



Calming the Long War in the Philippine Countryside

Asia Report N°338 | 19 April 2024

Headquarters

International Crisis Group

Avenue Louise 235 • 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 • brussels@crisisgroup.org

Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction	1
II. From Peace Talks to Counter-insurgency	4
A. The Failure of Peace Talks	4
B. A Whole-of-Government Offensive	7
C. The Battle for the Countryside.....	10
III. An Insurgency on the Retreat.....	14
A. A Rebellion at Low Ebb	14
B. Mindanao: A Fading Stronghold	16
C. Visayas: The Last Bastion	18
D. Luzon: Pockets of Resistance.....	20
IV. Managing the Fallout of Conflict.....	22
A. Preparing for Talks	23
B. Adjusting the Counter-insurgency.....	25
C. Strengthening the Rule of Law	26
D. Boosting Livelihoods in Conflict Zones	27
E. Supporting Local Peacebuilding.....	28
V. Conclusion	30
APPENDICES	
A. Map of the Philippines	31
B. The Communist Insurgency through Time	32
C. About the International Crisis Group	37
D. Crisis Group Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2021	38
E. Crisis Group Board of Trustees	40

Principal Findings

What's new? The Philippine Maoists, one of Asia's longest-running communist insurgencies, are on the defensive, with Manila pushing for definitive victory through counter-insurgent operations and development initiatives. Fighting has fallen in intensity nationwide, but pockets of conflict remain in some of the country's poorest and most remote areas.

Why does it matter? While the government has indisputably weakened the rebels, somewhere between 1,200 and 2,000 fighters remain under arms. Their elusiveness and residual community support mean that efforts to vanquish the guerrillas on the battlefield will be arduous and prone to spurring new manifestations of armed conflict.

What should be done? Both sides should look to fresh peace talks, due to begin soon, as the best route to settling the conflict. To overcome the mutual distrust that scuppered previous negotiations, government and rebels should craft steps to reduce violence and build confidence before turning to major points on the agenda.

Executive Summary

Conflict between the Philippine government and communist rebels persists despite the state's attempts to force the insurgents' final surrender. Since peace talks collapsed in 2017, Manila has tried to defeat the rebels by combining military pressure with development projects in remote villages across the country. The strategy seems to be paying off. Estimated rebel numbers now stand between 1,200 and 2,000 – far from the 25,000-strong force of the 1980s – while fighting is confined to largely impoverished territorial redoubts. But the rebels still manage to defy predictions of their demise. Clashes caused the deaths of at least 250 fighters and civilians in 2023. To mitigate the impact of conflict, the government should seize the opportunity of a fresh round of peace talks expected to begin soon by crafting concrete steps to reduce violence, build confidence between the sides and address some of the rebels' substantive demands. Authorities should also seek to overcome lingering mistrust of the state in rural areas by curbing military and police abuses, as well as redoubling efforts to improve socio-economic conditions.

Over almost five decades of conflict, Manila has relied mainly on counter-insurgency campaigns to thwart the communist rebels, while making occasional forays into peace talks. During his term of office from 2016 to 2022, President Rodrigo Duterte initiated a peace process that broke down amid resurging violence. Since then, Manila has battled to increase the scope and pace of counter-insurgency operations, partly through an inter-agency mechanism known as the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict. Determined to finish off the insurgency, the government has endeavoured to expand state presence and deliver basic services in the most conflict-affected regions. Following the killing of several high-ranking commanders over the last three years, as well as the death of the group's founder, Jose Maria Sison, in December 2022, the rebels have found themselves increasingly adrift and on the defensive. Arrests and surrenders of fighters have come at a steady clip.

These battlefield gains have nevertheless fallen short of achieving a definitive end to the conflict. Without doubt, some Philippine regions have regained peace and stability. The Davao region and parts of central Mindanao, as well as some provinces in Luzon and the Visayas, have witnessed a major reduction in conflict and seen modest economic improvements. At the same time, violence continues to claim lives and warp ties between state and society in pockets of land across the archipelago. Long an insurgent stronghold, the southernmost island of Mindanao still has several areas under rebel sway despite the counter-insurgency campaign. In the Visayas, a few hundred guerrillas are trying to hold back the military's push to dislodge them from their traditional bastions in Negros and Samar, where economic divides remain stark and human rights abuses by both the military and the rebels persist.

Most of the communities caught up in the violence are rural and poor. Indigenous peoples often bear the brunt of the conflict, which in some regions has been characterised by sudden flare-ups of fighting, abuse of civilians and profound damage to local economies. Manila's campaign has also featured extensive use of the practice of red-tagging, referring to the authorities' sometimes over-reaching efforts to prosecute or

otherwise harass people or organisations suspected of being associated with the communist movement.

As it proceeds with its campaign, the government will likely be able to further dent the rebels' capacity to operate. But bringing an end to the decades-old insurgency through military means will not be easy. Whether the insurgents can survive a further wave of military pressure is uncertain, but for now it is too early to speak of total rebel collapse. The communist movement has demonstrated in the past its capacity to overcome major losses and adapt to adverse circumstances. Moreover, there is a risk of escalation: some rebels may decide to form splinter groups or fuse with criminal outfits, thus perpetuating deadly conflict in new ways.

Against this backdrop, the announcement of a return to talks, which surprised many, represents an opportunity that should not be missed. To ensure that these talks do not suffer the same fate as the round that collapsed in 2017, Manila and the rebels need to focus from the start on agreeing to concrete steps to reduce violence and build trust. These confidence building measures might include guaranteed freedom of movement for rebel negotiators and local or temporary ceasefires. Progress in these areas could help establish the foundations for discussions about substantive reforms long demanded by the rebels, including thorny issues relating to rural development.

Even as it pushes forward with these negotiations, Manila should also recalibrate its inter-agency task force's efforts to deliver development projects that are better tailored to rural areas. Stronger oversight, a focus on community-driven development and curbs on the crackdown on suspected communist sympathisers would give the task force much greater credibility. The government should also work through officials, national agencies and the police to halt abuses committed in the name of counter-insurgency, while improving its relations with civil society organisations operating in conflict-affected areas. Both rebels and the armed forces, meanwhile, should curtail violations of international humanitarian law for the sake of civilians caught in the crossfire.

Absent a negotiated peace, it is hard to know when this insurgency rooted in the 1960s, and with a demonstrated capacity for longevity, will be over. Military pressure and a counter-insurgent offensive have whittled the rebels down to a fraction of their former strength, but so long as they remain active and able to draw on the support of disgruntled rural dwellers, peace talks will offer the best route to bringing an end to the conflict.

Manila/Brussels, 19 April 2024

Calming the Long War in the Philippine Countryside

I. Introduction

For more than 50 years, the Philippine government has been in conflict with the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).¹ Launched in 1969, the communist rebellion is among Asia's oldest insurgencies, having outlasted seven Filipino presidents.² To date, fighting between the NPA and the state has claimed at least 40,000 lives – rebels, soldiers and civilians – the vast majority of them in the conflict's early phases.³ Today, the CPP says its armed wing is active in “more or less 70” of the country's 82 provinces.⁴ But the conflict is concentrated in a few areas, particularly northern Mindanao, southern Luzon and parts of the Visayas, a set of smaller islands in the middle of the country, with clashes between the sides accounting for at least 220 fatalities in 2023.⁵ Some of the movement's leaders, including its negotiating panel, live in exile in the Netherlands.

The CPP's belief in the need for “national democratic revolution” stems from its ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. With a mission that it associates with anti-imperialism and social justice, the group follows Mao Zedong's “protracted people's war” strategy, which calls for armed struggle in the countryside to encircle cities and, eventually, take over the reins of government. It says it will fight until the “root causes” of its rebellion – in a spokesperson's words, “poverty, longstanding exploitation and oppression” – are no more.⁶ These ills, it says, result from imperialism, feudalism and bureaucratic capitalism.

Successive Philippine governments have acknowledged the social problems the insurgency claims to be fighting to resolve, but Manila nevertheless sees the rebellion as an armed enemy bent on seizing power. Fighters attack the army and police and used to run what were in effect parallel governments in remote areas. Despite

¹ For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°202, *The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks*, 11 February 2011. The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF), founded in 1973, negotiates with the Philippine government on the party's behalf and is an umbrella of different underground organisations allied with it. The CPP-NPA-NDF structure follows the three-part division into party, army and united front – what Mao termed the “three magic weapons” – that is typical among communist movements.

² For a historical overview, see Gregg Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement* (Boulder, 1989); and William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power* (London, 2021).

³ Crisis Group Report, *The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks*, p. 1. While the number of casualties has declined in recent years, the conflict still kills hundreds every year. Data on casualties since 2010 is scarce, but Crisis Group estimates that at least 3,000 people have been killed and over 2,000 wounded in this period.

⁴ Crisis Group correspondence, Marco Valbuena, CPP chief information officer, 24 July 2023.

⁵ Crisis Group data.

⁶ Crisis Group correspondence, Ka Ma. Roja Banua, NDF-Bikol spokesperson, 4 July 2023.

differences between the wings of the communist movement, the military and police look at it as one interconnected web under the party's control.

Bodies allied with the communists, ranging from trade unions to agricultural associations, some of which are grouped under National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF) while others remain formally independent, are frequent targets for state crackdowns. Manila's effort to expose these links – and, in some cases, harass the individuals or groups in question – is known as red-tagging.⁷ Manila proscribes the political and military wings of the movement and the NDF on the grounds that they are terrorist organisations.⁸

Nonetheless, Manila has periodically negotiated with the rebels, who are represented in talks by the NDF.⁹ After the 1986 ouster of President Ferdinand Marcos, during which the insurgency grew in strength, successive administrations – from the one headed by Corazon Aquino (1986-1992) to the one helmed by her son Benigno Aquino (2010-2016) – held peace talks with the communist group, but with few results.¹⁰ Norway facilitated the intermittent talks from 2001 until President Rodrigo Duterte called them off in 2017.¹¹ Even so, in November 2023 Manila and the rebels once again pledged to resume talks in the near future.¹²

This report assesses the state of the decades-old conflict and suggests ways to take advantage of the opportunity created by prospective talks, as well as offering other recommendations for conflict mitigation. In addition to fresh research, it draws upon an extensive review of scholarly literature, historical documents, military writings and CPP publications. Research was conducted in Manila and other parts of the country, including almost a dozen conflict-affected provinces, mostly in southern Luzon, Mindanao and the Visayas, between mid-2020 and late 2023. It consists of more than 160 interviews with members of the government and the CPP negotiating panels, rebel cadres and commanders, surrendered rebels, women ex-rebels and activists, military officers, local government officials, civil society representatives, Indigenous

⁷ Some members of legal left-wing organisations might also belong to the NDF, CPP or even the NPA, but others do not, though they may sympathise with the armed struggle. Probing these relationships is hampered not only by secrecy, but also by the real possibility of harm coming to those who are “red-tagged” by assertions of a connection. Red-tagged individuals have been victims of extrajudicial killings. Red-tagging has also extended to international non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam. Mara Cepeda, “Red-tagged Oxfam, NCCP slam military for ‘malicious, careless’ attack”, *Rappler*, 6 November 2019.

⁸ The CPP-NPA, but not the NDF, is also listed as a terrorist organisation by the U.S., the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

⁹ In contrast to the failure of talks with the communist rebels, Manila reached a major agreement with the largest of the Moro Muslim separatist groups in 2014. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°240, *The Philippines: Breakthrough in Mindanao*, 5 December 2012.

¹⁰ Almost 25,000 fighters were enlisted in the insurgency when the country was under martial law, under President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr., from 1972 to 1986. Appendix B details the various presidents' approaches to the conflict.

¹¹ The Norwegian government provided space, opportunities and, when needed, advice to both sides. Decisions are left to the parties.

¹² See “Oslo Joint Communique”, 23 November 2023; and “Joint Statement Signed by the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines”, 23 November 2023.

and community leaders, church officials, analysts and diplomats.¹³ Reflecting gender dynamics in the upper echelons of Philippine institutions, 50 of Crisis Group's interlocutors – less than half – were women.

¹³This report uses the terms CPP to refer to the communist movement's political leadership, NPA to refer to its armed component and NDF to refer to the negotiating panel.

II. From Peace Talks to Counter-insurgency

Following the breakdown of peace talks in 2017, with violence escalating, the government tackled the insurgency with a dual approach.¹⁴ First, it set out on a military campaign to “make the NPA irrelevant”, in the words of a senior commander; and secondly, it sought to address the conflict’s “root causes”, particularly perceived injustices and poverty in the country’s remote areas, which it believes account for the insurgency’s resilience.¹⁵

In 2018, then-President Duterte began deploying more troops to Bicol, Samar and Negros regions – all hotbeds of insurgency.¹⁶ The military killed front commanders and members of the CPP’s Central Committee, including figures such as Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, Jorge “Ka Oris” Madlos, Antonio Cabanatan, Mariano Adlao, Julios Giron and Menandro “Bok” Villanueva.¹⁷ The loss of strongholds and safe areas, as well as the armed forces’ technological superiority, have posed major challenges to the insurgents’ logistics and communications.¹⁸ Especially under Duterte, but also under his successor Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., the military and police have harassed and on occasion directly attacked left-wing organisations and activists accused of being affiliated with the communist movement.¹⁹ In parallel, the government launched development projects in the countryside in a bid to weaken the rebels’ support base.

A. *The Failure of Peace Talks*

After his election in July 2016, Duterte, who presented himself as the first “leftist” Philippine president, extended several olive branches to the communist rebels.²⁰ He offered them positions in his cabinet and freed nineteen top cadres from prison.²¹ He also sent a delegation to hold preliminary talks in Norway.²² Composed of Jesus Dureza, Silvestre Bello III and Hernani Braganza, whom the rebel negotiators considered “old comrades” – all had been government emissaries under previous admin-

¹⁴ At the beginning of Duterte’s term, the rebel fighters were said to number around 3,000-4,000. Women have long been part of the movement as combatants, political cadres and members of allied civil society organisations, but there are no credible estimates of how many.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Manila, March-April 2023.

¹⁶ “Memorandum Order 32: Reinforcing the Guidelines for the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police in the Implementation of Measures to Suppress and Prevent Lawless Violence”, Office of the President of the Philippines, 22 November 2018.

¹⁷ A long-time observer of the conflict said the government also killed party cadres who were “doves” open to talks. Crisis Group interview, Manila, 2 September 2022.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, source close to Caraga-based NPA, 12 March 2023.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Commission on Human Rights officials, Manila, 1 June 2020; civil society figures, Manila, 31 January and 14 February 2023.

