



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

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### Malaysia's New Most Wanted Terrorist: Mundi Sawadjaan

*Jacob Zenn*

On January 27, Malaysia's Sabah East Coast Security Command (Esscom) updated its list of the country's five most wanted terrorists. Three of them, including Ahadin Hussein, Ellam Sajirin, and Ismurah Jirah, have been responsible for kidnappings off the waters between Sabah in Malaysian Borneo and the Philippines ([nst.com](http://nst.com), January 27). A fourth by the name of Madjid Said is based in Sulu in Mindanao, the Philippines, where he is a commander of the Islamic State (IS)'s Southeast Asia province. It is known locally by its Arabic name, Daulah Islamiah. Madjid Said was also the former deputy of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who was the leader of the Abu Sayyaf faction aligned with IS. Sawadjaan, however, was killed in April 2021 by Filipino soldiers ([benarnews.org](http://benarnews.org), April 23, 2021).

Until January, it was believed that Sawadjaan's two nephews, including Mundi Sawadjaan, were killed in the same operation that killed Hatib Hajan. Mundi's

appearance on Esscom's most wanted terrorist list, however, is now leading Malaysian security officials to acknowledge that Mundi is still alive ([freemalaysiatoday.com](http://freemalaysiatoday.com), January 30). Mundi had been taken off Esscom's terrorism most wanted list, but he was placed back on the list in July 2021. Among other lethal attacks, Mundi masterminded the January 2019 double bombings in Jolo at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral, which killed 22 persons ([philstar.com](http://philstar.com), January 28, 2019).

As a result of Mundi's new status, Esscom has established a special branch to monitor his movements and prevent him from entering Sabah from the Philippines, where he is now believed to be based. In addition, Esscom is coordinating with the Joint Task Force of Western Mindanao Command (J2 Westmincom) and Philippine National Police to arrest him or kill him in a special operation. It was the Philippine security forces who had discovered Mundi was still alive after recovering intelligence about him in a July 2021 battle in Mindanao ([nst.com](http://nst.com), January 31).

Mundi is not necessarily expected to carry out another bombing in Sabah, however. Rather, his main threat is facilitating the movement of Indonesians into Sabah either through maritime routes or across the shared border between Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. Esscom has not specified exactly where the intelligence on Mundi's current movements is originating from ([Twitter/@ZamYusa](#), February 1).

Mundi likewise has an international recruitment profile. In April 2021, for example, an Egyptian was killed alongside an Abu Sayyaf bomb-maker and third militant in Jolo. They were under Mundi's command, with the Egyptian having volunteered to become a suicide bomber. At that time, the Philippines security forces expected they would soon capture Mundi, which nearly occurred three months later, but, as recent reports from Sabah are revealing, Mundi evaded capture ([rappler.com](#), April 18, 2021).

Notwithstanding Mundi being at large, terrorism in Southeast Asia has decreased in the past two years ([benarnews.org](#), January 6). This is attributed, in part, to COVID-19 restrictions, which have limited the movements of Southeast Asians generally, including jihadists. In addition, the increasing capacity of regional counter-terrorism forces, especially in Indonesia, has led to the degradation of some of the region's most longstanding terrorist groups, such as Jemaah Islamiya.

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## **Muhammad Kawtharani: Hezbollah's Key Operative in Iraq**

*Rami Jameel*

On April 10, 2020, the U.S. treasury announced a \$10 million award for information on Muhammad Kawtharani, a

Lebanese Hezbollah commander ([state.gov](#), April 10, 2020). Kawtharani is one of the founding members of Hezbollah and has been extensively involved in Iraqi affairs since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. His role in Iraq became even more significant after the killing of Qassim Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF), which took place outside the Baghdad International Airport in a U.S. air raid on January 3, 2020.

Prominent Iraqi Shia militia commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was also killed with Soleimani in the operation that dealt a large blow to Iraqi militias and the Iranian-led axis in the Middle East ([aljazeera.net](#), April 21, 2020). Soleimani was succeeded by General Esmail Qa'ani, who has demonstrated less effectiveness in exerting influence in Iraq compared to Soleimani. This has made Qa'ani more dependent on Kawtharani, who is now one of the few senior members of the Iranian-backed movements in the Middle East capable of playing a key role in Iraqi politics ([kitabab.com](#), January 17).

