

Mindanao (Philippines) - Our Marawi: "Enemies of the State"

Thursday 10 August 2017, by [ALONTO Robert Maulana Marohombsar](#) (Date first published: 7 August 2017).

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY (MindaNews / 07 August) — [Note: Upon his assumption to the caliphate after the demise of the Holy Prophet of Islam (saw), Hazrat Abubakr as-Siddiq (ra) told the Muslim throng in Madina that attended his investiture: "Correct me when I am wrong and support me when I am right."]

This has always been the guiding principle we have followed when it comes to those at the helm of leadership, Islamic or not. Thus, it behooves us to correct the President when he is wrong and support him when he is right.

We absolutely support him in his crusade against the illegal drug trade; we unconditionally support him in his fight against criminality; we firmly stand by him in his struggle against the oppressive and exploitative national oligarchy and foreign interference; we ardently support him in his campaign to federalize the country; and we are one in supporting him in his war against Daesh ISIS anarchist extremism.

Apart from these, we lauded him for his bold pronouncements early in his term that he intends to correct the historical injustices heaped on the Moro people by granting them the right to exercise self-determination within his envisioned federalism. But, though we are not in government and are not part of government, we are obliged as citizens of this country to tell him what is wrong with his policies with regard to the Marawi siege and the treatment of M'ranaw evacuees [bakwits].

We do not belong to those who bash him right or wrong and neither do we belong to those who applaud him right or wrong. I am a M'ranaw, a Moro and a Muslim and will speak as such.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution states that executive power is vested in the President of the Philippines. This is in Section 1 of Article VII, Executive Department, of said Constitution. Under Section 18 of the same Article VII, the President is also the Commander-in-Chief of all the armed forces of the Philippines.

In other words, in the unitary state system that we have today, the President is the head of state as well as leader of government all rolled into one. He is thus the President of all the people of the Philippine State, viz. the national citizenry, and the numero uno honcho of the government, which, going by its republican democratic definition, is a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people." And appendant to this is he is the Commander-in-Chief of all the armed forces of the State not only because civilian authority is supreme over the military establishment but because the President of the Philippines has to protect and defend the State, which is the people, and the government, which is the "government of the people, for the people and by the people" from all external and internal threats.

What we're saying is that it is the priority of the President – first and foremost, that is – to protect and defend the people (national citizenry) from the northernmost part of the country down to its southernmost part and ensures that they continue to enjoy human security in all aspects of life. This

is what makes him the President of the people.

Towards this end, the President has at his command and disposal the Armed Forces of the Philippines, whether land, air or sea based, including the Philippine National Police that is civilian in character but nonetheless armed. And when such external or internal threats are imminent or actually pose clear and present danger to the people, the President can call on the Armed Forces to neutralize these threats, which, in extreme cases, would necessitate the President to declare a state of emergency, suspend the writ of habeas corpus or declare martial law subject to certain limitations by the Constitution. This is for no other purpose but to protect the State, the national citizenry, which is the primordial duty and obligation of the government headed by the President. In turn, the President delegates to the Armed Forces the physical protection of the people during actual emergencies because the latter exists for this very purpose.

All members of the Armed Forces, thus, are salaried and paid by government through the taxes of the people to perform this duty of protecting and defending the people and can be called on anytime by the President when such emergencies arise that threaten the State. For all intents and purposes, therefore, members of the Armed Forces including the National Police are civil servants and their only difference from the civil servants in the civilian bureaucracy of government is that they are armed civil servants because their sole purpose and role, as aforesaid, is to defend and protect the national citizenry - the State - and its territory and national sovereignty.

This dual role of the President, as a civilian President and as Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces, is complementary and it does not mean that when the President invokes his being Commander-in-Chief, it will supersede his being the civilian President. No. His being Commander-in-Chief, in fact, provides him the wherewithal to exercise his constitutional civilian authority as President and protect the people from any danger.

Given this definitional framework, there is much to say about 'disconcerting' developments which we have come to observe arising out of the Marawi siege, which is now beyond the second month (Day 76).

We do not begrudge the President for extolling the members of the Armed Forces - and there are many good men and women in uniform - who are engaged in warfare against the Daesh ISIS extremists who have invaded, occupied and caused the devastation of Marawi City and the dispersal and dislocation of its populace since May 23, 2017. It is the duty of the President to boost the morale of the Armed Forces and the National Police, to praise them for their sacrifices in a war or conflict situation, and reward them for extraordinary deeds of valor even beyond the call of duty.

But what we are very disturbed about is that the President seems to have gone beyond the normal morale-boosting presidential ritual and has placed the military on a sacred pedestal or a sort of mythical Mt. Olympus for 'gods' and 'goddesses' with power over life and death over the citizenry in Marawi City.