²⁰ Before assuming the presidency, Duterte was mayor of Davao City, Mindanao, where he had good relations with local NPA commanders.

²¹ Many saw the release of Benito and Wilma Tiamzon – the CPP chairman and secretary general, respectively – as risky, as they were the highest-ranking rebels in custody at the time and were considered hardliners. Crisis Group telephone interview, former top cadre, 25 August 2022.

²² “Duterte team, NDF ‘optimistic’ after day 1 of peace talks in Norway”, CNN Philippines, 15 June 2016.

istrations – the delegation got a warm welcome.²³ At first, Duterte’s gamble seemed to have paid off.²⁴ During the first three rounds of talks, held from August 2016 to January 2017, the parties made major progress on issues that had derailed past negotiations, including separate unilateral ceasefires and a joint framework for a comprehensive agreement.²⁵

But despite the breakthroughs, violence and unresolved differences soon threw the talks off track. In late January 2017, with the third round under way, a six-month ceasefire declared by both sides the previous July collapsed as soldiers and rebels clashed in Makilala, Cotabato, leaving a communist fighter dead.²⁶ Meanwhile, negotiations stalled over issues such as amnesty for rebels, prisoner releases and the communists’ socio-economic demands. While the sides endeavoured to bridge the gaps, through both official and back channels, it was not enough to break the deadlock.

A series of events deepened the impasse. On 23 May 2017, a major battle erupted between government forces and jihadists in Mindanao’s Marawi City, leading Duterte to declare martial law across the island the same day.²⁷ Believing they were also being targeted, communist leaders ordered their fighters to attack government forces, both in Mindanao and across the country.²⁸ Dureza, the negotiator, responded by announcing the government’s withdrawal from talks.²⁹ Manila then cancelled a round of back-channel conversations planned for July after the rebels attacked the Presidential Security Group, a close protection unit tasked with guarding the president, in Cotabato, and another round slated for November after a rebel ambush took the lives of a police officer and a four-month-old baby in Bukidnon.³⁰ On 23 November, Duterte signed Proclamation No. 360, formally terminating the talks. Two weeks later, he issued Proclamation No. 374, designating the CPP-NPA as a terrorist organisation.

Efforts to negotiate persisted even after the talks formally ended. The negotiating panels held four additional rounds of back-channel talks from March to June 2018,

²³ Crisis Group interview, Satur Ocampo, NDF Philippines adviser, Manila, May 2020. The NDF panel and working groups included several women, while the government’s team had at least one woman member.

²⁴ The Philippine public was supportive of the talks. Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz, “8 in 10 Filipinos in favor of peace talks: Pulse”, *Manila Bulletin*, 9 May 2017.

²⁵ Both declared indefinite unilateral ceasefires for the first time and agreed to work on a mutual ceasefire agreement. According to Crisis Group data, casualties dropped by more than half during the ceasefire.

²⁶ “Soldiers, NPA break ceasefire in Cotabato clash”, *Rappler*, 23 January 2017. The NDF negotiating panel said the NPA kept honouring the ceasefire, despite counting 500 violations by the army in 43 provinces, until the situation became “untenable”. Crisis Group interview, NDF panellist, Utrecht, 14 December 2022.

²⁷ The battle, which lasted five months and displaced 400,000 people, pitted the army against a local jihadist coalition that had pledged allegiance to ISIS. See Crisis Group Commentary, “Philippines: Addressing Islamist Militancy after the Battle for Marawi”, 17 July 2018.

²⁸ “CPP orders NPA to launch more attacks in Mindanao, other regions”, *Inquirer*, 25 May 2017. The NDF panel said the command to intensify attacks was not intended to undermine the negotiations, adding that they asked the leadership to reconsider the order. But the episode undermined trust between the sides just as the president was becoming increasingly reliant on the military due to the violence in Marawi.

²⁹ “Gov’t ‘will not proceed’ peace talks with communist rebels”, CNN Philippines, 27 May 2017.

³⁰ As of January 2024, the unit is known as Presidential Security Command.

during which they signed an Interim Peace Agreement.³¹ But when the government negotiators presented the document to Duterte in a June cabinet meeting, the military asked the president not to approve it. He did not.³² Hopes early in the COVID-19 pandemic that Duterte would rekindle the peace process were dashed, as each side accused the other of violating its unilateral ceasefire.³³

In hindsight, three causes combined to undermine what was arguably the most promising peace initiative in decades between Manila and the Maoist insurgency. The first was mutual distrust. The good-will between the two negotiating panels, which was based on their personal relationships, did not extend to the institutions they represented, especially on the government side. The armed forces were openly sceptical of negotiations and insisted (though not successfully) on setting ceasefires as a pre-condition for talks.³⁴ From the rebels' perspective, the military had a vested interest in wanting the conflict to continue. The second major hurdle was the communists' adherence to a strategy of "talking while fighting".³⁵ Although the rebels demonstrated that they could stick to a long unilateral ceasefire and were willing to enter a coordinated, bilateral truce, they were also quick to resume attacks once the ceasefire looked shaky. Even before the talks collapsed, rebel units engaged in actions that were, if not hostile, at the very least provocative.³⁶

Finally, the process would have benefited from the support of an independent third party. Norway's mandate, which required Oslo to work with both parties to facilitate talks but without seeking to steer the negotiations, held it back from taking a more direct mediation role. Meanwhile, the lack of independent oversight and monitoring of the unilateral ceasefires proved damaging.³⁷ Without a trusted third party, whether local or international, belief in the peace process withered on both sides.

³¹ The text contained sections on amnesty for imprisoned rebels, agrarian reform and rural development, national industrialisation and economic development, and coordinated unilateral ceasefires. Crisis Group interview, Fidel Agcaoili, chief negotiator, NDF panel, Utrecht, May 2020.

³² Crisis Group interview, Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade, Jr., Manila, 25 May 2020.

³³ The CPP Central Committee extended its ceasefire for two weeks, but the government did not reciprocate, citing rebel attacks on the ground.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade, Jr., Manila, 25 May 2020. During the six months of unilateral ceasefires while the talks were proceeding, both sides accused each other of violations.

³⁵ Previous rounds of talks, for example during the Benigno Aquino administration, had also broken down for this reason. Some of the Maoist leaders disagreed that the rebels should ever suspend the armed struggle.

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, former cadre, Tacloban City, 10 March 2023.

³⁷ The parties have tried to set up a monitoring body in the past. In 1998, the government and rebels signed the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, which paved the way for creating a Joint Monitoring Committee to investigate violations of the accord. Inaugurated in 2004, the committee was reactivated in 2017 during the talks but soon disbanded. Some believe, however, that the committee has its merits and could be revived. Crisis Group telephone interview, source close to the NDF, 27 February 2024.

B. *A Whole-of-Government Offensive*

After peace talks collapsed, Manila grew increasingly confident that it could sap the rebel group's support and eventually defeat the rebels. To this end, in 2018 the Philippine government introduced a new framework to deal with the insurgency through Executive Order 70, which created the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC).³⁸ The government presents the NTF-ELCAC as a means of coordinating various approaches aimed at ending the insurgency, including fighting the movement's armed wing, weakening its political fronts and tackling the rebellion's root causes by delivering better public services in the country's rural areas.³⁹ Provided with generous funding, this nexus of military and civilian agencies is the outcome of decades of counter-insurgent experimentation.⁴⁰

Twelve "clusters" of work operate within this holistic model. The Strategic Communication Cluster, for example, works on strengthening the government's propaganda machine, which many officials believe has been its greatest weakness in the fight with the insurgents to date.⁴¹ The Local Government Cluster brings together the Department of Interior and local governments to build support for counter-insurgency.⁴² Through the International Engagement Cluster, the government conducts advocacy campaigns targeted at international organisations, foreign embassies and Filipinos living overseas.⁴³

Most controversial is the Legal Cooperation Cluster, through which the government files criminal complaints against suspected NPA fighters, CPP community organisers and party supporters, as well as against members of organisations that are not outlawed but that the military believes to be fronts for the movement. Using the Anti-Terror Law, which was passed in 2020 and largely upheld by the Supreme Court, the government has piled legal pressure on suspected rebel supporters, with national and local courts issuing indictments on a variety of charges.⁴⁴ Such red-tagging of left-wing

³⁸ The ideas behind the NTF-ELCAC predate 2018, as many military officers and government officials had long recognised the need for an inter-agency body to steer a national campaign. In the Davao and Caraga regions of Eastern Mindanao, a similar approach was already in place from 2016. Crisis Group interviews, Davao, 5 February 2023; Manila, 1 December 2022. President Marcos, Jr. has delegated responsibility for the NTF-ELCAC to his vice president, Sara Duterte, who is the former president's daughter.

³⁹ Critics note that the task force portrays itself as a peacebuilding mechanism though it remains a counter-insurgency tool. Crisis Group correspondence, peace scholar, 12 January 2024.

⁴⁰ For an overview of how past experiences fed into the current approach, see Glenda Gloria, "War with the NPA, war without end", *Rappler*, 29 February 2020.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade, Jr., Manila, 25 May 2020.

⁴² To encourage local administrations to help curb the insurgency, Manila and the military have worked with many municipalities to declare NPA rebels *personae non grata*.

⁴³ In February 2019, the NTF-ELCAC organised a "truth caravan" in Europe, visiting Bosnia, Switzerland and Belgium. In Brussels, it urged the Belgian government and the EU to cut funding for 30 NGOs it accused of being CPP-NPA fronts. Crisis Group interview, Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade, Jr., Manila, 25 May 2020.

⁴⁴ This law, which replaced the 2007 Human Security Act, led to the arrest of dozens. The state has used it to designate several other individuals as terrorists. Procedural rules, including guidance on implementation, that clarified aspects of the law, took effect on 15 January 2024. Executive Order 70, which created the NTF-ELCAC, is seen as another legal basis for state action against communist supporters. Crisis Group interview, activist, Manila, 14 February 2023. Crisis Group correspond-

sympathisers rose sharply during President Duterte's term, especially following the law's enactment, with a "chilling impact" on civil society.⁴⁵

Red-tagging is a broad term. It can colloquially refer to law enforcement efforts to capture insurgents or CPP political cadres or to expose rebels working with legal political groups.⁴⁶ Much more frequently, however, it denotes a campaign aimed at people on the fringes of the communist movement. As part of this campaign, the state or government-friendly media will accuse individuals of ties with certain groups, which are "leftist" in the sense that they pursue objectives shared with the communists, and then sometimes link them to the movement itself.⁴⁷ Many court cases rely on suspicions of "association" with the rebels.⁴⁸ According to civil society figures, these charges are often based on no more than hearsay.⁴⁹

Red-tagging has done no small amount of harm. Legal powers have allegedly been misused on occasion, including in cases where individuals have accused political opponents or other foes of communist ties in order to bring them into disrepute.⁵⁰ Activists and development workers in areas under communist influence feel the threat of red-tagging keenly: knowing that they might face charges of association with or support for rebels makes it hard for them to operate independently from the state.⁵¹ Human rights groups have also reported cases of extrajudicial violence against activists and other civilians who were not members of the communist movement, though they may have been sympathetic to it.⁵²

Government officials deny there is any such thing as a red-tagging policy, but they insist that the 2021 law and other provisions give them the prerogative to pursue en-

ence, human rights observer, 21 March 2024. The alleged crimes include arson and murder but also material support for terrorism, such as financing. The authorities often bring these charges against civil society organisations and activists.

⁴⁵ Red-tagging predates the Duterte presidency, but after the peace talks broke down it became a core part of Manila's counter-insurgency approach without ever being made explicit policy. Crisis Group interviews, observers and civil society activists, March 2024.

⁴⁶ Critics of the government acknowledge that justified law enforcement actions do not represent unfair persecution of activists, which is what they regard as "actual" red tagging. Crisis Group interviews, local and international observers, March 2024.

⁴⁷ For example, the National Federation of Sugar Workers or political organisations associated with the Makabayan Bloc in Congress. The government sometimes claims that these groups provide direct support to the rebels. Crisis Group interview, 1 March 2024.

⁴⁸ On the repercussions of red-tagging for left-wing activists and sympathisers, see Ruby Rosselle L. Tugade, "Persistent Red-Tagging in the Philippines as Violation of the Principle of Distinction in International Humanitarian Law", *Philippine Law Journal*, vol. 95, no. 3 (2022). ACLED recorded "nearly 50 red-tagging related violent events targeting civilians" between 2020 and June 2023.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group telephone interviews, human rights observer, Manila, 31 January 2023; human rights lawyer, 27 February 2024.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Manila, 14 February 2023. Crisis Group correspondence, human rights observer, 21 March 2024.

⁵¹ For example, a humanitarian organisation in southern Luzon was red-tagged after the authorities got an anonymous call telling them it was CPP-linked. The group was forced to stop its work to protect staff. Crisis Group interview, Sorsogon, 16 April 2023. Several other organisations shared similar experiences with Crisis Group.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, human rights activists, January-July 2023. See also "The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: A 'Protracted People's War' Continues", ACLED, 13 July 2023.

tities with links to the communist movement to help them fight the insurgency.⁵³ Even so, they recognise that in some cases local authorities' "overzealousness" stirs controversy.⁵⁴ Some commentators say pressure on left-wing sympathisers has eased slightly under President Marcos, Jr., though others see no meaningful change in the campaign.⁵⁵

Another objective of the task force, through the Local Peace Engagement Cluster, is to encourage dialogue with insurgents in conflict hotspots. But such local peace talks have never really come to fruition. The rebels have not named a negotiating panel for such talks, leaving the military and local governments to engage only with small NPA field units or individual fighters.⁵⁶ In addition, well-meaning local officials have felt that the communists' terrorist designation tied their hands.⁵⁷ In any case, most such efforts seemed aimed at persuading rebels to surrender, rather than fostering genuine dialogue.⁵⁸ Indeed, seeking surrenders has become a flagship policy for tackling the insurgency.

An inter-agency body called Task Force Balik-Loob supervises the reintegration of rebels who surrender into civilian life.⁵⁹ Target beneficiaries include NPA fighters and sometimes their immediate family members, as well as the movement's community organisers and supporters.⁶⁰ While the government claims that over 20,000 rebels have so far returned to law-abiding lives, the proportion of that number who represent actual combatants as opposed to sympathisers or relatives is unclear.⁶¹ Whether

⁵³ Several journalists and observers share this view, saying there is nothing wrong with calling out groups or individuals as CPP members. In some cases, they say, arrests – but not killings – are justified. Crisis Group telephone interviews, 7 April and 22 July 2023.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, task force officials, Manila, 26 February 2024.

