



Philippine Insurgents Disrupt Army's COVID-19 Response

OE Watch Commentary: Although militants loyal to Abu Sayyaf and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have often commanded the most attention among insurgents in the Philippines, the Communist New People's Army (NPA) is still a highly active rebel group. The excerpted article discusses one of the latest NPA attacks on an infantry battalion that had been protecting employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The employees were delivering stipends to families affected by COVID-19 during the country's lockdown. The NPA opened fire on the soldiers near a village and killed two soldiers after a one-hour long gun battle.

The article quotes the commander of the infantry battalion, Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, who stated that the ambush was particularly unfortunate because it caused violence in a community suffering from COVID-19. The soldiers were described as heroic for their role in assisting to alleviate the pandemic's effects before they lost their lives. Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio vowed to avenge the two soldiers and capture the NPA rebels who conducted the attack. With around 7,000 cases and 500 deaths in the Philippines, attacks that undermine the country's pandemic response will likely be heavily condemned, possibly leading to a loss of further support for the NPA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



NPA Flag.

Source: Jolle via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NPA.png>, CC BY 3.0

“Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, acting commanding officer of the 91st Infantry Battalion, said the attack was ‘unfortunate,’ criticizing the rebels for bringing violence to a community that is struggling with COVID-19.”

Source: “NPA attack on troops securing COVID-19 aid distribution kills 2 soldiers,” *News Info Inquirer*, 22 March 2020. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1262803/npa-attack-on-troops-securing-covid-19-aid-distribution-kills-2-soldiers>

Two soldiers were killed while three others were wounded in an attack on Tuesday (April 21) by gunmen believed to be New People's Army (NPA) rebels during the lockdown in the town of Maria Aurora. The soldiers from the Army's 91st Infantry Battalion were securing the area as employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) were distributing cash to beneficiaries of the government's Social Amelioration Program. The program was part of government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aimed at helping poor households cope with movement restrictions during the lockdown.

According to a report of the Public Information Office of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, NPA rebels opened fire at soldiers en route to the village of Diaat, killing one soldier and wounding another who died later in a hospital. The soldiers returned fire and engaged rebels in an hour-long gun battle. Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, acting commanding officer of the 91st IB, said the attack was “unfortunate,” criticizing the rebels for bringing violence to a community that is struggling with COVID-19. “Sooner or later, we will catch these bandits and for sure they will pay for the crimes they have committed,” he said.