For example, when queried as to when will he lift martial law, the President's answer was "It's up to the military." When asked how long martial law will last, he gave the same response: "It's up to the military." Or when will the civilian evacuees return to their respective places, still the same answer, "It's up to the military."

Everything it seems is "up to the military" that he even repeatedly mentioned several times in his speeches that if the military were to ask him to step down from the Presidency, he will. It appears the President has forgotten that it is the people who voted him into office with a margin of six million votes over his closest rival, and not only the military. Now he tells the military to relax and "take

their time” in the liberation of Marawi City from Daesh ISIS as if there are no Marawi *bakwits* (evacuees) languishing in evacuation centers and suffering in diaspora in other parts of the country.

The people of Marawi are an integral part of the national citizenry but while the President pays extraordinary homage to the military, he seems to have neglected consoling and empathizing with the citizenry of Marawi who are now suffering in diaspora in refugee centers and private living quarters and facing an uncertain future what with the destruction of their homes, they're unable to return to their city, and with martial law taking on the visage of hostility and suspicion towards the very people whom the Armed Forces have sworn to protect and defend as if they are not the victims of the extremist terrorists but are themselves all wrapped up in the black flag of ISIS.

This blatant disparity in how the President treats the military and the Marawi people is evident in the President's visits to Marawi City twice wherein he met with officers and soldiers of the Armed Forces, played Santa Claus to them, visited wounded servicemen in hospitals, but never found time to even hold dialogues with the multi-sectoral representatives of the *bakwits* who constitute practically the whole population of Marawi City and whose number now runs to nearly four hundred thousand when adding to it those that evacuated from nearby municipalities.

In World War II, at the height of the intensive bombing of London by Nazi Germany, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill walked through the rubble of London many times in demonstration of solidarity, sympathy and empathy with the civilian populace of England who had to suffer the tough ordeal of being at the receiving end of the Nazi aerial bombings. We do not expect the President to walk through the rubble of Marawi City. But how we wish he could talk to the people, really talk and not just joke with them or joke about them.

Trivial as it may seem, is it not a cause of concern that while members of the Armed Forces in Marawi City are recipients of Jollibee hamburgers from generous sponsors in Manila, the *bakwits* in evacuation centers and those who are home-based cannot even eat the unpalatable rice doled out to them by government? Is it not a cause of concern that while families of slain soldiers are to be given P1.2 million each, and indeed they deserve this help, *bakwits* in the evacuation centers are losing their minds literally because they do not know where and how to eke out a living, how to survive during and after the conflict as they have lost everything, all their possessions?

The soldiers and police are provided housing by government but the *bakwit* victims whose homes were razed to the ground by ISIS thugs and government air strikes are not sure if they can rebuild their homes. The soldiers and police are assured by government of scholarships for their children; the pauperized *bakwits* will not even be able to send their children to school. Many have resorted to begging and even (engage in) illegal and immoral activities out of desperation.

It is the people of Marawi City and Lanao del Sur who suffer the indignities heaped on them by overbearing soldiers and police in checkpoints, and not the soldiers and police who man these checkpoints.

It is the *bakwits* who have to undergo the humiliation of being required to secure and wear IDs in places where they have taken refuge, as if they were Jews in Hitler's time who had to wear the 'Star of the David' to identify themselves as Jews so it would be easy to abuse them on the streets or send them forthwith to the gas chambers; or as deportable aliens who have to carry their passports anywhere they go to in the country.

The soldiers and police are paid to fight and die if necessary in any conflict. Fighting and dying go with the job of soldiering and policing. The *bakwits* are not paid to become victims of the conflict, let alone die a miserable death because of breakdown of health, trauma, lack of medicines as well as

imminent starvation while in diaspora. An unofficial report, drawn from the testimonies of Marawi rescue workers, states that more than one thousand civilians have died in the continuing battle for Marawi. Their corpses remain unrecovered and are scattered all over the ruined buildings, underground rooms of homes, city backstreets and canals.

The President, in fairness, did visit an evacuation center in Iligan City once. But a fleeting visit is not enough; what is of vital significance is for the President to have honest-to-goodness and all-inclusive dialogues with the people of Marawi and Lanao del Sur through their bonafide representatives and not just through the politicians who just listen to the monologue of the President, laugh when he jokes, and clap their hands in a display of pathetic obsequiousness.

If the President could break traditional and security protocols by meeting with boisterous militant Leftist demonstrators in the street outside Congress after his SONA, why can't he do the same to the people of Marawi City and Lanao del Sur who defied the 'status quoist' politicians of the previous regime and voted for him overwhelmingly in the presidential election?

Didn't the President say at the beginning of his term that Malacañang is open to the people and this is why he calls it the "Palace of the People"?

The *bakwits* have no need of the wrist watches and cell phones that the President now graciously gives out to soldiers; what they need is the presence of the President and the assurance through presidential affirmative action that their rights under martial law are not abused, which means an end to all the looting, burning and bombings in Marawi City which can no longer be blamed on the ISIS thugs because such things do happen in safe zones which have been cleared of terrorist presence by the military itself.