⁵⁵ "Philippines: 'Red-Tagging' Puts Activists at Risk", Human Rights Watch, 11 January 2024. An international observer concurs that while Manila has scaled back its rhetoric against left-wing sympathisers, red-tagging continues at the local level, especially where the communist movement is active and the army's field commanders are particularly hostile to it. Crisis Group interview, 1 March 2024.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Fidel Agcaoili, chief negotiator, NDF panel, Utrecht, May 2020.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, provincial officials from Laguna, 18 October 2022. In Davao, for example, Mayor Sara Duterte was open to talking to insurgents under the local framework, but once her father designated the movement a terrorist organisation, she abandoned the idea. Crisis Group interview, Davao City, 17 February 2023.

⁵⁸ Manila cites cases of "local peace agreements" (for example, in Zamboanga region), but they are few. Moreover, it was often the rebels' supporters who struck the deals, rather than the NPA itself. Document made available to Crisis Group.

⁵⁹ Rebel reintegration occurs in four phases: the police or military certifies the individual as a bona fide combatant after reviewing intelligence; security officials interview the ex-combatant; the person is officially enrolled in the reintegration program; and, lastly, the government provides assistance. Crisis Group interviews, provincial government officials from Laguna, 18 October 2022. Immediate family members can also benefit from relocation programs and psycho-social support.

⁶⁰ Beneficiaries receive livelihood assistance, remuneration commensurate to the value of firearms surrendered, temporary shelter, medical and housing assistance packages, legal assistance for any pending criminal complaint and a conditional cash transfer.

⁶¹ There is evidence that at least some of the surrenders have been staged. Critics also allege that the government is inducing movement sympathisers to surrender by such means as intimidating the families of combatants or promising financial compensation that is never paid. Crisis Group interviews, church and civil society leaders, Manila, 1 June 2020; activists, Quezon City, 14 February and 21 April 2023.

or not they were fighters, most of those deemed former rebels stay in “halfway homes” or in military camps. Provision of housing, however, has been patchy, and those who have surrendered noted that other promises, such as cash or livelihood assistance, were not honoured, either.⁶²

C. *The Battle for the Countryside*

The Philippine military’s long experience fighting in the countryside has shaped the government’s strategy for defeating the insurgents. While tactics vary from place to place, the rural campaign aims to win “hearts and minds” while applying attritional military pressure, with institutional and financial support from Manila, particularly the counter-insurgent task force. According to the military, as of May 2023 only 200 villages were still under the communist movement’s influence – a stark contrast to the estimated 1,381 villages at the end of 2008. At the same time, the military is monitoring 300 villages where insurgents are believed to be poised to rebound.⁶³ At present, the government says, the rebels are operating in eleven “weakened” fronts across the country.⁶⁴

Unlike past campaigns, which consisted exclusively of “search and destroy” missions, the present counter-insurgency effort aims to establish the state’s writ. After combat “clears” a village of rebels, the armed forces often use paramilitaries (known as Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units) or peacekeeping teams made up of villagers to patrol it. “My job as a commander is to focus on the armed component”, explained an officer. “We need to deter them and make sure they will not come back”.⁶⁵ The armed forces also try to convince rebel supporters to switch their allegiance to the state, organising them into grassroots associations and undertaking development projects to that end.

A vital part of this strategy is to ensure that state services reach the village level.⁶⁶ To obtain funds from the national Barangay Development Program, which finances projects in conflict-affected communities, villages must first secure the military’s certification that they are “insurgency-free”, after which civilian state agencies are meant to undertake various initiatives, ranging from developing water infrastructure and clinics to building roads that can be used to get farm goods to market.⁶⁷ In reality,

⁶² The military also complains that it does not receive the funds budgeted for housing former rebels, forcing it to spend its own. Crisis Group interviews, August-September 2023.

⁶³ John Mendoza, “NPA present in more than 200 barangays, says AFP”, *Inquirer*, 11 July 2023; Joviland Rita, “AFP looking at more or less 300 areas as possible election hot spots”, GMA News, 24 May 2023. See also “From Insurgency to Stability: Volume II, Insights from Selected Case Studies”, RAND Corporation, 2011, pp. 16, 37.

⁶⁴ Priam Nepomuceno, “NTF-ELCAC: Removal of ‘mass bases’ greatly weakened NPA”, Philippine News Agency, 1 April 2024.

⁶⁵ The military uses intelligence assets and local officials to watch out for returning insurgents. Crisis Group interview, military commander, 11 April 2023.

⁶⁶ The current approach draws heavily on a counter-insurgency manual written by an army officer who defected to the NPA but later surrendered. Victor M. Corpus, *Silent War* (Quezon City, 1989).

⁶⁷ Declaring areas “insurgency-free” is a staple of Manila’s efforts to showcase victory. Sceptics, however, look at these claims as politically motivated and sometimes groundless. In September 2023, for example, the NPA killed five paramilitaries and injured three soldiers in a Quezon province town

the military often remains in the driver's seat.⁶⁸ "We know who are the poorest of the poor, and what they need, because we are on the ground", noted a commander.⁶⁹

In many conflict-hit areas, development projects have had the desired effect. Villagers in such places told Crisis Group said they had "felt the government's presence for the very first time".⁷⁰ The promise of funds has encouraged village officials to cooperate with the authorities rather than turn back to the rebels, whose influence historically tended to rise whenever residents felt abandoned by the state. Development projects have had the most pronounced success in villages where mayors are committed to them, managing to raise additional funds and seeing the work through to completion.⁷¹

The process of bringing better public services to the countryside, however, is not free of administrative failings. Selection of eligible villages has been one source of controversy. The island of Palawan received around 700 million pesos (\$12 million) though NPA guerrillas there are few.⁷² On Mindoro, government officials promised community leaders development funding, which led the locals to scramble for rebel surrenders only to be told later that their village was not eligible.⁷³ Other village officials also complained about funds that never arrived or came in amounts much lower than expected.⁷⁴ Furthermore, state spending on the program varies greatly from year to year.⁷⁵ The way development projects are chosen has also come in for its share of criticism. Communities do not always have control over project selection or design, as government agencies work with a menu of pre-selected options.⁷⁶ "The problem is, everything is about infrastructure", noted an observer from Surigao del Norte.⁷⁷

Development projects also vary greatly in quality, in large part due to the decisive role played by local power-brokers. If mayors and other local officials, or even mili-

that had been proclaimed "insurgency-free" months before. Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 8 September 2023.

⁶⁸ The CPP considers these efforts to be "equivalent to military rule". Crisis Group correspondence, Marco Valbuena, CPP chief information officer, 24 July 2023. The government has tried to let the civilian bureaucracy take the lead, but with mixed results so far, as the military tends to assume it needs to do the job. Crisis Group telephone interview, senior commander, 15 July 2023.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 11 April 2023.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 5 October 2023.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, Negros and Samar, 2023. Crisis Group interviews, governance expert, Manila, 22 February 2024; former local officials from the central Visayas, 15 March 2024.

⁷² G. Ticket, "Palawan's success story dealing with insurgency", *Palawan News*, 28 December 2022.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, activist, Quezon City, 21 April 2023. Former President Duterte had visited the area, making locals think their chances of eligibility were good. Some of the people whom they convinced to surrender were not actually rebels.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, civil society observers, Cagayan de Oro, 9 July 2023; NGO staff, Manila, 5 October 2022.

⁷⁵ Funding per village has fluctuated, starting at 20 million pesos (\$368,000), dropping to four million (\$73,000), rising back to six million (\$110,000) and then falling to 2.5 million (\$44,000). Nestor Corrales, "NTF-ELCAC's budget cut to P6.3B in 2023", *Inquirer*, 14 January 2023. The initial reduction came after pressure from the program's critics in Congress, who wanted to improve transparency.

⁷⁶ The menu is provided by the Department of Budget Management and divided into categories of projects. From nine in 2021, the number of categories fell to five in 2023: farm-to-market roads, school buildings, water and sanitation facilities, clinics and electricity grids.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Surigao City, 4 June 2023.

tary commanders, are half-hearted, the results can be mediocre.⁷⁸ Allegations of mismanagement have also plagued a number of projects.⁷⁹ “Some communities feel they receive only bread crumbs”, commented a humanitarian worker.⁸⁰ Although oversight from both Manila and regional governments is expected, development projects are occasionally piecemeal, ad hoc and “out of sync” with community needs. Critics complain there is neither monitoring to make sure initiatives are on track nor a detailed, evidence-based study pointing to the most successful schemes.⁸¹

While development projects may enjoy short-term success, their long-term effects are often uncertain. Building roads may be an essential step in connecting villages to markets, but corridors from the countryside to urban centres, which are crucial to boosting rural livelihoods, are often missing from the plans. Other projects focused on the village level appear to have contributed little to improving overall socio-economic conditions in conflict-affected provinces. In twelve provinces where the rebels are active, poverty rates rose from 2018 to 2021 despite numerous projects being completed.⁸²

Despite its flaws, the development program illustrates that the military knew it needed to pursue a more holistic approach to ending the communist insurgency.⁸³ By incorporating local government and recognising the importance of grassroots economic conditions, the approach shows more sensitivity to the causes driving conflict than previous campaigns, which relied to a greater extent on military might. A refrain from officials Crisis Group spoke to was that, the practical problems aside, the development projects represent a new beginning. One military officer with experience in civil-military relations said: “You cannot fix everything. But you can aspire to fix things enough so that the people see and perceive that the government is trying to do its job”.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ In some cases, community consultations happened only afterward and involved just a few village officials.

⁷⁹ The interventions are also less effective in areas where dynastic elites control local politics and business, as is the case in many rural areas. In some cases, young people have joined the rebels precisely out of frustration with these elites’ influence. Crisis Group interviews, former cadre, Manila, 7 October 2022; journalists and activists, Legazpi City and Irosin, 21-24 February 2023.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 5 October 2022. Completion rates are also a concern. In Iloilo province, less than 60 per cent of projects were completed. John Herrera, “55% of ELCAC projects in Iloilo completed; over P172-M unused funds returned to nat’l gov’t”, *Daily Guardian*, 15 March 2023.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, development expert, Quezon City, 10 April 2023. Crisis Group interview, Bacolod, 15 March 2023. See also Llanesca Panti, “Goals achieved? COA says performance audit on NTF-ELCAC needed”, *GMA News Online*, 24 August 2023.

⁸² These provinces were Quezon, Albay, Camarines Sur, Sorsogon, Capiz, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Surigao del Sur and Misamis Oriental. Crisis Group field visits corroborated the economic difficulties. Crisis Group interviews, residents, Bicol, Negros Occidental and Cotabato, February-June 2023. Four of these provinces continued to see increasing poverty after 2021, and conflict-affected provinces such as Samar, Northern Samar, Misamis Occidental and Zamboanga del Sur faced a similar trend.

⁸³ The military had been cognisant of the need for a civilian component in previous campaigns, but then it had neither the financial backing nor the institutional framework that the current campaign enjoys.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, Tagum City, 4 February 2023.

Overall, the new policies appear to have contributed to the rebels' decline, especially in central and eastern Mindanao and across Luzon and parts of the Visayas. According to various indicators, the rebels' military strength has subsided, while projects carried out under the task force's aegis have curbed recruitment, preventing the insurgents from rebuilding their ranks. Some government officials are so convinced that Manila has defeated the Maoists that they doubt the need to return to peace talks.⁸⁵

But red-tagging, bureaucratic hiccups and ill-informed decision-making cast a shadow over these achievements. While many residents of conflict-affected regions no longer consider the guerrillas to be their defenders, they are struggling to regain faith in the state's capacity, commitment and willingness to solve their problems. A military officer acknowledged the risks involved in not delivering on the government's promises or allowing development efforts to flag: "If things do not turn out right, you are inviting disaster".⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Manila, January-February 2024. Government officials estimate that they will fully dismantle the guerrillas by the end of 2024.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, military commander, Quezon City, 11 April 2023. Some observers think that the task force is overambitious and will not be able to deliver all the intended services, especially with a lower budget in 2024. Crisis Group interview, Manila, 28 February 2024.

III. An Insurgency on the Retreat

While the government has weakened the rebels politically and militarily over recent years, the movement remains afloat. Conflict continues in parts of the Philippines, while in December 2023 the CPP issued a statement encouraging its members to redouble the struggle despite the challenges it faces.

A. *A Rebellion at Low Ebb*

A complicated succession at the top appears to have debilitated the rebel cause. The nominal leader, Jose Maria Sison, died in exile in December 2022. With the previous passing of the Tiamzons, the highly influential couple who had run the group in the Philippines for decades, the CPP is facing what is perhaps the most severe leadership crisis in its history.⁸⁷ The party says it has filled vacancies on the Central Committee, but the current composition of this commanding organ is unknown.⁸⁸ The peace negotiating panel, based in Utrecht, is still operational, with Sison's widow, Juliette de Lima, appointed as its interim chairperson. But it has no control of political and military operations in the Philippines.⁸⁹ Whether the movement has in its ranks a new generation of commanders and cadres who could replace the old guard is for now unclear.⁹⁰ Some observers speculate that, with its established heads gone, the rebels could face fragmentation.⁹¹ That said, the number of coordinated attacks in 2023 and continuous messaging from the party's media outlet suggest that it still has a degree of hierarchy.⁹²

The rebels' military and political wings both appear to be at a low ebb. State officials estimate that the NPA has only 1,500 full-time combatants left.⁹³ Whether these figures are to be trusted or not, there seems to be little doubt that the insurgency is smaller than ever.⁹⁴ Besides its diminished fighting corps, the movement has found it hard to maintain its broader support structure. The guerrillas have long depended

⁸⁷ With Sison in exile, the Tiamzons were in charge of CPP operations on the ground.

⁸⁸ A former member of the movement speculated that Rafael Baylosis, a former CPP secretary-general, has become the interim leader. Most sources, however, suggest that the sickly Baylosis is unlikely to be in charge. Crisis Group interviews, Manila, 2 September 2022 and 14 July 2023. Teresa Ellera, "Baylosis to take Sison's place as CPP chair", *Sunstar Bacolod*, 11 May 2023.