### **Kawtharani from Najaf to Lebanon**

There have been several reports suggesting that Kawtharani was born in the Shia holy city of Najaf, Iraq. Although different dates are suggested for the year of his birth, it is widely accepted that he spent his formative years as a young man in Iraq studying Shiite theology in Najaf seminaries. He also met his future wife, an Iraqi Shia, in Najaf ([thenewkhalij.news](#), April 11, 2020).

When Saddam Hussein promoted himself from vice president to president of Iraq in 1979, a crackdown on Shia Islamists ensued. Kawtharani himself was arrested and put in prison for four years. Upon his release, he traveled to Lebanon and joined Hassan Nasrallah as well as other junior Shia clerics and operatives to form Hezbollah ([janoubia.com](#), December 4, 2019).

After the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Kawtharani began to focus on Iraq again, a country he knew very well. He spoke the Iraqi dialect of Arabic fluently and had maintained a network of contacts there. He worked with Emad Maghniyah, another prominent, albeit shadowy, Hezbollah operative, who became involved in careful and calculated process of launching a Shia insurgency in Iraq.

### **Kawtharani in the Iraqi Insurgency**

As the main Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militia, Badr Corps became involved in politics by declaring that it would become a civilian organization while at the same time infiltrating the newly established Iraqi Ministry of Interior. Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army dominated the Shia insurgency but always sought some independence from Iran. Kawtharani, Maghniyah, and al-Muhandis themselves, meanwhile, always aspired to build a group in Iraq like Hezbollah, with its efficiency and commitment to Iranian leadership but also its' genuine grassroots support. They never managed to achieve that goal completely, but since 2006 the term "Special Groups" has emerged to refer to Shia insurgent groups who split from the Mahdi Army and followed Iran's direction more closely ([lebanon24.com](http://lebanon24.com), April 15, 2020).

The first two prominent Special Groups in Iraq were Asa'b Ahl al-Haq (The Groups of the Righteous, AAH) and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH). Their operations against the U.S. and British forces appeared to be more sophisticated than the Mahdi Army's operations. Kawtharani was an influential figure in all the efforts that led to the formation of the AAH and KH, including the January 20, 2007 attack on a U.S. unit in Karbala, which attempted to kidnap rather than just kill U.S. soldiers--and almost managed to do so ([ajel.sa](http://ajel.sa), December 30, 2019).

After this, the U.S. started to dedicate more resources towards fighting the Shia insurgency in Iraq. Several months after the Karbala attack, Qias al-Khazali was

captured in a U.S. operation in Basra. Alongside him was one of Kawtharani's fellow operatives, a Lebanese Hezbollah member known as Ali Mousa Daqdoq ([aawsat.com](http://aawsat.com), July 4, 2007). Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq at the end of 2011, Kawtharani secured the release of Daqdoq through his ties with the then Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Malik, who had reportedly granted Kawtharani Iraqi citizenship. Lebanese clerics became the liaison officers between al-Maliki and Hassan Nasrallah ([iraqhouseinstitute.com](http://iraqhouseinstitute.com), December 4, 2019).

### **Kawtharani, Militias, and Islamic State**

After the rise of the Islamic State (IS) and its major advances in Iraq, the role of Soleimani and al-Muhandis became more visible. They appeared in videos as well as built up and led Shia militias in the field during the war against IS in Iraq. Later they managed the same feats against IS and other Sunni insurgent groups in neighboring Syria. Kawtharani, however, kept a low profile during these events and avoided the media. All the while, his role in Iraqi politics and its internal affairs became more influential.

After the killing of Soleimani, a swift intervention was required as Shia militias began a whole new phase in their confrontation against U.S. forces, which were supporting Iraqi security forces in Operation Inherent Resolve. The Shia majority in the parliament was united in passing a resolution to expel U.S. forces despite Kurdish and Sunni opposition ([aljazeera.net](http://aljazeera.net), January 5, 2020). However, the killing of Soleimani occurred during another internal crisis that had been engulfing Iraq. Street protests in Baghdad and other predominantly Shia cities in central and southern Iraq became violent as authorities and Shia militias used force to quell the protests. Kawtharani at this time was accused of playing a major role in the efforts to repress the protests ([bchoufk.com](http://bchoufk.com), October 25, 2019).