In a nutshell, the President has the obligation as the President of the national State to listen to the people. And the people have the right to assert that they be listened to by the President.

But then again, relative to the Marawi siege and its victims, the President has been acting less as President of the people but more pronouncedly as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In short, the balance of being President of the people and being Commander-in-Chief is now tilted towards favoring the latter.

The people of Marawi City and Lanao del Sur are part of the national citizenry. They are not aliens that can be deported anytime or prevented from returning home. Or confined to a 'tent city' 'til kingdom come. Or patently ignored when they cry foul against those who are looting and burning their homes.

Martial law should not make an enemy out of them, but on the contrary martial law should protect and defend them from Daesh ISIS because that is supposed to be why the President summoned and deployed the Armed Forces and the National Police: To protect and defend the people of Marawi and Lanao del Sur who form part of the national citizenry.

No question about it, the Daesh ISIS madness must be exterminated. Not only is it against the sitting government; not only is it against what a civilized society stands for; not only does it assail all the values and ethos that our Islamic faith ingrained in us, but it is against the legitimate aspiration of the Bangsamoro people, which is the right to exercise self-determination.

But given the present track that government has taken vis-à-vis the shabby treatment of the *bakwits* of Marawi and Lanao del Sur, those in authority are losing instead of winning the hearts and minds of the people. The people have been terrorized by Daesh ISIS; now it appears that they are being terrorized by those who are supposed to liberate them from ISIS. Among the M'ranaw *bakwits*, this

is colloquially a “double jeopardy.”

This begs the question: Who can our people turn to?

Recently, a meeting was held in Iligan City between the M’ranaw people and the only three M’ranaw members of the President’s cabinet. Quite late into the game but welcome nonetheless. The lingering question, however, is – will the President listen to them? The President visited Marawi City twice and not one of the M’ranaw cabinet members was even invited to be part of these visits, which is quite baffling to the mind because they are M’ranaws from Marawi City and Lanao del Sur. As Cabinet members, they are theoretically the President’s alter egos and are understandably, therefore, vocal in their support of martial law and its extension.

The President’s visits to Marawi City were kept confidential by his security people for security reasons, but by excluding the M’ranaw Cabinet members from these visits, was this because the President wanted only to visit the military camps or are these M’ranaw Cabinet members “security threats” too, because they are M’ranaws? We do not want to speculate but there is more to what meets the eye as we see the President undergoing a sort of metamorphosis when the Marawi siege broke out.

The M’ranaw people are blamed for ignoring and even welcoming the ISIS thugs who have immersed in their community. The President, in one of his public speeches, said in effect that in the fight between ISIS and government forces, the Moros will take the side of ISIS.

The President, of course, was ‘joking’ as when he joked about granting soldiers the impunity to rape women while in the act of discharging their duty to defend the State. But the messaging that this ‘joke’ transmits is a wrong reading of the situation, a sweeping generalization, and needless to say, unbecoming of a President of the people.

Perhaps the President is unaware that while there are a number of people who support the extremists out of frustration, desperation, greed and even fear given the context of the Bangsamoro social and political conditions, the majority of Moros do not and will not support Daesh ISIS knowing pretty well that the latter champions a fake *takfiri* (sectarian) ‘Islam’ and is averse to, and has disavowed, Moro identity and right to self-determination.

Even granting this is true, which is arguably not, more blame for the Marawi tragedy should fall on those in authority, those that are tasked to protect and defend the people, who are responsible for the “failure of intelligence” and/or who “failed to appreciate intelligence.”

In all levels of leadership, national, regional and local, secular and religious, Moro Fronts included, there was failure, a blackout. This failure of leadership has engendered human insecurity in the Ranao provinces and Marawi City. And in the ensuing confusion, the victim, as it were, has become the culprit.

Which, all told, now means the people of Marawi and Lanao del Sur appear to be not facing a civilian President, their President, the President of the people, the President with Moro blood running in his veins, but a Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces wearing the uniform of a soldier whose priority concern is his soldiers and policemen.

And this is precisely what lies at the heart of our present consternation: The people of Marawi City and Lanao del Sur who have lost their homes and face an uncertain future are not treated as part of the national citizenry but ironically, unjustly, and for all intents and purposes as “enemies of the State.”

P.S.

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<http://www.mindanews.com/mindaviews/2017/08/our-marawi-enemies-of-the-state/>

* MindaViews is the opinion section of MindaNews. Robert Maulana Marohombsar Alonto was a member of the peace panel of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that negotiated the Framework Agreement of the Bangsamoro signed in 2012 and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro signed in 2014. He was also a member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission that drafted the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law that the Aquino administration did not pass. This piece was posted on his Facebook wall on Monday, August 7. The author gave MindaNews permission to reprint this