⁸⁹ Sison had a crucial role as a member of the negotiating team but had more of an advisory function in the last few years, likely due to deteriorating health. Crisis Group interviews, Manila, 12 March and 23 May 2023. Moreover, Sison himself acknowledged that it is the Philippine-based "collective leading organ" that plays the most important role. See Jose Maria Sison, *On the GRP-NDFP Peace Negotiations* (Utrecht, 2022), p. 383.

⁹⁰ In a message from 26 December 2022 published in its mouthpiece, *Ang Bayan*, the CPP said that all committees should combine "senior, middle-aged and young cadres".

⁹¹ Crisis Group interviews, March-June 2023.

⁹² An observer commented that the insurgents "seemed even more determined" after Sison's death. Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 10 April 2023.

⁹³ John Mendoza, "NPA down to around 1,500 fighters – AFP", *Inquirer*, 26 December 2023. Other experts and independent analysts have a spectrum of estimates, from 1,200-1,500 at the lower end to 2,000 or more at the upper end. Crisis Group interviews, April-July 2023 and 14 March 2024.

⁹⁴ In the early 1990s, one of the rebels' weakest periods, their forces still amounted to 6,000 fighters. See Crisis Group Report, *The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines*, op. cit., p. 8.

for survival on the sympathy of a majority, or at least a substantial minority, of residents in the rural areas where they operate, while also counting on a phalanx of urban dwellers.⁹⁵ The counter-insurgency campaign and the rollout of development projects have weakened the movement, with many NPA units trying to evade arrest and political work becoming increasingly arduous.⁹⁶

Generating funds at the local level has also become more difficult. In the countryside, rebels traditionally rely on what they call “revolutionary taxation” (ie, extortion) – of businesses and sometimes individuals – to sustain the movement, but revenue has shrunk in recent years as the insurgents have lost territory and seen the arrest of financial operatives.⁹⁷

While the movement is still trying to recruit cadres and combatants, its survival will depend on resisting the army’s pressure while rebuilding its own political and military strength.⁹⁸ The CPP appears mindful of these challenges, saying it considers the recent loss of its leaders an “inspiration” to continue the revolution.⁹⁹ In two messages published in December 2022 and March 2023, it outlined how it intends to galvanise the movement, emphasising that it will reinvigorate political and ideological education for cadres and combatants.¹⁰⁰ It also said it had identified tactical flaws in its military operations that contributed to its weaknesses on the battlefield, learning from the mistakes.¹⁰¹ Finally, it said it would preserve the primacy of Maoist military strategy but would work to introduce innovations, such as the formation of special tactical teams, the creation of local encampments to oversee guerrilla expansion and an emphasis on more mobile techniques of warfare. The CPP is also staying active online, putting out regular communications targeting internet-savvy, younger and minority audiences.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ The movement has recruited minors in the past. While it officially claims to have put an end to this practice, reports of underage combatants still surface. Crisis Group interview, humanitarian law expert, 25 February 2024. See also “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines”, UN, 21 July 2022.

⁹⁶ There are indications that the government is redoubling efforts to target the movement’s urban machinery, including the so-called legal fronts. Crisis Group telephone interviews, former top cadre, 16 July 2023; journalist, 11 September 2023.

⁹⁷ According to testimony from former rebels in Caraga region, one unit was able to generate at least \$50,000 yearly from two construction companies. “2 alleged rebels in Caraga bare funds from construction firms”, GMA Integrated News, 8 March 2024.

⁹⁸ The insurgents have traditionally been open to a wide recruitment pool, including women and members of the LGBTQI+ community. The NPA famously officiated over a gay marriage. On the other hand, there are reports that in some units traditional gender norms still apply.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group correspondence, Ka. Ma. Roja Banuan, NDF-Bikol spokesperson, 4 July 2023.

¹⁰⁰ In its publications, the party said fighters underwent basic political education courses in Bicol, Bukidnon and Negros in the first months of 2023. The movement also wants to update its official political program (the last one dates to 2017).

¹⁰¹ These include an overly cautious attitude about operations, a tendency to fall back to safe zones in the mountains and missed opportunities to strengthen the guerrillas’ support base.

¹⁰² The NPA has accounts on X (formerly Twitter), TikTok and Discord. A former cadre said the movement is engaging in identity politics to expand its reach, for example, applauding the LGBTQI+ community for its achievements in advancing the revolution. Crisis Group interview, 15 March 2023. The movement also claims to have strengthened its support among students. “Kabataang Makabayan reinvigorated in key Philippine universities”, NDF, 12 December 2023. Crisis Group interviews, civil society observer, Manila, 6 February 2024; government officials, 26 February 2024.

The movement's efforts to rejuvenate itself culminated in December 2023, when it announced what it called the Third Rectification Movement.¹⁰³ Party representatives insisted that the movement has been "gaining ground".¹⁰⁴ Government officials expressed concern about the announcement's timing, just weeks after the plan to return to peace talks had been unveiled.¹⁰⁵ The rebels reiterated their commitment to rectification and revolutionary struggle in another statement the following March.¹⁰⁶

B. *Mindanao: A Fading Stronghold*

A guerrilla bastion since the late 1970s, Mindanao was the proving ground for the government's approach of combining military pressure and development projects following the 2017 collapse of peace talks. Most of the NPA's recruits in Mindanao come from the Lumad, local Indigenous communities often considered the part of the population most neglected by Manila, and whose concerns have shaped the insurgency's overall identity.¹⁰⁷

Counter-insurgency operations first intensified in the Davao region, particularly around the NPA's former strongholds in Davao de Oro and Davao del Norte, weakening the insurgency in both areas.¹⁰⁸ In villages in the hinterlands of Davao City, Duterte's hometown, activists and the city government developed an initiative known as Peace 911. Launched by Duterte's daughter Sara, who had replaced her father as mayor, the program aimed to restore the state's legitimacy in former insurgent bastions, including the notorious Paquibato district.¹⁰⁹ Schemes included creating satellite government offices, consulting with residents about development projects and establishing a hotline for reporting security concerns. Together with the provision of employment opportunities for fighters who surrendered, the program helped stem the rebellion in Davao City's outskirts.¹¹⁰

The initiative was extended to adjacent areas, with some success. Towns such as Magpet, Antipas and Arakan in Cotabato province, where rebels had been highly

¹⁰³ "Message to Party Members on 55th Anniversary of the Party's Foundation", Central Committee, CPP, 26 December 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Beltran, "Why Philippines' Maoist rebellion may not end by 2025 despite Manila's claims", *South China Morning Post*, 23 February 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Malaya, "The CPP-NPA's 3rd Rectification Movement is bad news to the peace process", *Rappler*, 15 January 2024. Malaya is a member of the Philippine National Security Council.

¹⁰⁶ "Set to blaze the revolutionary armed struggle for national democracy! Carry out the critical and urgent tasks to rectify errors and advance the revolution!", Central Committee, CPP, 29 March 2024. The statement mentions "active defence warfare" and "redeployment of forces" as means of reversing recent setbacks.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Davao de Oro, 18 February 2023. According to some estimates, Lumads constitute as many as 70 per cent of the fighters in Mindanao. Cadres or recruiters, however, often come from other regions. Crisis Group interview, Kidapawan City, 25 October 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Between 2016 and 2021, the government claims to have reduced the number of "active insurgents" by 75 per cent, from 900 to 210, and the number of firearms at their disposal by 78 per cent, from 1,150 to 250. "60IB media conference", video, YouTube, 7 October 2021.

¹⁰⁹ The army had mounted scores of counter-insurgency campaigns in Paquibato, year after year, without achieving notable results. Crisis Group interviews, civil society observers, 17 February 2023.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, 6 June 2022. The last encounter in the region occurred on 14 September 2022 in Davao Oriental.

active in the past, have remained peaceful in recent years. People there say they appreciate the better roads and services the state has provided since 2018.¹¹¹ Sarangani, another small province where several towns have been known as hotbeds of insurgency for decades, combined national funds with its own resources to improve public services, including by hiring nurses to work in remote areas and building roads to help farmers get their produce to market.¹¹²

Finishing off the insurgency is proving more elusive in eastern and northern Mindanao. Under military pressure since 2018, guerrillas have moved westward into forested hills and are still trying to recruit among Muslim Moros and the Indigenous.¹¹³

Caraga region in north-eastern Mindanao, comprising the provinces of Agusan del Sur and del Norte, Surigao del Sur and del Norte, is also proving difficult to pacify.¹¹⁴ Here, the insurgency overlaps with disputes over exploitation of natural resources, particularly logging and mining. Indigenous peoples have a troubled relationship with the state, which they resent for its perceived neglect, feeding into the conflict.¹¹⁵ Local officials say the military is making headway in winning over public opinion, and that business and tourism are growing, especially in the cities.¹¹⁶ But traces of conflict are ubiquitous.¹¹⁷ Army patrols in villages are common, and clashes still take place: during a June 2023 skirmish on the outskirts of one city, Butuan, the military had to resort to airstrikes to fend off the guerrillas.¹¹⁸ Grievances related to Indigenous rights, resource extraction and land ownership continue to simmer and could spur further conflict unless they are carefully handled. Caraga also borders the vast province of Bukidnon, which the rebels use to hide and move around.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, community leaders and civil society representative, Arakan, 26 October 2022.

¹¹² Crisis Group interviews, local and regional officials, Alabel, 8 February 2023.

¹¹³ One such area is the boundary between Lanao del Sur and Bukidnon, where the military is still conducting operations against small guerrilla units and CPP political cadres remain active. Crisis Group correspondence, 21 February 2024.

¹¹⁴ According to Crisis Group data, between 2010 and 2023, every mainland Caraga municipality saw at least one clash. Crisis Group interviews, military officers, Davao, 9 June 2020.

¹¹⁵ The 1996 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act was an effort to protect the country's Indigenous communities. While the law marked a step forward, enforcement has been patchy. The conflict has also widened divisions within Indigenous communities, with both state authorities and rebels trying to exploit these fissures to boost their cause. The military tried to spur community leaders to switch their allegiance from the insurgency to the state, often by supplying them with firearms, polarising some communities. In other cases, the state has backed Indigenous leaders who are feuding with others aligned with the rebels. Crisis Group interviews, sources from Caraga, Manila, April 2023; Davao City, 21 June 2023.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, former local government official, Surigao del Norte, 29 May 2020; former NPA rebel commander, 29 October 2022, Manila.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Butuan, 3-4 June 2023.

¹¹⁸ Froilan Gallardo, "Soldiers kill 3 in surprise attack but face strong NPA defense in Butuan", *Rappler*, 17 June 2023. The communist movement has also highlighted the Agusan and Surigao del Sur provinces as focal points of the Third Rectification movement. *Ang Bayan* (English edition), 7 April 2024.

¹¹⁹ Caraga is also the priority region for the 2024 village development program.

C. Visayas: The Last Bastion

Over the last two years, the centre of gravity of the government's campaign has shifted from Mindanao to the Visayas, a group of islands in the middle of the country, now considered "the last bastion" of the insurgency.¹²⁰ The government believes that "a few hundred guerrillas" remain scattered across several "weakened" fronts, particularly in the eastern (Samar and Leyte) and western Visayas (Negros).¹²¹

Negros, comprising the two provinces of Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental, is perhaps the most affected island. The dynamics in each province are slightly different: Negros Oriental, where towns are poorer, has only a few hotspots of violence, which, while severe, is not solely rooted in the insurgency.¹²² Negros Occidental, on the other hand, has experienced a high level of conflict since 2017, recording the greatest number of clashes per province in the Philippines in the last two years. The main reason is the sugar industry, which has been the island's economic lifeline for centuries, but also perpetuates stark economic divides.¹²³ The local hacienda system leads to abuses of farmers and sugar workers, which are fodder for the NPA's media machine.¹²⁴ While sugarcane plantation owners have begun treating employees better in some respects, land grabs, poor wages and violence persist.¹²⁵ According to a local mayor, "people turn to insurgency because they are brainwashed [by the rebels]. But then there is clearly the injustice".¹²⁶

The rebels are nevertheless on the back foot, having suffered heavy losses for years, including among their local leaders.¹²⁷ Moving between the plains and mountain hide-

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior military officer, 23 April 2023. The counter-insurgency intensified after 2018, when Duterte issued Memorandum Order 32 to "suppress lawless violence and acts of terror" in Samar and Negros. Memorandum Order 32, op. cit.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, senior military officer, Cebu City, 6 June 2023. See also Gilbert Bayoran, "Troops sustain onslaught vs. CPP-NPA", *Visayan Daily Star*, 13 March 2024.

¹²² Guihulngan, the hometown of rebel leader and former priest Frank Fernandez, has been a particular hotspot, with many killings over the last few years. But the drug war and political competition – with the March 2023 assassination of provincial governor Roel Degamo being a prominent example – are responsible for more casualties than the insurgency. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Dumaguete, 20-21 March 2023; local government officials and military officers, Tanjay City, 22 March 2023.

¹²³ Rebellion erupted on the island in the early 1970s, partly inspired by liberation theology, and also in reaction to martial law and intimidation of workers by landlords' thugs. Crisis Group interview, former top cadre, 16 March 2023.

¹²⁴ The hacienda system, dating back to the Spanish colonial era, refers to the management of vast sugar plantations with work forces hundreds strong. In parts of the Negros countryside, the insurgents administer a form of justice, often called "kangaroo courts", which some residents nevertheless appear to prefer to the state system. While not as intense as in the past, resentment of the official justice system still fuels conflict on the island. Crisis Group correspondence, source from Negros, 8 April 2024.

¹²⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic hardships have further affected the lives of farmers and poor people. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Manila, 31 January 2023.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, mayor in Negros Oriental, 18 March 2023.

