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US-Terrorists

MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, THE PHILLIPINES NEXT US TARGETS?

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WASHINGTON, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Osama bin Laden's network in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia are among the likely targets of future United States (US) covert and overt actions, the New York Times (NYT) reported Wednesday.

The NYT quoted United States officials as saying that the campaign against the groups linked to bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network is global and may last for years.

"But they said the East Asian groups have expanded their operations in recent years, exchanging money, personnel, materiel and experience with the bin Laden organisation and its allies, and that they pose a clear and present danger to American institutions overseas," NYT reported.

"There has been a concerted effort by bin Laden and his people to expand their activities in East Asia, not only in the Philippines, but in Malaysia and Indonesia," the US official was quoted as saying.

"The Philippines have become a major operational hub, and it's a serious concern. People linked to bin Laden are not only in Manila but elsewhere in the Philippines." the official said.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, John D. Negroponte, told the UN Security Council on Monday that the US, acting in self-defence after the Sept 11 attacks may take "further actions with respect to other organisations and other states."

Negroponte did not name any specific groups but officials said that the war against terrorists will range far beyond Afghanistan.

"East Asia, and particularly the Philippines, is an area where terrorists who have struck the United States before are known to have planned their attacks."

Militant Islamic groups in East Asia - chief among them, the Abu Sayyaf group, based in the Philippines - are high on the list of American counter-terrorism targets to come, officials said.

Since the attacks, Philippine intelligence officers have arrested two suspected Abu Sayyaf commanders and several men they described as foreigners carrying bombs.

Malaysia has charged the son of a leading opposition politician Nik Adli Nik Mat as plotting to overthrow the government.

Indonesia has imprisoned two Malaysians in connection with a series of bombing.

In Indonesia, Laskar Jihad, is said to have been reinforced by Taliban guerillas, while the Islamic Defenders Front is threatening violence against American officials and organisations.

Some members of Al-Qaeda have transited through the international airport at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

One of the Sept 11 hijackers, Khalid Al-Midhar, was videotaped at a terrorist meeting in Kuala Lumpur in January 2000.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has offered, and the US has accepted, her nation's airspace and the use of two US military installations - the Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay naval base, for transit and staging operations.

President George W. Bush is scheduled to discuss the counter-terrorism campaign with Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the presidents of the Philippines and Indonesia in Shanghai on Oct 19 at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting.

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