One of the results of the protests was the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi. ([alarabiya.com](http://alarabiya.com), November 30, 2019). The process of selecting a prime minister in Iraq is usually slow and complicated as the endorsement of several parties and even foreign countries are required. Kawtharani played his usual role in mediating between various parties, but his influence was even more crucial this time. When a pro U.S. candidate, Adna al-Zurfi, was designated to form a government, Kawtharani used his personal influence on al-Zurfi to convince him to abandon his candidacy ([avatoday.net](http://avatoday.net), April 16, 2020).

## Conclusion

The Iranian-led axis in the Middle East has overcome several challenges in the last few years, and the role of Hezbollah in achieving that outcome has been vital. Kawtharani in particular has been in a very central position in the regional activities of Hezbollah. With the killings of key figures, however, the small circle of armed and special operation wing founding members of Hezbollah has become much smaller. Kawtharani is one of the few members of that contingent who are still standing and operating. This means that he will become only more influential, but with mounting pressure from other countries and especially the U.S., he will have to operate with caution.

Kawtharani's Iraqi portfolio will be very important for the Iranian-led axis in the future. Unlike Lebanon, where Kawtharani's party almost completely dominated Shia and Lebanese politics, Iraq is more complicated. Shia parties in Iraq have become increasingly more divided, which jeopardizes the major geographical gains of the Iranian axis. Such a situation will make Kawtharani's role in mediating Iraqi Shia politics and various militias relations probably more important than any time since 2003.

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## **The Mysterious Assassination of Pakistani Taliban Spokesman Mufti Khalid Balti (Alias Muhammed Khurasani)**

*Abdul Basit*

On January 9, 2022, Mufti Khalid Balti, a senior member of the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or Pakistani Taliban, was killed in an unclaimed attack in a border district in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province ([Dawn](http://Dawn), January 10). Balti was the former TTP spokesperson who played significant roles for the TTP's media, military and political fronts ([Umar Media](http://Umar Media), January 13). Balti has become the first senior TTP figure in Afghanistan to be assassinated since the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021.

Pakistani state television first reported Balti's assassination on January 10, claiming that he was the TTP spokesperson known as "Muhammad Khurasani" ([PTV News](http://PTV News), January 10). That same day, the TTP issued a statement denying the death of "Khurasani" and stated the group was investigating the case ([Umar Media](http://Umar Media), January 10). Days later, on January 13, the TTP confirmed Balti's killing in a separate statement and provided details about his background ([Umar Media](http://Umar Media), January 13). However, the TTP did not offer any specific information about the assassination itself. According to media reports, Balti was missing for two days before his beheaded body was found with a bullet in the head on January 9 in Mohmand Dara ([Mashriq TV](http://Mashriq TV), 13 January). His funeral was held in Kunar province, which is adjacent to Nangarhar ([Dawn](http://Dawn), January 13).

## Initiation into TTP

Mufti Muhammad Khalid Balti's name at birth was Muhammad Ali Balti, and he hailed from northern Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region ([Mashrig TV](#), January 13). He belonged to the Noorbakhshi sub-sect of Shia Islam, but later converted to the Sunni sect. He received religious education from the Deobandi seminary in Karachi city, where he later became a religious scholar ([The News](#), November 16, 2014). [1] He was also affiliated with the Jamia Rasheed seminary in Karachi, which has been a major supporter of the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan ever since the Taliban took control of Kabul in the mid-1990s.

Balti became close to Deobandi jihadists and sectarian militant groups in Karachi. He joined the jihadist war against the Pakistani state after a Pakistani military operation against the pro-jihadist Deobandi mosque and seminary known as the Red Mosque in 2007 ([BBC Urdu](#), January 11). After this, he moved to Waziristan in the Pakistani tribal region bordering Afghanistan, which served as the jihadist regional capital. The anti-state Pakistani tribal militants hosted local and foreign jihadists along with al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. Balti, therefore, also shifted there in early 2008 and joined the TTP, which was only a few months old at the time, as it was established in December 2007 ([BBC Urdu](#), January 11).