¹²⁷ The rebels face difficulties in their command structure as a result of these losses. While exact numbers are hard to come by, it seems that somewhere between 45 and 60 fighters – and possibly fewer – are left in the region. The military's latest estimate of the number in Negros Occidental is just over 30 fighters. Glazyl Masculino, "NPA combatants in Negros Occ. decreased significantly – Army", *Daily Guardian*, 6 March 2024.

outs, the rebels benefit from logistical support in urban centres. But the challenges they face are mounting. Differences among cadres regarding the movement's political and military direction have adversely affected operations. The rebels have also alienated local people with their behaviour, with some of them prizing economic returns and resembling hired goons. Much as the NPA enjoys popular backing in some places, rebel executions of "class enemies", such as sugar planters, businesspeople and military informers, push others away, including members of the middle class.¹²⁸ Some of the more gung-ho actions are likely taken by younger, overzealous commanders who lack the older generation's finesse in guerrilla warfare.¹²⁹

With the military pushing hard to dismantle the remaining NPA units since early 2023, parts of Negros are trapped in conflict, with civilians intimidated by both soldiers and rebels.¹³⁰ The hillside villages around Himamaylan and Kabankalan, in particular, are beset with clashes and displacement. Some military commanders are impatient with mayors whom they perceive as insufficiently supportive of efforts to tackle the insurgents.¹³¹ Local officials, in turn, are concerned by the intensity of the counter-insurgency campaign.¹³² Rebels burnish their appeal by pointing to perceived military overreach and portraying government projects as largely useless in the face of creeping impoverishment.¹³³ Though the army is on the offensive, rebels occasionally hit back.¹³⁴ "The war here is far from over", a local told Crisis Group.¹³⁵

The military is also having trouble ending the insurgency in Samar. Scores of rebel fighters have been killed over the decades, but the government has never managed to dislodge them fully.¹³⁶ Many of the cadres released in 2016 – including the Tiamzons

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, local officials, February-March 2023. The Leonardo Pangalinan NPA command in particular has been known to put offenders to death. A recent case occurred in Toboso town on 2 January 2024, when the rebels executed Juvie Sarona, who had allegedly been behind the killing of several farmers during the 2018 Sagay massacre. A few weeks after, the NPA owned up to having killed a village councillor's husband, also in Toboso town.

¹²⁹ An observer noted that some of them could be political activists who decided to join the armed struggle. Crisis Group interview, Manila, 19 June 2023.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, March-April 2023.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, military officers, Cauayan, 24 March 2023.

¹³² Crisis Group telephone interview, journalist, 17 July 2023.

¹³³ Dry weather in Negros as a result of El Niño has done massive damage to sugarcane fields and caused water shortages on the island, with a congressional deputy warning of "social unrest" as a result. "Yulo calls no cloud seeding report frustrating, warns of social unrest", *Digicast Negros*, 20 March 2024. The local rebel Mount Cansermon command has encouraged people to continue the "democratic revolution". Statement by Dionesio Magbuelas, spokesperson, NPA-South Central Negros, 17 March 2024.

¹³⁴ After a clash in February 2024, the military employed airstrikes against rebels. Reymund Titong, "Military launches airstrike after fierce clashes in Negros Occidental", *Rappler*, 23 February 2024. Three hundred families evacuated due to the hostilities.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bacolod, 24 March 2023.

¹³⁶ In the 1980s, two thirds of Samar's territory was under NPA influence. Crisis Group interview, former top cadre, Catbalogan City, 11 March 2023. The military went on a particularly intense offensive in 2005, but despite losing hundreds of fighters, the insurgency recovered.

– made for the province, which to them was familiar territory.¹³⁷ A guerrilla-held zone on the island even hosted the CPP's Second Party Congress in 2016.¹³⁸

Even in Samar, however, the government has achieved gains over recent years. The 8th Infantry Division has relied on intelligence work, pursuing the Tiamzons, for instance, as well as carefully calibrated use of force.¹³⁹ In response, in August 2022, the 200-300 Samar-based guerrillas divided up their large formations into more than a dozen smaller units to avoid detection.¹⁴⁰ Yet the armed forces continued to apply pressure. On 6 January, government forces killed a key rebel leader in Borongan town in Eastern Samar.¹⁴¹ The last group of hardened insurgents, numbering over 100, is holed up in the hinterlands between Northern Samar and its adjacent provinces.¹⁴² The rebels' support networks are also weakened.¹⁴³

As in Negros, the insurgents in Samar are struggling. But some elements of Manila's approach may play in their favour, starting with the slow delivery on promises such as socio-economic assistance to surrendered combatants.¹⁴⁴ Frustration could lead disillusioned ex-fighters to return to the guerrillas' ranks and dissuade others from demobilising. Reports even suggest that some fighters have buried their weapons in caches and are planning to go back to war once conditions are more favourable.¹⁴⁵

D. *Luzon: Pockets of Resistance*

Luzon, the Philippines' largest island, is less affected than others by the conflict with the communists. As it is home to the national capital, it enjoys better economic conditions than other parts of the country. Security operations over the last fifteen years have also weakened the movement's political and military base. Still, pockets of violence persist, for example in the Southern Tagalog region, the site of a police and mili-

¹³⁷ A former top NPA commander said Samar-based guerrillas were among the most ideological. Crisis Group interview, Tacloban, 10 March 2023.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Catbalogan City, 6-8 March 2023. The rebels in Samar at that time numbered around 700 fighters. A key decision at the congress was to redeploy cadres from Mindanao to Luzon and the Visayas, in an attempt to stretch government forces thin.

¹³⁹ Surrendering fighters who knew the intricacies of rebel movements on the island were a big help. Moreover, in the course of the operations in Samar, the NPA regional command head was killed. Crisis Group interview, journalist, 31 January 2023.

¹⁴⁰ "AFP's 8-month rebel chase in Samar", *Rappler*, 19 October 2022. In April 2023, the military said it had cleared two fronts, and in June it asserted that only one front was left, which officers considered "already weakened". The CPP said this claim was "utterly laughable". Crisis Group interviews, senior military commander, 23 July 2023; Marco Valbuena, CPP chief information officer, 24 July 2023.

¹⁴¹ Miriam Desacada, "NPA leader' slain in Eastern Samar encounter", *Philippine Star*, 8 January 2024.

¹⁴² Connected to the Bicol and Caraga regions, Northern Samar served as a logistical hub for coordinating rebel movements. Crisis Group telephone interview, senior military commander, 23 July 2023.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, police official, Catbalogan, 9 March 2023. The rebels also failed to secure monetary support for their "permit to campaign". Even so, some sources claim that many rebel units in Samar remain intact. Crisis Group correspondence, 27 March 2024.

¹⁴⁴ In Matuguinao, for example, over 150 rebels surrendered between 2019 and 2022. Crisis Group interview, local official, Catbalogan City, 8 March 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, local journalist, Manila, 17 February 2024.

tary crackdown during the COVID-19 pandemic that included alleged human rights abuses.¹⁴⁶ In the north of Luzon, sustained military operations forced rebel formations to move back to the mountains known as the Cordillera or to adjacent areas such as Cagayan and Isabela provinces.¹⁴⁷ Government forces also aim to prevent a guerrilla resurgence on the eastern side of the Sierra Madre mountain range in Central Luzon.¹⁴⁸

The southern portion of the island, Bicol region and the adjacent Quezon province, are traditional communist strongholds.¹⁴⁹ At present, even some of the movement's supporters admit that it has "been weakened".¹⁵⁰ But "lightning attacks", rebel strikes from out of nowhere to grab firearms and score propaganda points, were still taking place in early 2023.¹⁵¹ There have also been reports of extortion of business owners and, in March 2023, a clash near a school in Masbate made national headlines.¹⁵² Aiming to boost development, the national government had allocated a chunk of counter-insurgent funds to Bicol two months earlier.¹⁵³ In the first four months of 2024, fourteen clashes in Bicol, Quezon and Batangas, even if mostly initiated by government forces, showed the insurgency's staying power.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ In March 2021, soldiers and police killed nine activists in an incident known as Bloody Sunday, sparking outrage across the Philippines. State investigations into the killings are in limbo. Tetch Torres-Tupas, "Murder raps vs. 17 cops in 'Bloody Sunday' raids dismissed", *Inquirer*, 18 January 2023.

¹⁴⁷ The Cordilleras are generally free of conflict, unlike in the past, though human rights violations and extrajudicial killings are still reported. The Abra province saw clashes in 2023 – continuing into 2024 – after a period without any. In 2023, the air force also bombed rebel positions in Kalinga province and the towns of Baggao and Gonzaga in Cagayan province.

¹⁴⁸ Hilda Austria, "Army sustains fight vs insurgency in Pangasinan", Philippine News Agency, 12 March 2024.

¹⁴⁹ Quezon in particular has been a hotbed of NPA activity. Its mountains and the Bondoc peninsula offer easy refuge, and its location makes it a stepping stone to the Visayas and Mindanao. As of early 2024, small rebel units can pass through parts of the province, but the guerrillas find it difficult to stay in villages for long.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group, telephone interviews, NPA sympathisers, March 2023. A key rebel leader in Bicol region was also captured in late February. Crisis Group correspondence, 28 February 2024.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, church official, Legazpi City, 23 February 2023.

¹⁵² Janvic Mateo, "Masbate AFP-NPA clashes disrupt classes", *Philippine Star*, 24 March 2023. The number of incidents in Masbate has traditionally been disproportionate to its small size. The island has been one of the most politically contested provinces in the Philippines.

¹⁵³ Marlon Atun, "261 barangay sa Bicol tatanggap ng P6.6 milyon bawat isa mula sa NTF-Elcac", Philippine Information Agency, 31 January 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Even in these areas, the party's "mass base" is on the decline, but its long history there makes it hard for the government to fully control every patch of the countryside. Crisis Group interview, long-time observer, 10 April 2023.

IV. Managing the Fallout of Conflict

Recent military advances have raised the prospect of the rebels' definitive defeat. Although the NPA has recovered from setbacks in the past, most recently in the 1990s, many observers agree that this time a revival is unlikely. Even so, the conflict is not over. In 2022, clashes related to the insurgency killed over 250 people; the next year, the death toll stood at over 220, with incidents occurring in 42 of the 82 Philippine provinces.¹⁵⁵ In 2024 to date, the conflict has killed 45 people, wounded seventeen and displaced at least 550 families.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, the rural conflict could have new manifestations. The rebel movement could splinter, either on ideological grounds (not uncommon in communist insurgencies) or due to local schisms.¹⁵⁷ Alternatively, the rebels might turn to crime, according to those familiar with them, or seek work as violent enforcers for political figures.¹⁵⁸ Another scenario could entail a smaller but more lethal communist movement under new leadership.¹⁵⁹

Victory for the Philippine government appears closer than in the past but not yet clearly within reach. Defeat of the rebels and lasting peace in the countryside are likely to prove elusive unless more is done to address the roots of conflict. With this reality in mind, many analysts expressed guarded optimism following the surprise announcement that talks between Manila and the rebels would resume. But support for peace negotiations and an eventual agreement aiming to address deep-seated grievances is far from unanimous, with parts of the military and Vice President Sara Duterte voicing outright opposition immediately after the announcement in late November.¹⁶⁰ The military has also kept up the tempo of its operations against the insurgents in the first quarter of 2024. Meanwhile, Marcos, Jr. offered amnesty to those rebels who want to surrender.¹⁶¹ The National Security Council reiterated the overture, calling on rebels to "return to the fold of the law".¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group data.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group data.

¹⁵⁷ Regional NPA units have split from the movement in the past, for example in the Visayas in the early 1990s.

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, former cadres, independent observers and community-based workers, 2020-2023.

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, former member of government negotiating panel, Manila, 15 May 2020; government official, 19 January 2024; diplomat, 2 March 2024.

¹⁶⁰ Until the talks were announced, government officials tended to dismiss the need for negotiations, arguing instead that the best ways to counter the rebellion were to improve governance, hasten economic development and apply military pressure, giving insurgents a way out through surrenders. Crisis Group interviews, government officials, Manila, 25 June 2022; 21 April 2023; 2 February 2024.

¹⁶¹ Jairo Bolledo, "Marcos grants amnesty to rebels", *Rappler*, 24 November 2023.

¹⁶² Hana Bordey, "NSA Año urges ex-rebels to apply for gov't amnesty program", GMA News Online, 26 March 2024. Manila has also convened meetings of former communist leaders in support of the talks. Ryan Rosaura, "Ex-rebels vow to help widen support for peace talks", *Inquirer*, 23 January 2024.

A. *Preparing for Talks*

Pursuing dialogue with the rebels should serve the Marcos, Jr. administration's interests, allowing it to reaffirm its readiness to put a full stop to one of Asia's longest-running communist insurgencies.¹⁶³ It could also enable the government to achieve the strategic goal of shifting attention from internal security to external defence.¹⁶⁴ As Manila's priorities move toward modernising its military, especially the navy and air force, counter-insurgency increasingly looks like a distraction.¹⁶⁵

With a first official meeting between the sides expected in the near future, a good-faith peace process that concludes in a negotiated settlement appears within striking distance. But if the conversations are to be fruitful, compromise on what to expect from them will be of paramount importance. Despite a commitment to talks, the government and rebels harbour starkly different expectations of what they might entail. The NDF is sticking to its traditional expansive set of demands. It refuses what it calls "surrender talks".¹⁶⁶ Having enhanced its bargaining power with its counter-insurgent campaign, Manila, on the other hand, is likely to push for a much more restricted agenda.¹⁶⁷ Even so, the possible involvement of senior military figures – an important advance from the last, failed round of negotiations – signals that the government views these talks as a major opportunity to end the conflict.¹⁶⁸

To bridge their differences, the government and rebels should aim to build on the Oslo Joint Statement and Communiqué of 23 November 2023, which called for a peaceful end to the conflict. Both should also prepare a list of principles to guide the agenda for negotiations.¹⁶⁹ These principles could include mutual commitment to rural development and to participation by rebel cadres in formal political life.¹⁷⁰ In

¹⁶³ Crisis Group telephone interview, peace process observer, 22 July 2023. See also Crisis Group Commentary, "The Philippines: Keeping the Bangsamoro Peace Process on Track", 30 January 2024.

¹⁶⁴ Georgi Engelbrecht, "Manila's focus on external defense needs peace in Mindanao", *The Diplomat*, 8 May 2023. The goal of strengthening the Philippines' defence capabilities is rooted in Manila's view that it needs to be ready for maritime tensions with China amid the strategic competition between Washington and Beijing.

¹⁶⁵ "AFP wants to end insurgency within 2024", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 February 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Raymund Villanueva, "NDFP consultants welcome return of peace talks to national level", Kodao Productions, 27 March 2024. The four traditional NDF concerns are: 1) respect for human rights and humanitarian law; 2) social and economic reforms; 3) political, electoral and constitutional reforms; and 4) an end to hostilities.

¹⁶⁷ Officials in Manila espouse a range of views about how to engage in talks and which compromises are acceptable. Crisis Group interviews, state officials, January–February 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, international observers, Manila, 6 December 2023, 26 January 2024. Some military officers are still averse to peace talks, which explains why officials from the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity have been visiting various commands to discuss the talks. Crisis Group correspondence, 5 March 2024.

