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POLICE RENEW OPERATIONS AGAINST PHILIPPINE REBELS

An increase in Huk terrorism in central Luzon has caused President Marcos to order the Philippine Constabulary back into the field once again.

According to intercepted communications, the constabulary--the paramilitary national police force--renewed its operations on 2 January. Marcos had pulled the constabulary off its previous anti-Huk drive in early November, explaining at that time that intensified civic action would be used to correct the social and economic ills that gave the Huks their base.

Marcos' critics, questioning both the ability of local police to maintain order and the government's seriousness about rural reform, attacked the switch to civic action as an impractical political ploy. Marcos, looking toward the presidential election next November, may have calculated on gaining support from Huk-influenced politicians by easing police pressure on the rebels.

The Huks, however, are being led by less-experienced and less-disciplined squad leaders because of the constabulary's success in killing a dozen veteran Huk leaders in the past year. These new leaders are not as responsive to the Huk field chiefs' authority and lack the finesse of their predecessors in intimidating the local officials and populace.

As a consequence, they have resorted increasingly to terrorism since last autumn.

The Huks apparently were also encouraged by the transfer in September of 700 of the 3,000-man constabulary in central Luzon to the southwest Philippines in connection with tensions over Sabah and by Marcos's pulling the remaining police back to their camps in November.

The historic connections of the Huks with the Communists have dissipated as their present-day emphasis on profitable extortion rackets has risen. The illegal Philippine Communist Party dismisses the Huks as bandits and reportedly has marked their field commander for assassination. The Huks' influence in central Luzon is, nevertheless, more pervasive than their strength--a hard core of 150 armed guerrillas operating in scattered squads--would suggest, and local politicians find accommodation necessary to survival. Tacit support is widespread among the rural population, which sees the Huks dispensing a measure of justice not found in the official courts. In the absence of effective government action against social and economic ills, or an all-out military operation against the insurgents, Huk influence in rural areas will probably continue to grow.

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