Balti was involved in the TTP's militant, political and media fronts, but his most significant contributions were to developing TTP propaganda ([Umar Media](#), January 13). His educational instructor in Karachi, Jamia Rasheed, was a pioneer of jihadist media and propaganda operations in Pakistan ([The News](#), June 30, 2019). Jamia Rasheed, for example, published the largest Urdu jihadist weekly, *Zarb-i-mu'min*, which was the mouthpiece of the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Deobandi jihadist groups in Kashmir ([The News](#), June 30, 2019).

In addition, Jamia Rasheed held jihadist media training courses for religious students, where Balti was a trainee and then trainer [2]. Thus, Balti helped the TTP develop its media and propaganda operations through his past experiences and joined the TTP's media commission at its inception. He was appointed the TTP spokesman and put in charge of its media commission in 2014 when the former TTP spokesperson, Shahidullah Shahid (alias Shaikh Maqbool), defected to Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) ([The News](#), November 16, 2014).

## Imprisonment at Bagram

It was when Balti took charge as TTP spokesperson that he adopted the alias "Muhammad Khurasani." He then further established a committee for the spokesperson position and headed the committee [3]. A senior Pakistani journalist reported that Balti would regularly contact Pakistani media to relay TTP statements and other information relevant for the media ([BBC Urdu](#), January 11). This was an effective TTP strategy because when Balti was arrested by the U.S. and Afghan forces in Nangarhar in early 2015, "Muhammad Khurasani" continued as the group spokesman and has done so ever since ([Geo Tv](#), January 13). This demonstrates that someone else within the TTP likely replaced Balti and used the same alias.

Balti's arrest came after he claimed responsibility for the TTP's brutal attack against the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar on December 16, 2014 ([BBC Urdu](#), January 11). This was the most violent terrorist attack in Pakistan's history because more than 147 people were killed, including 132 school children ([The News](#), December 16, 2021). It consequently resulted in the TTP receiving massive condemnation across the world in Pakistan and beyond Pakistan. Even TTP-allied jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, strongly condemned it ([The Express Tribune](#), December 21, 2014).

Following the arrest, Balti was transferred to Kabul's Bagram prison, the largest U.S. military base in Afghanistan ([BBC Urdu](#), 11 January). He was released from Bagram after the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021. According to the al-Qaeda Urdu flagship magazine, Nawa-i-Ghazwai Hind, Balti repented in prison for his part in the APS attack and admitted to the jailed inmates that it was an oppressive act [4]. The magazine added that Balti turned the prison into a religious seminary and taught many inmates in Islamic theology and religious education.

### **Assassination in Afghanistan**

Balti is not the first TTP commander to be killed in a mysterious unclaimed attack in Afghanistan. Similar attacks started when TTP factions shifted to Afghanistan after Pakistani military operations destroyed the militant strongholds on the Pakistan side of the border in late 2014. Following their dislodging in Pakistan, they established a string of remote bases across the eastern Afghanistan border provinces of Khost in the southeast to Kunar and Nuristan in the northeast. [5] Since then, several senior TTP commanders have been killed in unclaimed attacks.

Qari Shakeel Ahmad Haqqani was the first of the attacks, and he was killed on March 11, 2015 in the Goshta district of Nangarhar, close to the same area where Balti was killed ([The News](#), March 13, 2015). Haqqani was a powerful TTP military commander and senior leader of the TTP Jumat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) faction. Since his death, several TTP commanders have met the same fate. Some of these major blows included the killing of TTP personnel who played major roles in the anti-state jihadist war in Pakistan, such as Shaikh Khalid Haqqani, Shehryar Mehsud, Haji Rasheed, and Muslim Yar ([Tolo News](#), February 7, 2020; [Dawn](#), February 14, 2020).