¹⁶⁹ For models, the two sides could look to the "Decision Points on Principles" of the Bangsamoro peace process, which paved the way for the first agreement between Manila and the Moro rebels in 2012. Past agreements between Manila and the communists, even if they largely have been set aside, could offer additional guidance in developing these principles or points. For instance, the draft agreements on social and economic reforms developed during the 2016–2017 talks might be helpful. Crisis Group correspondence, 12 April 2024.

¹⁷⁰ One prominent civil society leader said the principles should include a commitment to "local peace and development zones". Crisis Group interview, Manila, 23 January 2024. As for political

addition, community leaders across the archipelago told Crisis Group that the talks should tackle the precarious living conditions of Indigenous people trapped in the conflict.¹⁷¹ The reference to “environmental issues” in the Oslo statement also gives the sides an opportunity to discuss remedies for areas affected by conflict and natural disasters, for example parts of the Visayas and Mindanao.¹⁷²

Compromises between the sides will be difficult, but prospects may improve if the parties can take concrete steps to engender trust. As a confidence-building measure, Manila should consider releasing the oldest and sickest NDF members on humanitarian grounds, including those who might become members of the negotiating panel.¹⁷³ Another feasible step would be to guarantee freedom of movement for NDF negotiators, which successive governments have been reluctant to do. The rebels could reciprocate by agreeing to local, temporary cessations of hostilities, with clear rules as to which acts are prohibited.¹⁷⁴ On this basis, the sides could look to establish a mechanism for monitoring and verification of human rights and compliance with international humanitarian law to stay in effect as long as the conflict continues.¹⁷⁵

The complexity of the issues and difficulties of building confidence between the sides suggest that talks should not be rushed, even if the process moves more slowly than Manila would like. The parties should convene internal consultations to build constituencies for peace. Manila has taken a step in this direction, with the counter-insurgency task force calling the Oslo “exploratory talks” a “welcome development”.¹⁷⁶ On the rebel side, it will be particularly important to strengthen communication among party leaders, the negotiating panel and field commanders in order to ensure a cohesive approach to talks and compliance with any agreement.¹⁷⁷ Views differ within the party, with some seeing peace talks as a genuine objective and others regarding them

participation, the communiqué stipulates that “resolving the roots of the armed conflict and ending the armed struggle shall pave the way for the transformation of the CPP-NPA-NDFP”.

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, Mindanao, Negros and Caraga regions, 2022-2023.

¹⁷² Environmental protection discussions could address protected forests in former guerrilla strongholds as well as safeguards for communities regarding development projects, such as mining operations, in conflict-affected areas.

¹⁷³ The military is very averse to this idea. Crisis Group interview, retired senior officer, 20 December 2023. A compromise could be to put the consultants under house arrest with regular visits from members of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

¹⁷⁴ These agreements would naturally have to apply to government forces as well.

¹⁷⁵ Manila and the rebels could also draw lessons from the Joint Monitoring Committee, inaugurated in 2004 to investigate humanitarian law violations, for such a body. In addition, short of a cease-fire, the two sides could set up a mechanism that would ensure joint monitoring and verification of issues of mutual concern. Ideally, the mechanism would feature not only representatives of both sides, but also members of the Philippine Human Rights Commission, independent civil society figures and – if the sides agree – even foreigners.

¹⁷⁶ “Memorandum on ‘Guidance on the Signing of the Oslo Joint Communiqué’”, National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, 3 December 2023. Following the announcement, however, the armed forces pressed ahead with operations aimed at dismantling the remaining guerrilla fronts.

¹⁷⁷ The rebels could appoint top political or military cadres to the panel.

as an instrumentalist tactic. Its leaders need to bridge the gap and tell cadres and the government that they have done so.¹⁷⁸

Both parties should also seek to incorporate a wide variety of voices in the negotiations. The government and NDF should have women negotiators and Indigenous representatives on their respective panels and in any working group that may be created, helping ensure that talks reflect the views of the grassroots.¹⁷⁹ In addition, once the talks start, government negotiators should in parallel conduct “town hall” meetings in conflict-affected areas to hear the most pressing concerns of local citizens.

B. *Adjusting the Counter-insurgency*

The government’s holistic counter-insurgency approach has weakened the rebels, but with peace talks on the horizon, authorities could improve it. Above all, Manila should tone down rhetoric stigmatising individuals and communities, putting an end to red-tagging that, in effect, criminalises political dissent. In addition, Manila should step up efforts to evaluate the counter-insurgent task force’s operations and make recommendations regarding its mandate and future funding.¹⁸⁰ Stronger civilian oversight of the task force, drawing on the expertise of representatives from national government agencies, Congress, civil society and academia, could help it become more community-oriented and transparent, while placing more women in top management positions would make it more representative.¹⁸¹ Over time, and so long as the conflict abates, Manila should strengthen the agency’s civilian identity and continue its focus on spurring development in conflict-stricken areas.¹⁸²

National and local authorities should also aim to fine-tune the inter-agency approach to make it more responsive to community needs. While a complete revamp of the pre-set list of development projects seems unlikely, ensuring that local civil society has a greater say in the initiatives that are proposed, and oversight while they are being implemented, is feasible. Manila could also do more to supervise local officials who oversee implementation.¹⁸³ More concerted efforts could also be made to address the reasons for project delays and other problems as well as to plan responses to pos-

¹⁷⁸ Communications from the CPP and NDF over recent months have repeatedly emphasised the rectification campaign and “the people’s struggle”, without prominently mentioning the exploratory talks. The NDF appears to see no contradiction between rectification and pursuing talks, wishing to negotiate from “a position of strength”. “Panayam Kay Julie de Lima Sison (Huling Bahagi)”, video, YouTube, 26 March 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Manila should also consider appointing the chair of the counter-insurgency task force as a panel member.

¹⁸⁰ During a visit to the Philippines, UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan urged Manila to abolish the inter-agency task force and to issue a presidential order to develop a policy against red-tagging. Officials expressed disagreement with the advice. Jairo Bolledo, “UN’s Khan urges Marcos: Abolish NTF-ELCAC”, *Rappler*, 2 February 2024.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, independent observer, Bacolod City, 15 March 2023.

¹⁸² Crisis Group interviews, government officials, February 2024; documents made available to Crisis Group. Jean Mangaluz, “NTF-Elcac to transition into unity and peace task force – official”, *Inquirer*, 2 February 2024.

¹⁸³ In this regard, authorities can call on the assistance of the Department of Interior and Local Government, which plays a key role in the inter-agency task force.

sible funding gaps.¹⁸⁴ In municipalities or clusters of towns where service delivery has been lagging, officials could encourage local governments to establish “satellite offices” in remote areas that could employ health and administrative personnel.¹⁸⁵ Together with civil society, these municipalities should also prepare development plans that respond to the specific needs of women and ethno-linguistic minorities, for example in the Caraga region.¹⁸⁶

Lastly, Manila needs to improve its treatment of rebels who have surrendered. Even though the program for surrenders is in place, funding has fallen short. The government should assess what additional resources are required to meet the needs of former rebels, strengthen program oversight and come up with a plan for housing ex-combatants, some of whom still live in military camps.

C. *Strengthening the Rule of Law*

Protecting communities that bear the brunt of the conflict and strengthening the rule of law in conflict-affected areas remain crucial to lasting peace. Grievances regarding security force operations and the actions of local officials continue to fuel resentment of the state that rebels regularly exploit.

The military can help mitigate these resentments through stronger safeguards relating to the use of force, particularly with respect to protecting civilians. It should stop using a heavy hand with communities it suspects of being sympathetic to the insurgency, reducing coercive interactions with civilians.¹⁸⁷ The armed forces should also more closely monitor the operations of paramilitaries such as the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units and punish any transgressions.¹⁸⁸ Finally, they should allow safe, unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected villages, regardless of whether these are near rebel-influenced areas. Where the military is hesitant to do so out of concern the relief could benefit the insurgents, it should coordinate with civil society groups and local governments to create humanitarian corridors so that aid reaches the intended recipients.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, the armed forces should ensure that farmers in conflict-affected areas can harvest their crops without harassment.¹⁹⁰

To win local legitimacy, the Philippine state also needs to strengthen the rule of law and curb injustices that generate disaffection in areas where the insurgency is strongest. Training more police and deploying more women officers to provide safety and order is particularly important if the state wishes to consolidate its authority

¹⁸⁴ In early April, Marcos, Jr. instructed his cabinet to increase village development funds. Raymund Antonio, “PBBM orders increase of funds for this year’s barangay dev’t program”, *Manila Bulletin*, 4 April 2024.

¹⁸⁵ These initiatives should focus on municipalities in Negros Occidental, Samar and Bukidnon.

¹⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, Magpet, 28 October 2022.

¹⁸⁷ Each military unit’s human rights officer could also be tasked with monitoring possible over-reach through red-tagging.

¹⁸⁸ In Negros, in particular, paramilitaries were identified as responsible for humanitarian law violations. Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, March 2023.

¹⁸⁹ In the past, rural dwellers, local officials and civil society leaders proposed setting up “peace zones” – areas where the sides would cease fire for the sake of community well-being. But over the years, these initiatives have eroded from the Cordilleras to Negros.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, 5 October 2022.

in parts of the countryside where rebels are in retreat or have already retreated, for example in Davao.¹⁹¹ The police should also strengthen its mechanisms to punish abuses by officers. At the same time, authorities should look to give more resources to local courts, filling vacant judicial positions and improving case management so that conflict-affected communities can get better access to the justice system.

For legal and humanitarian reasons – and to create a climate of good-will ahead of negotiations – the rebels should also protect non-combatants, including by avoiding setting up encampments near sites such as schools and steering clear of targeting civilians.¹⁹² They should also honour their pledge not to recruit minors.¹⁹³

D. *Boosting Livelihoods in Conflict Zones*

Land ownership is a root cause of the insurgency, and the notion of “agrarian revolution” remains a staple of CPP ideology.¹⁹⁴ In conflict-affected regions such as Bicol, Negros and Samar, agriculture is the economic lifeline for hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, yet farmers live in poverty and bear the brunt of the war. About 22.4 per cent of the population, or more than one fifth of the country, lives in or near poverty, but some provinces where insurgents operate face a rate one and a half times as high.¹⁹⁵ Considering that farming communities provide a steady stream of recruits for the rebels, improving livelihoods in the countryside should be at the heart of efforts to build peace.¹⁹⁶

First, the Philippine government should use the village development program to increase the number of agricultural projects it funds in conflict-affected areas rather

¹⁹¹ While the police may not yet be capable of taking over provision of public safety from the military in rural areas affected by conflict, the Marcos, Jr. administration appears to be considering transferring this responsibility to law enforcement in the long term. As of now, the police are playing a support role to the military’s counter-insurgency campaign.

¹⁹² Officially, the movement claims to adhere to humanitarian law. In the past, it has released captured soldiers and sometimes issued apologies when it has harmed civilians. It claims to have developed internal mechanisms for dealing with transgressions, for example compensating aggrieved parties and cooperating with the peace panel – the NDF – in cases of alleged violations after the NDF signed an agreement with the Philippine government in the 1990s committing to respect human rights and humanitarian law (see earlier footnote). Crisis Group correspondence, Marco Valbuena, CPP chief information officer, 24 July 2023. The government has filed several complaints against the NPA with the Commission of Human Rights. See also Priam Nepomuceno, “NPA rights violations piling up: AFP”, Philippine News Agency, 6 November 2022.

¹⁹³ In 1992, the NPA amended its rules to stipulate that eighteen is the minimum age for recruitment. Crisis Group correspondence, Marco Valbuena, CPP chief information officer, 24 July 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, NDF panellist, Utrecht, 14 December 2022. Regions where the insurgency continues, for example Negros, Bicol and Bukidnon, have economies oriented toward farming.

¹⁹⁵ Iya Gozum, “Philippines’ poverty incidence down in first half of 2023”, *Rappler*, 22 December 2023.

¹⁹⁶ In October 2022, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, agriculture employed 22.5 per cent of the country’s workers, some 10.6 million people. Cristina Eloisa Baclig, “PH farms getting empty: Agriculture job loss a worrying trend”, *Inquirer*, 8 December 2022. Women comprise more than a quarter of workers in Philippine agriculture, but official data fails to take account of informal work carried out by rural women. Other challenges for women include lower wages, socio-cultural norms complicating applications for land titles and agricultural policies that often lack a gender lens. See also “Crafting Policies and Programs for Women in the Agriculture Sector”, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, July 2018.

than focusing almost exclusively on infrastructure development. These initiatives should go beyond mere distribution of livestock and fertilisers.¹⁹⁷ Projects geared toward providing better equipment such as storage facilities or machinery could boost the income and productivity of farmers, as could better access to training.¹⁹⁸ Local governments, with support from the national government's Departments of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, should support these initiatives with know-how and capital, while calling on agrarian experts from civil society and academia for advice, for example on how best to diversify crops.¹⁹⁹

Secondly, national authorities should press ahead with land reform, particularly if agreement on this issue is reached in peace talks with the rebels.²⁰⁰ Even though distributing land more fairly has been official policy in the Philippines since 1988, the results have often not met expectations.²⁰¹ The government should take steps that would galvanise reform but do not require, in the words of a former official, "re-inventing the wheel".²⁰² Officials should seek to identify public land in or near conflict-affected areas and develop plans to redistribute these plots to landless farmers, as well as bolster schemes to enhance land productivity.²⁰³ They should also assess the challenges facing previous reform efforts in Negros, Samar and Northern Mindanao so as to avoid repeating past mistakes in conflict-affected areas.²⁰⁴ Lastly, they should establish specific programs of support for women farmers, for example by improving credit services, enhancing technical training and strengthening women's roles in land governance.

E. Supporting Local Peacebuilding

Even if levels of violence fall, there is and will continue to be a need for peacebuilding aimed at bridging differences in conflict-affected areas and promoting more inclusive local authorities. Beyond government agencies, civil society organisations are

¹⁹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Visayas residents, March-May 2023.

¹⁹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, NGO workers, Catbalogan, 11 March 2023; Dumaguete, 19 March 2023. Cooperatives and associations of former NPA combatants could play a crucial role in training for farmers.

¹⁹⁹ Such measures would go a long way toward demonstrating Marcos, Jr.'s avowed commitment to improving agricultural output countrywide. Anna Bajo, "Marcos renews commitment to enhance agricultural productivity", GMA News Online, 25 October 2023.

