

Exposing the VFA/Balikatan War Machine in the Philippines (Comments on the Affidavit of Former Navy Lt. SG Nancy Gadian)

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Navy Lt. SG Nancy Gadian's affidavit and testimony regarding the combat role of U.S. military forces in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao is the most telling "insider's " account of what U.S. military forces and U.S. intelligence operatives are actually doing in the Philippines. Her written and oral sworn testimony exemplifies the courage, integrity and loyalty to the Filipino peoples' interests that every genuine soldier should uphold.

First, Lt. Gadian has nothing to gain but everything to lose if she exposes U.S. military activities in the Philippines. At the very least, she may never get a U.S. visa for the details she exposed about the activities of U.S. military forces in the Philippines. In an earlier expose about the misuse of Balikatan funds by her superior officers, she now has the entire Armed Forces of the Philippines running after her. Why would she now risk the might of the U.S. government and its armed forces now going after her, except to tell the truth about how our nation's sovereignty and self-respect is being trampled like a doormat.

Second, I observe how much detail Lt. Gadian has given regarding the role of U.S. military forces particularly those of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) based in Mindanao. These are direct and first hand accounts, that only an insider could give, an expos'e of Balikatan and the VFA war machine to the Filipino people. In her capacity as part of the administrative operations of Balikatan exercises, doing liaison work with U.S. and military forces involved in so-called Balikatan exercises in Mindanao and the AFP's Western and Southern Commands, no doubt, her testimony sheds light to a lot of things that have been hidden from the Filipino people. It only opens this issue to the fact that there are many more activities which are being kept hidden by the U.S. and Philippine governments about what U.S. forces are really doing in Mindanao and the Philippines, under the cover of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and so-called "humanitarian missions" by U.S. military forces.

On the Issue of U.S. Role in Combat Operations and Counter-Insurgency in the Philippines

In an article published by the journal, MILITARY REVIEW (May-June 2004) of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, former Joint Special Operations Task Force - Philippines (JSOTF-P) Commander Col. David Maxwell, U.S. Army, said that the mission of the JSOTF-P in the Philippines "is to conduct unconventional warfare in the Philippines through, by, and with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, to help the Philippine government separate the population and destroy terrorist organizations." The title of Maxwell's article was, "Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: What would Sun Tzu Say?" The latest U.S. Field Manual on Unconventional Warfare (FM 3-05.130) issued to the U.S. Army Sept. 2008, defines "unconventional warfare" as including "guerilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities and assisted recovery." Maxwell's article in fact, implied that the Balikatan exercises under the VFA were just a disguise for counter-terrorist operations. We must also note that the Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines which Col. Maxwell commanded in the Philippines was the Philippine counterpart of the Operation Freedom-Afghanistan which was a combat unit assigned to Afghanistan right after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. By no means were they just for training or logistics support.

If there is such an official claim that U.S. military forces here provide advisory, intelligence, equipment, training, logistics to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, then that may be the reason why U.S. Special Forces are "embedded" in combat units of the AFP during their tactical missions. The AFP largely depends of the intelligence gathering, covert and psywar operations now provided by U.S. forces in conflict zones.

It is clear that the type of U.S. support given to the AFP is not only at the level of strategic planning (such as in Camp Aguinaldo) but at the battlefield level, through operational and tactical units involved in combat. That is why the JSOTF-P are in Basilan, Sulu, Zamboanga, among other provinces where they have been deployed. They are integrated as part of combat units which at any given time actually engage in combat with the Abu Sayyaf or MILF or NPA. This is what the Gadian testimony has so clearly exposed. If the U.S. forces under Balikatan/VFA terms are just conducting training of AFP tactical troops, then they should do so in Nueva Ecija, in Tanay or in AFP training camps far from the conflict war zones.

As for the U.S. involvement in intelligence and counter-intelligence operations in support of the AFP, this this is done in the field, it can be considered as directly combat intelligence (and counter-intelligence). Information Operations (IO), a concept of the U.S. Army Land Information Warfare Activity is indeed classified as combat support, and a combat activity. It includes, intelligence, electronic warfare, operations security, psychological warfare operations. U.S. combat doctrine classifies information operations as integrated with combat planning and execution of combat operations in unconventional warfare or in an insurgency situation. Surveillance and target acquisition, command , control and communications for combat missions are all integrated as part of the whole tactical mission, which is to neutralize or kill the enemy target. U.S. Manuals now refer to all of these as battlefield operating systems (BOS). They are all part of the conduct of a military operation, using U.S. army doctrine, which has been adopted by the AFP as its doctrine.

On the Issue of U.S. Basing in many parts of the Philippines

In its document, Strengthening U.S. Global Defense Posture (Sept. 2004), the U.S. Department of Defense now categorizes its overseas basing structures according to the following:

MAIN OPERATING BASES (MOB) - these are very large installations and facilities located in the territory of their most reliable allies, with vast infrastructures and even family support facilities. They serve as hub of military operations with comprehensive facilities . Subic , Clark and other U.S. military facilities in the Philippines before 1992 were of this category. Today, Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan, and Camp Humphreys in South Korea are examples of MOB.

FORWARD OPERATING SITES (FOS) - these are smaller bases and facilities, but they store pre-positioned equipment and logistics and normally host only a small number of troops on a rotational, as opposed to permanent, basis. They support a range of operations such as the forward deployment forces of the special operations forces. To a certain degree, the U.S. presence in the Philippines has the qualities of FOS.

COOPERATIVE SECURITY LOCATIONS (CSL) - these are facilities owned by host governments that would only be used by the U.S. "for access" in case of actual operations. Though they would be run and maintained by the host nation or even private contractors, they may be used to pre-position logistics support, for joint operations, etc. . When expanded, they are converted to FOS.

FOS and CSLs are referred to as "lily pads" by U.S. military literature as they support MOBS without requiring a lot of resources to maintain large U.S. bases and to disguise themselves against political agitation from the host country. FOS and CSLs are normally integrated in host country military or civilian facilities. Thus, U.S. military presence in the Philippines, based on Lt.SG Gadian's testimony can easily fall under FOS and CSLs.