The Balti assassination has proven to be a worrisome incident for the TTP because his death demonstrates that these mysterious murders have not ended with the Taliban's

return to power. Moreover, his assassination came after the Pakistani government and military made threats against the TTP when attacks against the security forces increased after a ceasefire with the government on December 9, 2021 ([Umar Media](#), December 9, 2021; [The Express Tribune](#), January 10). The Pakistani government offered the TTP negotiations for a peace deal after the Taliban takeover of Kabul, which resulted in both sides' agreeing to a ceasefire on November 9, 2021 ([Dawn](#), September 15, 2021; [Dawn](#), November 9, 2021; [Umar Media](#), November 9, 2021). The TTP ultimately ended the ceasefire unilaterally on December 9, alleging government violations of its conditions ([Umar Media](#), December 9, 2021).

Pakistani threats to the TTP turned into action when security forces shelled TTP hideouts in the remote areas of Kunar bordering Pakistan on December 16, 2021. In these attacks a TTP co-founder by the name of Mulawi Faqir Muhammad narrowly escaped ([The Friday Time](#), December 18, 2021). Likewise, the vehicle of senior TTP military commander, Mufti Burjan, was targeted in an unclaimed improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Kunar on January 19 ([Twitter/Abd. Sayed](#), January 20). Burjan was critically injured, and his driver was killed.

The TTP have accused Pakistani intelligence agencies of Balti's assassination. Nawa-i-Ghazwai Hind, for example, claimed that Balti was assassinated by a hired agent of Pakistan's Inter-Services intelligence (ISI) [6]. The fact that his killing was reported as significant news on Pakistani state-run media also confirms this theory.

### **Conclusion:**

The TTP reaction over Balti's assassination shows that it is a very unexpected blow to the group, which is now centered in Taliban controlled Afghanistan. A message was sent to the TTP that the Pakistani security agencies can and will target its senior

figures like Balti, who otherwise operated stealthily. In sum, the TTP does not have a safe haven inside Afghanistan, as it may have expected. Pakistani intelligence likely has agents within TTP circles that can strike the group with similar attacks in the future. The TTP has issued new security guidelines to its commanders in Afghanistan to strictly follow security protocols to avoid any further losses [7].

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## References:

[1] Author interview with Karachi-based Pakistani journalist Faizullah Khan, an expert on militancy in Pakistan, remotely conducted, January 15, 2022.

[2] Author interview with a former student of Mufti Khalid Balti at Jamia Rasheed, remotely conducted, January 10, 2022.

[3] Author interview with a former student of Mufti Khalid Balti at Jamia Rasheed, remotely conducted, January 10, 2022.

[4] Moeen-u-Deen Shami, "Martyrdom of Mufti Khalid Balti," *Nawai Ghazwai Hind*, 15(01), January 2021, p.90.

[5] For details on the TTP shifting to Afghanistan in late 2014, see Abdul Sayed and Tore Hamming, "The Revival of the Pakistani Taliban," *CTC Sentinel* 14:4 (2021): pp. 28-38.

[6] Shami, "Martyrdom of Mufti Khalid Balti."

[7] A TTP letter circulated via the group's social media accounts shortly after the attacks on Balti and Swati, which advised cadres to adhere to strict security measures to counter infiltration.

## A Post-Mortem Analysis of the Filipino Communist Guerrilla -- Jorge "Ka Oris"

*Lucas Webber*

In late October 2021, a high-ranking Filipino communist rebel commander and spokesman, Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos, was killed by soldiers in Bukidnon, Mindanao. He was on his way to receive medical treatment at the moment of attack. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) referred to Ka Oris as the "topmost wanted NPA [New People's Army] commander in the country" and accused him of committing "murder, multiple murders with double frustrated murder, and robbery with double homicide and damage to properties" ([Twitter/@TeamAFP](https://twitter.com/TeamAFP), October 30, 2021). A spokesperson for the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), stated that Oris "played a lead role in the recruitment and radicalization of the helpless, the most gullible among us, mutating them into violent extremists of the NPA" ([Manila News](https://manila.news), November 1, 2021).

Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos's place in the Filipino and global Communist cause was as a highly charismatic leader. He was a globally renowned revolutionary revered for his personality, writings, speeches, songs, as well as his seniority and longevity in the movement. His wide-reaching influence was highlighted after the confirmation of his death, which saw messages of respect pour in from communist supporters and organizations all over the world. These including the outlawed Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist-Leninist (TKP/ML) party and its paramilitary wing, Türkiye İşçi-Köylü Kurtuluş Ordusu (TIKKO), and from underground Turkish Communists currently fighting in Rojava, Syria, including the Marksist-Leninist Komünist Parti (MLKP Turkey/Kurdistan) ([Twitter/@ATKPML2](https://twitter.com/ATKPML2), November 6, 2021; [Twitter/@MLKP\\_IB](https://twitter.com/MLKP_IB), November 4, 2021). The CPP gave him the "highest

revolutionary salute” and declared November 7 the “International Day of Remembrance for Ka Oris”. ([Twitter/@pasabilisSMR](#), November 14, 2021).

Speaking on Ka Oris’ enduring legacy, the CPP asserted that the state has “succeeded only in immortalizing” him and added that “he now lives forever in the hearts and minds of the Filipino people as one of their heroes and icons” ([Twitter/@cpp\\_marco](#), November 2, 2021). The CPP Central Committee also noted that he had “inspired, trained and developed thousands of his successors.” It added that his “martyrdom further inspires the current generation and further generations to continue the people’s democratic revolution through protracted war” ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021).

Months before his death, Ka Oris recalled the year 1968 and his enrollment in Central Mindanao University in Musuan, Bukidnon. In his words, at the time the region “was then budding with political activism within the ranks of the students and among the ranks of peasants, workers, the religious and other middle class sectors” ([PRWC](#), January 26, 2021). The CPP Central Committee itself detailed how Ka Oris himself was one such “young student activist in the early 1970s ... driven by the cause of democracy and social action” and therefore “helped organize his fellow students” ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). Oris also wrote about how he came from a conservative Christian background and decided to join the reformist Khi Rho, the youth arm of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF). He decided not to join the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) and Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK) underground socialist youth organizations.

### **Coming of Age**

The student activists’ “revolutionary ferment” reached a critical point on September 22, 1972, when martial law was declared by “the dictator [Ferdinand]

Marcos.” According to Ka Oris, who was an agricultural engineering student at the time, this effectively put an end to the “reform or revolution” debate ([PRWC](#), January 26, 2021). That night, according to Oris, “more than a hundred active members of KM, SDK and Khi-Rho met at the oval ground of our university campus, and in the cover of darkness we pledged to continue the fight against the fascist dictatorship and against feudalism and imperialism by joining the New People’s Army (NPA) to wage armed revolution” ([PRWC](#), January 26, 2021). In a 2011 interview, he again recounted the decision to go into the hills to join the armed resistance with around one hundred fellow students following the enactment of martial law ([MindaNews](#), January 6, 2011).

Oris explained that the day after martial law was declared, hundreds of students were detained by the military, while “the rest of us who made it to the countryside found ourselves groping for guidance on how to launch armed struggle because there was no NPA unit yet then to absorb us” ([PRWC](#), January 26, 2021). He then headed to the forested area of Davao and the Upper Pulangi River and engaged in “urban underground organizing” ([PRWC](#), January 26, 2021). His wife, Ka Maria Malaya, a spokesperson of the National Democratic Front-North Eastern Mindanao, also detailed how Oris was captured in 1974 and held until 1976, before returning to guerrilla territory and helping grow the NPA in Mindanao again ([PRWC](#), November 16, 2021).

Oris had appeared in the 1988 documentary “A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution,” which showed how Jorge Madlos changed his name in 1977 to ‘Comrade Oris’ and went underground, where he would remain for the rest of his life ([Canada Wild Productions](#), January 1, 1988). Oris joined the NPA while underground and fought in one of the first Communist guerrilla groups that emerged in Mindanao. He is said to have played a significant role in the NPA’s development in the 1970s and 1980s,



which saw considerable growth in the NPA's ranks and insurgent capabilities ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021).