²⁰⁰ Iya Gozum, "After 35 years of CARP, are Filipino farmers free?", *Rappler*, 12 June 2023.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, Negros and Manila, April-May 2023. The reform, which was rolled out from 1988 to 2014, envisioned a ceiling on land holdings and redistribution of public and private lands to small farmers. In some regions, big landholdings were split up, but in others oligarchic land ownership is still the norm. See Tasso Adamopoulos and Diego Restuccia, "Land Reform and Productivity: A Quantitative Analysis with Micro Data", *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2020).

²⁰² Crisis Group interview, Quezon City, 23 May 2023. Pursuing complete land reform would in all likelihood draw fierce opposition from the landed oligarchy.

²⁰³ A positive step was Marcos, Jr.'s enactment of a law eliminating the debt of more than 500,000 farmers. "New law writes off P57-B farmers' debt", *Manila Times*, 8 July 2023. Productivity could be improved by diversifying crops, using technology more effectively and resolving pending land cases at the agriculture department.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, civil society representative, Manila, 19 February 2024.

among the best placed to do this job, as they have earned credibility from years working on humanitarian, environmental and rehabilitation issues.²⁰⁵

Supporting these groups could be a way for donors to contribute to peace and stability.²⁰⁶ While red-tagging still occurs, the political conditions for this sort of work have slightly improved since the Duterte presidency ended.²⁰⁷ Some donors and international organisations are interested in helping with peacebuilding in principle but concerned about running afoul of the government.²⁰⁸ An indirect approach could offer a way forward: funding small pilot projects that focus on climate change adaptation and disaster relief – issues of concern to Manila – while not losing sight of peacebuilding goals.²⁰⁹ This course of action would be cost-effective and broadly in line with the Marcos, Jr. government’s thinking.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, source close to the 2016-2017 peace talks, Manila, 14 February 2023; source from the Bicol region, Manila, 10 April 2023; community leader, Surigao del Sur, 16 December 2023.

²⁰⁶ The vast majority of donor support, according to some estimates around 75 per cent, goes to the Bangsamoro peace process and broader development programming in the country.

²⁰⁷ Most observers agree that such rhetoric has cooled under Marcos, Jr., but whether red-tagging is on the wane remains debateable.

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, 22 February 2023, 22 January 2024.

²⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, civil society worker, Silay, 4 September 2023; humanitarian and development NGO head, Manila, 27 February 2024.

²¹⁰ Donors need not divert their attention from the Bangsamoro peace process to address climate change adaptation, which is a priority for the Marcos, Jr. administration, ensuring its buy-in to potential projects.

V. Conclusion

The Maoist insurgency in the Philippines is at its lowest ebb in decades. But it has not been vanquished, and the armed conflict remains both a challenge for the state and a threat to public safety in pockets across the country. The government's military successes in the last few years have lent it confidence in its capacity to end the rebellion once and for all. But Manila may be underestimating the rebels' resilience; moreover, the political, social and economic grievances that have driven the rebel cause over decades could stoke last-ditch resistance among parts of the guerrilla force or new manifestations of violence.

Manila's attempts to transform the conditions that have fuelled the communist rebellion are at the heart of its quest to close this painful chapter in the country's history. But while it is on the right track, refinements in its development policies are required to win over certain communities, and its sometimes heavy-handed approach continues to sow unnecessary distress. With peace talks slated to resume soon, the government should seize the opportunity to work patiently toward a definitive end to the conflict, beginning with modest confidence-building steps. So long as the trajectory and outcome of talks are uncertain, Manila should also strive to balance its counter-insurgent efforts with a peacebuilding approach that stresses adherence to the rule of law and inclusive development.





The Philippine state has done much to blunt the guerrilla movement and deplete its ranks. Now is the time to reach further in its bid to tackle the political, social and economic causes that fuel the insurgency, so that this decades-old conflict can finally draw to a conclusion.

Manila/Brussels, 19 April 2024

Appendix A: Map of the Philippines



Areas in focus

-  PH army infantry divisions
-  CPP regional party committees
-  Key regions and provinces
-  Provincial borders



Appendix B: The Communist Insurgency through Time

The history of the communist insurgency in the Philippines can be divided into different periods. These are: 1) the movement's origins (1968-1972); 2) its expansion and growth during the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986); 3) a time of retrenchment (1986-1996); 4) on-and-off resurgence (1996-2016); and 5) an escalation of conflict followed by decline (2016 to the present). This appendix covers the first four.

Origins and Early Stages (1968-1972)

Antecedents of social revolt appeared in the Philippines in the colonial era, as well as in the 1940s and 1950s. The most prominent was the Huk uprising. The Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (or Hukbalahap or the Huks) was an anti-Japanese guerrilla movement during World War II. In 1946, the Huks began fighting the Philippine government, to resist political repression and landlordism but also to advance an ideological agenda.²¹¹ The Huks had close ties with the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas, the Philippine Communist Party, but also operated on their own.²¹² By 1954, the administration of President Ramon Magsaysay had defeated the movement through combined military, police and civic action.²¹³ The governments that followed, however, were unable to carry out reforms that might have prevented its resurgence. More than a decade later, in 1968, the CPP emerged during a period of social upheaval and prolonged economic stagnation. It drew its members from both the left-wing intelligentsia, including students, and veterans of the old party who were dissatisfied with their leaders.

In 1969, the party formed an armed wing, the NPA.²¹⁴ The nucleus of the new guerrillas teamed up with Huk remnants under Bernabe "Kumander Dante" Buscayno in central Luzon and began expanding.²¹⁵ CPP founder Jose Maria Sison envisaged the province of Isabela and the adjacent mountain ranges in northern Luzon, where the CPP Central Committee moved in 1970, as a launchpad for offensives.²¹⁶

Martial Law and the Marcos Years (1972-1986)

President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr.'s imposition of martial law on 23 September 1972, on the grounds of perceived unrest in Manila and outside, enabled the movement to

²¹¹ Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon means "people's army against Japan". See Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Quezon City, 1979). Landlordism refers to an economic system in which a few individuals rent or lease land to tenants. In the Philippines, the landlords tended to be politically dominant as well.

²¹² The party was established in 1930 by labour and trade union leaders.

²¹³ Magsaysay worked closely with Edward Lansdale, a U.S. intelligence officer, who later attempted to replicate the Philippine counter-insurgency model in Vietnam.

²¹⁴ One year later, the national democratic movement was galvanised by the "first-quarter storm", a series of student protests and street confrontations in Manila following the election of Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. Top communist cadres took part, setting the stage for further mobilisation of students and youth. Crisis Group telephone interview, former top cadre, 27 March 2024.

²¹⁵ For a granular narrative of the CPP's expansion in the Bicol region, see Soliman Santos, Jr., *TIGAON 1969: Untold Stories of the CPP-NPA, KM and SDK* (Manila, 2023).

²¹⁶ According to Jones' seminal work on the communist movement, Sison was inspired by Mao Zedong and the Yen'an base in China's Shensi province during 1935-1936. Jones, *Red Revolution*, op. cit., pp. 40, 96 and 101.

expand and challenge state power.²¹⁷ In the early 1970s, the NPA had around 1,000 to 2,000 fighters, but by the end of Marcos's rule that number had grown to an estimated 20,000 or more, as the military focused on dealing with Mindanao's Moro secessionist groups.²¹⁸ The communist rebels also benefitted from the repression of the Marcos years. Massacres, corruption and everyday violence drove more people to fight the dictator and his cronies. The rebels also took advantage of the Philippine archipelago's geographical spread.²¹⁹ Their major theatres were Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao.²²⁰

Mindanao in particular proved to be a perfect environment for unrest. The islanders harboured a variety of grievances, such as landlessness, resource exploitation, inequality and violence against Indigenous minorities, that found echoes in the insurgency's proclaimed agenda.²²¹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the regions of Davao and Zamboanga, followed by Agusan, Surigao and Misamis, all became staging grounds for guerrilla offensives.

The rebels reached their political-military peak in the mid-1980s, when they not only controlled territory and operated hit squads in cities across the country, but also attacked military bases.²²² Guerrilla units merged into bigger formations, often engaging the armed forces in conventional battles.²²³ Starting in the early 1980s, cities experienced strikes and uprisings, with political coalitions engaging in mass mobilisation.²²⁴ Many cadres experimented with new political and military strategies.²²⁵ By the time a popular uprising forced Marcos out of office, the rebels were active in almost every Philippine province.

²¹⁷ For a critical look on the communist movement during the martial law era, see Joseph Scalice, *The Drama of Dictatorship: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines* (New York, 2023).

²¹⁸ Moro rebels – the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front – have engaged in tactical cooperation with communist insurgents since the 1970s.

²¹⁹ Rebel doctrine followed Sison's 1974 text, "Specific Characteristics of Our People's War", which set out the principles of "centralised leadership and decentralised operations". Prior writings established the nucleus of this approach.

²²⁰ In Luzon, the rebel movement drew on grievances among Indigenous people in the Cordillera region who resisted government-imposed development projects. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°248, *The Philippines: Dismantling Rebel Groups*, 19 June 2013, pp. 9–10.

²²¹ In the 1980s, Davao City, for example, saw killings in shootouts and bombings on a scale some compared to the civil wars happening at the time in Central America.

²²² Battle deaths were highest in 1985. Crisis Group Report, *The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks*, p. 4.

²²³ Some look at this rebel move as a blunder that took cadres away from organising in the countryside. See Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968–1993: A Story of its Theory and Practice* (Quezon City, 2001), p. 230.

²²⁴ In the 1970s, the group also started to build solidarity networks with international guerrilla, leftist and social movements. Some of these links endure today.

²²⁵ The debates occurred also at the top echelons of the party. Some cadres wanted to move away from a Maoist line toward a more hybrid approach known as "insurrectionist strategy". Advocates of this approach, and another known as the political-military framework or the Vietnamese model, favoured a mix of armed, political and legal struggle as well as urban work in addition to the Maoist people's war. See, for example, Marty Villalobos, "For a Politico-Military Framework", unpublished paper, 23 February 1987.

The Corazon Aquino Years (1986-1992)

The movement then fell into decline, due to four factors. First, it decided to boycott the 1986 polls. Marcos had called these snap elections before the uprising, but the rebel leadership was convinced the polls would not be fair even with him gone.²²⁶ It proved to be a major mistake, since the CPP was the dominant anti-Marcos political force.²²⁷ Secondly, purges harmed the structure of party and its armed wing, alienating many cadres.²²⁸ The number of fighters in Mindanao, for example, fell by some 50 per cent.²²⁹ Thirdly, military operations intensified as the armed forces tried to exploit the movement's weaknesses after a temporary ceasefire in 1986 fell apart.²³⁰

But perhaps most important was a fourth factor: a split in the movement over policy disagreements. Debates on strategy and the 1986 election boycott decision culminated in Sison's publication of a strategic document to "reaffirm" ideological orthodoxy, denounce ideological adventurism and push for "rectification" – namely, a return to classical Maoist doctrine of protracted people's war.²³¹ The document triggered strong reactions from party members and grassroots supporters, ranging from disbelief to firm opposition, and reflecting frustration with Sison's dogmatism.²³² A substantial part of the movement split off.²³³ Estimates suggest that it lost 40 per cent of its combatants, 40 per cent of its territory, 15 per cent of party members and

²²⁶ The non-militant and more liberal opposition to the Marcos dictatorship was also gaining ground in the early 1980s. Crisis Group telephone interview, former member of the communist movement, 27 March 2024.

²²⁷ This decision was made by the leadership in the party's Executive Committee and in particular Rodolfo "Rudy" Salas, who led the party from 1977. The party later demoted Salas.

²²⁸ See Robert Francis Garcia, *To Suffer Thy Comrades: How the Revolution Devoured Its Own* (Manila, 2001). Among the main purge operations were "Ahos", in Mindanao; "Missing Link", in Southern Luzon; "Cadena de Amor" also in Luzon; and "VD" in Leyte.

²²⁹ In a moment of self-awareness, the late Ka Oris, a prominent Mindanao-based NPA leader, said: "In regions with forces numbering 1,000, only 200 were left. It was not because the enemy was good; it was because we were bad. Something was wrong with us". Carolyn Arguillas, "Q and A with Jorge Madlos", *Mindanews*, 8 January 2011.

²³⁰ The 60-day ceasefire was declared during the term of President Corazon Aquino, but collapsed almost immediately. Most of the blame goes to the government, which relaunched military operations in violation of the ceasefire. But the rebels were also half-hearted in respecting the ceasefire. As a result, the war in the countryside continued with ferocity.

²³¹ Armando Liwanag (Sison's pen name), "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors". Sison's campaign became known as the Second Great Rectification Movement.

²³² Those who endorsed Sison's point of view were known as Reaffirmists, while the splinter members became the Rejectionists. Both labels are in use today in internal debates and among outside observers.

²³³ Those who left included the Manila-Rizal committee, chunks of the Mindanao and Negros party and military structures, Central Luzon and parts of sectors in the united front (a coalition of revolutionary and legal forces).

60 per cent of its popular support.²³⁴ The emergence of various communist splinter groups, most of which abandoned the armed struggle, fractured the Philippine left.²³⁵

The Fidel Ramos and Joseph Estrada Presidencies (1992-2001)

The armed conflict continued in the 1990s, but with varying intensity. The Ramos presidency pressed ahead with Aquino's military campaign, taking advantage of the CPP's disarray. Many cadres and activists, past and present, regard this period as the rebels' low point.²³⁶ Beyond the party's erosion, many in the growing Philippine middle class had lost faith in the need for violent revolution to bring about social change.²³⁷

The Ramos administration also achieved the most progress in terms of peace talks, leading to four agreements but falling short of a comprehensive settlement.²³⁸ Late in the decade, however, the rebels managed to reorganise some of their forces, at a time when the military once again had its hands full with the Moro rebellion.²³⁹ Moreover, under the leadership of the Tiamzons and other figures, veteran cadres rebuilt networks to capitalise on weak state service delivery in rural areas, as well as continuous military abuses against civilians. The rebels grew in number once more, with up to 9,500 fighters in 1999.²⁴⁰ The next administration under Joseph Estrada (1998-2001) did not engage in serious talks and clashes continued.

The Gloria Macapagal Arroyo Years (2001-2010)

The conflict once again intensified during the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.²⁴¹ At first, her administration was predisposed to negotiations.²⁴² But it quickly

²³⁴ Dominique Caouette, "Persevering Revolutionaries: Armed Struggle in the 21st Century, Exploring the Revolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines", Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 2004, p. 14.

²³⁵ Some of these groups merged while others splintered further. For instance, the Cordilleras Peoples Liberation Army separated after 1986 and concluded a peace deal with the government. The Cordilleras are, apart from the Bangsamoro, the only autonomous region in the Philippines.

²³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Manila, June-July 2023.

²³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, former cadres and activists, Cebu and Davao, March-April 2023.

²³⁸ From 1992 to 1995, the sides signed four agreements during exploratory talks, including the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees and the Agreement on the Ground Rules of the Formal Meetings. Ramos also repealed the Anti-Subversion Law that outlawed membership in the CCP.

²³⁹ In particular, the emergence of the Abu Sayyaf Group and renewed hostilities with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Ramos handed over part of the responsibility for peace and order to the police in 21 provinces, but they were ill equipped to take on the task. Thomas Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (Essex, 1996), p. 83.

²⁴⁰ A striking example of the insurgency's capacity to rise from the ashes was in Negros, where in 1992-1993 the NPA allegedly had only one platoon and one gun left. After the military withdrew and the police took over many of its responsibilities, Frank Fernandez, a priest-turned-rebel, convinced many fighters who had either surrendered or were lying low to recommit to the struggle. After an intense period of mass mobilisation, the guerrillas were soon able to tax companies and attack detachments. Crisis Group interview, local source, 19 June 2023.

²⁴¹ At the Arroyo administration's request, Norway took over as official facilitator of the talks in 2001.

²⁴² The political and legal organisations of the communist party supported Arroyo during an uprising that led Estrada to resign. In the 2001 elections, Bayan Muna topped the party-list vote. Some members of the party were contemplating the possibility of democratic politics beyond an exclusive focus on Maoist struggle. Crisis Group interview, political observer, 15 March 2023.

grew alarmed at the strong electoral performance of Bayan Muna, a political party close to the militant left, and rebellion in the countryside resurged. During this time, the military considered the communist rebels the biggest threat in the country, over and above the Moro armed groups.²⁴³ In 2004, the NDF withdrew from the negotiating table after Macapagal-Arroyo designated the NPA as a terrorist group. The subsequent military campaign, called Oplan Bantay Laya, was once again heavy-handed.²⁴⁴ In Davao's district of Paquibato, for example, the armed forces allegedly committed several abuses.²⁴⁵ A military campaign in Central Luzon targeted not only rebels but also activists and the movement's political backbone. This crackdown once again drove hundreds of people to the armed movement, even if military operations weakened some party committees and rebel fronts.

The Benigno Aquino Years (2010-2016)

Peace talks under Arroyo's successor Benigno Aquino again proved unsuccessful. The administration launched a new military campaign, the Oplan Bayanihan, and designed the PAMANA program, a countrywide effort to roll out development projects in communist-influenced villages.²⁴⁶ But the rebellion continued. The early Aquino years, in fact, saw a notable increase in NPA activity in Caraga and Davao regions in Mindanao.²⁴⁷ In these resource-rich areas, the movement's membership grew by up to 20 per cent. Clashes occurred almost everywhere in the country.²⁴⁸ While some in Aquino's negotiating team demonstrated flexibility, they were not able to agree on substantive issues with the communist movement. The rebels were also cautious about making concessions. In the end, despite Aquino's landmark peace agreement with the Moro rebels in 2012 and 2014, neither Manila nor the communists had the political will to achieve a breakthrough.

²⁴³ A high-ranking military officer said in 2003: "They are our utmost security concern at present ... and we consider them a much bigger threat than the Abu Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front or the Jemaah Islamiyah". See Carlos Conde, "Once nearly extinct, communist rebels find new converts: In Philippines, a threat revives", *The New York Times*, 29 December 2003.

²⁴⁴ The NPA started weakening in Luzon during Arroyo's presidency. In 2005 and 2006, the military started to target activists and farmers involved in peasant groups. Extrajudicial killings skyrocketed.

²⁴⁵ Rodrigo Duterte, mayor of Davao City at that time, said after one incident: "You are acting like an occupation army here. ... If this is what's happening, I cannot blame the people for joining the NPA". "Duterte declares hands-off policy in army's anti-NPA campaign in Paquibato", *Mindanews*, 13 March 2009. During his tenure as mayor, Duterte pursued a balancing act between the military and the communist rebels. He even attended the wake of Leoncio Pitao, alias Commander Parago, from Davao City. Duterte's main goal seems to have been to avoid spillover into the city, letting occasional skirmishes occur in districts near the adjacent provinces.

²⁴⁶ Insurgents declared PAMANA a counterrevolutionary initiative and, in many instances, tried to resist the program. For details, see also Balázs Áron Kovács, *Peace Infrastructures and State-Building at the Margins* (New York, 2018), pp. 189-219.

²⁴⁷ Document on file with Crisis Group. See also Amanda Fernandez, "NPA guerrillas mainly concentrated in north-eastern, southern Mindanao – AFP", *GMA News Online*, 29 March 2014.

²⁴⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, former Mindanao-based cadre, 9 March 2023.

Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kyiv, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. The ideas, opinions and comments expressed by Crisis Group are entirely its own and do not represent or reflect the views of any donor. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Austria (Austrian Development Agency), Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, DG INTPA), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), France (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency), Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs), Japan (Japan International Cooperation Agency and Japan External Trade Organization), Principality of Liechtenstein (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), The Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), New Zealand (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Qatar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Slovenia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), United Kingdom (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) and the World Bank.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations and organisations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Global Challenges Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Pivotal Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Stand Together Trust, Stiftung Mercator, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

April 2024

Appendix D: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2021

Special Reports and Briefings

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2021-2022, Special Briefing N°6, 13 September 2021.

7 Priorities for the G7: Managing the Global Fallout of Russia's War on Ukraine, Special Briefing N°7, 22 June 2022.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2022-2023, Special Briefing N°8, 14 September 2022.

Seven Priorities for Preserving the OSCE in a Time of War, Special Briefing N°9, 29 November 2022.

Seven Priorities for the G7 in 2023, Special Briefing N°10, 15 May 2023.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2023-2024, Crisis Group Special Briefing N°11, 14 September 2023.

Scam Centres and Ceasefires: China-Myanmar Ties Since the Coup, Asia Briefing N°179, 27 March 2024.

North East Asia

Risky Competition: Strengthening U.S.-China Crisis Management, Asia Report N°324, 20 May 2022.

Preventing War in the Taiwan Strait, Asia Report N°333, 27 October 2023 (also available in Simplified and Traditional Chinese).

Thin Ice in the Himalayas: Handling the India-China Border Dispute, Asia Report N°334, 14 November 2023.

South Asia

What Future for Afghan Peace Talks under a Biden Administration?, Asia Briefing N°165, 13 January 2021.

Pakistan: Shoring Up Afghanistan's Peace Process, Asia Briefing N°169, 30 June 2021.

Beyond Emergency Relief: Averting Afghanistan's Humanitarian Catastrophe, Asia Report N°317, 6 December 2021.

Pakistan's Hard Policy Choices in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°320, 4 February 2022.

Women and Peacebuilding in Pakistan's North West, Asia Report N°321, 14 February 2022.

Afghanistan's Security Challenges under the Taliban, Asia Report N°326, 12 August 2022 (also available in Dari and Pashto).

A New Era of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan, Asia Report N°327, 5 September 2022.

Taliban Restrictions on Women's Rights Deepen Afghanistan's Crisis, Asia Report N°329, 23 February 2023 (also available in Dari and Pashto).

Crisis Mounts for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh, Asia Report N°335, 6 December 2023.

Beyond the Election: Overcoming Bangladesh's Political Deadlock, Asia Report N°336, 4 January 2024.

The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan, Asia Report N°337, 30 January 2024 (also available in Dari and Pashto).

Pakistan: Inching toward Contested Elections, Asia Briefing N°178, 6 February 2024.

South East Asia

Responding to the Myanmar Coup, Asia Briefing N°166, 16 February 2021.

The Cost of the Coup: Myanmar Edges Toward State Collapse, Asia Briefing N°167, 1 April 2021.

Southern Philippines: Keeping Normalisation on Track in the Bangsamoro, Asia Report N°313, 15 April 2021.

Myanmar's Military Struggles to Control the Virtual Battlefield, Asia Report N°314, 18 May 2021.

Taking Aim at the Tatmadaw: The New Armed Resistance to Myanmar's Coup, Asia Briefing N°168, 28 June 2021.

Competing Visions of International Order in the South China Sea, Asia Report N°315, 29 November 2021.

The Philippines' Dilemma: How to Manage Tensions in the South China Sea, Asia Report N°316, 2 December 2021.

Vietnam Tacks Between Cooperation and Struggle in the South China Sea, Asia Report N°318, 7 December 2021.

Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts, Asia Report N°319, 12 January 2022.

Southern Philippines: Fostering an Inclusive Bangsamoro, Asia Report N°322, 18 February 2022.

Addressing Islamist Militancy in the Southern Philippines, Asia Report N°323, 18 March 2022.

Resisting the Resistance: Myanmar's Pro-Military Pyusawhti Militias, Asia Briefing N°171, 6 April 2022.

Sustaining the Momentum in Southern Thailand's Peace Dialogue, Asia Briefing N°172, 19 April 2022.

Avoiding a Return to War in Myanmar's Rakhine State, Asia Report N°325, 1 June 2022.

Coming to Terms with Myanmar's Russia Embrace, Asia Briefing N°173, 4 August 2022.

Crowdfunding a War: The Money behind Myanmar's Resistance, Asia Report N°328, 20 December 2022.

Breaking Gender and Age Barriers amid Myanmar's Spring Revolution, Asia Briefing N°174, 16 February 2023.

A Silent Sangha? Buddhist Monks in Post-coup Myanmar, Asia Report N°330, 10 March 2023.

A Road to Nowhere: The Myanmar Regime's Stage-managed Elections, Asia Briefing N°175, 28 March 2023.

Southern Philippines: Making Peace Stick in the Bangsamoro, Asia Report N°331, 1 May 2023.

Southern Thailand's Stop-start Peace Dialogue, Asia Briefing N°176, 25 May 2023 (also available in Malay and Thai).

Transnational Crime and Geopolitical Contestation along the Mekong, Asia Report N°332, 18 August 2023.

Treading a Rocky Path: The Ta'ang Army Expands in Myanmar's Shan State, Asia Briefing N°177, 4 September 2023 (also available in Burmese).

Appendix E: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees

PRESIDENT & CEO

Comfort Ero

Former Crisis Group Vice Interim President and Africa Program Director

CO-CHAIRS

Frank Giustra

President & CEO, Fiore Group; Founder, Radcliffe Foundation

Susana Malcorra

Former Foreign Minister of Argentina

OTHER TRUSTEES

Fola Adeola

Founder and Chairman, FATE Foundation

Abdulaziz Al Sager

Chairman and founder of the Gulf Research Center and president of Sager Group Holding

Hushang Ansary

Chairman, Parman Capital Group LLC; Former Iranian Ambassador to the U.S. and Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

G rard Araud

Former Ambassador of France to the U.S.

Zeinab Badawi

President, SOAS University of London

Carl Bildt

Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Sweden

Sandra Breka

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Open Society Foundations

Maria Livanos Cattau

Former Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce

Ahmed Charai

Chairman and CEO of Global Media Holding and publisher of the Moroccan weekly *L'Observateur*

Nathalie Delapalme

Executive Director and Board Member at the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

Mar a Fernanda Espinosa

Former President of UNGA's 73rd session

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer

Former Senior Mediation Adviser, UN

Sigmar Gabriel

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of Germany

Fatima Gailani

Chair of Afghanistan Future Thought Forum and Former President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society

Julius Gaudio

Managing Director of D. E. Shaw & Co., L.P.

Stephen Heintz

President and CEO, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Rima Khalaf-Hunaidi

Former UN Undersecretary General and Executive Secretary of UNESCWA

Mo Ibrahim

Founder and Chair, Mo Ibrahim Foundation; Founder, Celtel International

Mahamadou Issoufou

Former President of Niger

Kyung-wha Kang

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea

Wadah Khanfar

Co-Founder, Al Sharq Forum; former Director General, Al Jazeera Network

Nasser al-Kidwa

Chairman of the Yasser Arafat Foundation; Former UN Deputy Mediator on Syria

Bert Koenders

Former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

Andrey Kortunov

Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council

Ivan Krastev

Chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies (Sofia); Founding Board Member of European Council on Foreign Relations

Nancy Lindborg

President & CEO of the Packard Foundation

Tzipi Livni

Former Foreign Minister and Vice Prime Minister of Israel

Helge Lund

Chair bp plc (UK) & Novo Nordisk (Denmark)

Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown

Former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

William H. McRaven

Retired U.S. Navy Admiral who served as 9th Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command

Shivshankar Menon

Former Foreign Secretary of India; former National Security Adviser

Naz Modirzadeh

Director of the Harvard Law School Program on International Law and Armed Conflict

Saad Mohseni

Chairman and CEO of MOBY Group

Nadia Murad

President and Chairwoman of Nadia's Initiative

Ayo Obe

Chair of the Board of the Gor e Institute (Senegal); Legal Practitioner (Nigeria)

Meghan O'Sullivan

Former U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser on Iraq and Afghanistan

Kerry Propper

Managing Partner of ATW Partners; Founder and Chairman of Chardan Capital

Ahmed Rashid

Author and Foreign Policy Journalist, Pakistan

Nirupama Rao

Former Foreign Secretary of India and former Ambassador of India to China and the United States

Juan Manuel Santos Calder n

Former President of Colombia; Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2016

Ine Eriksen S reide

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Former Minister of Defence of Norway, and Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee

Alexander Soros

Deputy Chair of the Global Board, Open Society Foundations

George Soros

Founder, Open Society Foundations and Chair, Soros Fund Management

Darian Swig

Founder and President, Article 3 Advisors; Co-Founder and Board Chair, Article3.org

GLOBAL CORPORATE COUNCIL

A distinguished circle of Crisis Group supporters drawn from senior executives and private sector firms.

Global Leaders

Aris Mining

Shearman & Sterling LLP

White & Case LLP

Global Partners

(2) Anonymous

APCO Worldwide Inc.

BP

Chevron

Eni

Equinor

GardaWorld

Sempra Energy

TotalEnergies

CRISIS GROUP EMERITII

Mort Abramowitz – Founder and Trustee Emeritus

George Mitchell – Chairman Emeritus

Gareth Evans – President Emeritus

Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown – Founder and Chairman Emeritus

Thomas R. Pickering – Chairman Emeritus