### **Rising in the Ranks**

The CPP described how Ka Oris was selected as a representative of the National Democratic Front (NDF) in peace talks with the Corazon Aquino government starting in 1986; he was captured by state forces in 1987 when negotiations fell through. After this, he was imprisoned for five years until his release in 1992 ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). During this stint in jail, Oris allegedly suffered from a bladder infection and was refused medical attention ([Red Spark](#), November 7, 2021). This resulted in permanent health issues, which he dealt with for the rest of his life. It is likely the reason why he was travelling to see a doctor when he was killed in October 2021. CPP founder Jose Maria Sison spoke about Oris's toughness and determination after his death, pointing out how "despite [Oris'] health condition, he trekked long distances from one guerrilla front to another, to observe first-hand the work of Party committees and NPA units" ([Red Spark](#), November 7, 2021).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the NPA faced a series of setbacks and losses. Ka Oris, after being freed from prison, "served as one of the strongest pillars of the Second Great Rectification Movement which the Central Committee declared in 1992 to reaffirm the Party's basic Marxist-Leninist-Maoist principles" as well as "its strategic line of people's democratic revolution through protracted people's war" ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). In the final two decades of his life, Oris played a leading role as an advocate for the Communist revolutionary cause and acted as a commander of NPA insurgents in northeast Mindanao. In 2015, he was appointed as a top commander of the National Operational Command of the NPA ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). The following year, he played an influential role in bringing together members of all the regional party committees from across the

Philippines for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the CPP. At this event, the CPP explained that Oris was elected as a member of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau, and the Executive Committee. He was then tasked as a "leading cadre" of the Military Commission, the Mindanao Commission, and as a consultant in the NDFP peace negotiations ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021).

Oris also became a spokesman for the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in Mindanao, and during the final years of his life he served as the spokesman of the NPA. He was strongly influenced by Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism, and he had a penchant for reading the works of Communist guerrilla strategy by Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and others. The CPP notes how he "meticulously studied the history and successful experiences of waging people's war in semicolonial and semifeudal countries" and "devoted time and effort to training the young cadres and Red fighters in the art and science of guerrilla warfare" and "wrote manuals and training courses for officers and men of the NPA" ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). After his death, the CPP celebrated Oris as "a master military strategist" and "a seasoned tactician who led and participated in numerous tactical offensives" ([Twitter/@prwc\\_info](#), November 7, 2021). His wife also ruminated on his militant leadership tendencies, stating that "he showed and inspired Red fighters to be creative and daring in military actions, to persist to strike a blow against the enemy without being too adventurous to avoid casualties and defeat" ([PRWC](#), November 16, 2021).

Besides combat and ideology, Oris also championed environmental causes and his regional NPA Mindanao forces became known as "the Green Guerrillas," which was the title of a 1995 documentary about the group's struggle against commercial logging ([Red Spark](#), November 7, 2021; [Rod Prosser](#), 1995). He issued annual statements on Earth Day and condemned lumber, mining, and monocrop companies for harming regional ecosystems and

negatively impacting the lives of local communities ([Red Spark](#), November 7, 2021).

### **Killing and Controversy**

The killing of Ka Oris was a significant victory for the Filipino state and military. Oris' comrades and the states, however, provided contrasting versions of the events of October 30, 2021. The army's 4th Infantry Division (4ID) claimed Oris was killed in an armed encounter, while the CPP alleged that Oris posed no threat and was ambushed on his way to receive medical treatment. The CPP stated that he and his medical aide, Eighfel Dela Peña (also known as "Ka Pika"), were unarmed and travelling via motorcycle when they were killed ([PRWC](#), November 18, 2021).

The CPP claims that the 4ID propagates lies "to cover up their crime," and asserts that the army could easily have arrested them as both were unarmed and in no position to give battle" ([PRWC](#), November 2, 2021). The CPP then accuses the military of conducting airstrikes on a nearby mountain "to create the impression of an intense battle." It added that the "plot to kill Ka Oris was personally directed by the tyrant himself ... none other than Rodrigo Duterte" ([Twitter/@Phil\\_Insider](#), October 31, 2021).

It was also reported that Ka Oris was located after a civilian alerted authorities to his whereabouts. The civilian was subsequently awarded an outstanding bounty of 7,800,000 Philippine pesos by the 4ID ([Manila Bulletin](#), February 5). This is roughly equivalent to \$152,120.

### **Conclusion**

The killing of Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos dealt a serious blow to the NPA. His death reverberated far beyond the Philippines as he was known and appreciated by Communist insurgents around the world. No comparable charismatic leadership figure likely remains in the NPA. Despite losing this icon, the NPA network in the

Philippines continues to fight on and shows no signs of letting up.

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