

**MILITANT ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES: FROM
MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) –
TO ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG)**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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30th July, 2003

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled; “**MILITANTS ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES: FROM MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) – ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG)**”, submitted by Miss **AMRITA DEY**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University and this is her own work.

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*Dedicated to my parents
&
Tanusree*

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Amrita Dey

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Preface

The present study is aimed at analysing and understanding the growth of militant Islam in the Philippines, especially in light of the Mindanao problem, amid militant groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The first chapter gives an outline of the colonial history encompassing Mindanao, the causes of the growth of militant organisations in the region. It deals with the objective, motives of these organisations, vis-a-vis government policies in addressing the Mindanao Muslim minority problem, with special emphasis on Gloria Macapagal's tenure. It also attempts to examine the Moro militancy problem in the light of the post September 11 scenario, and the US deployment of troops in eradicating terrorism in Mindanao.

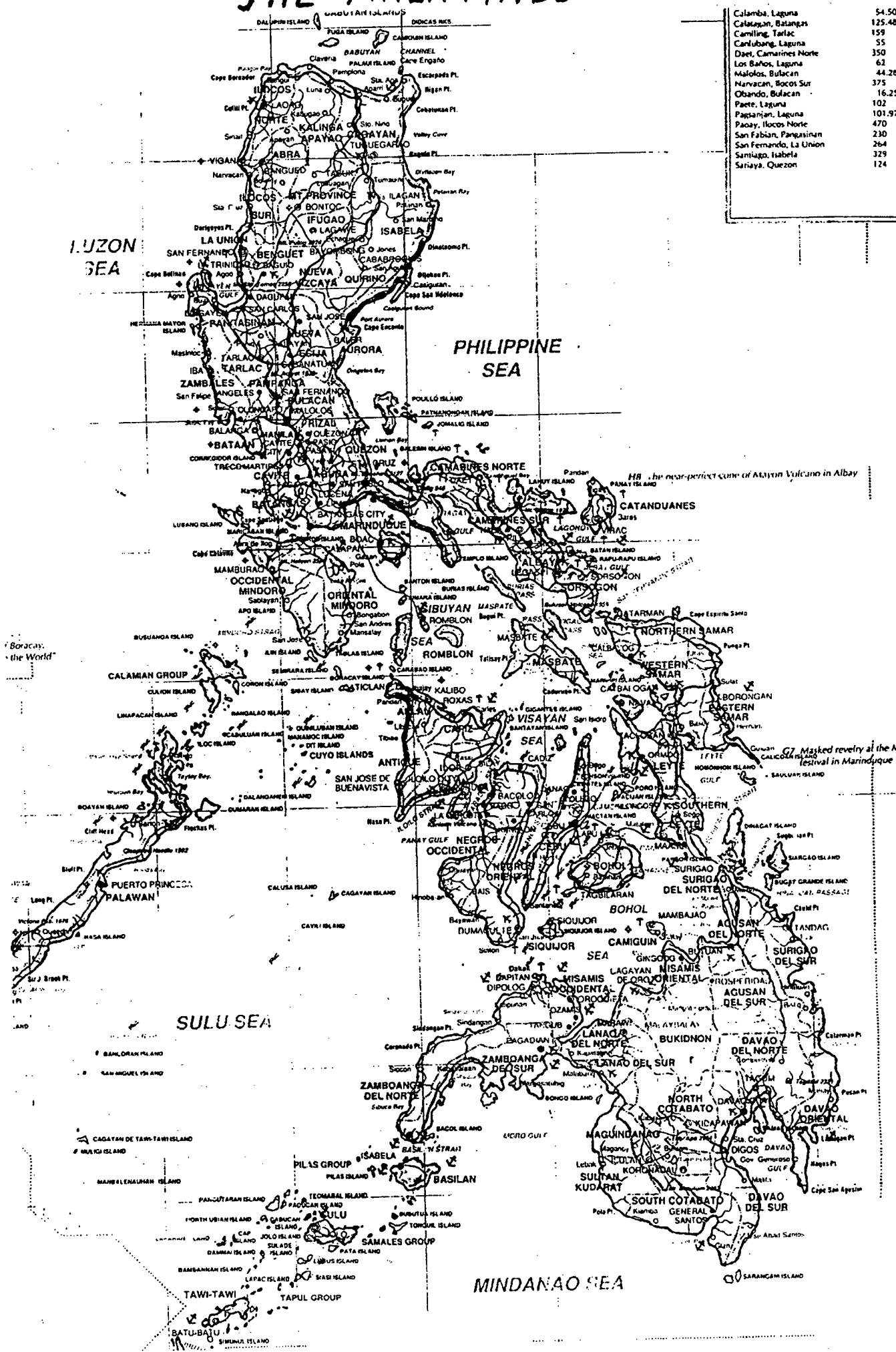
The second chapter analyses the Moro militancy problem within the ambit of international terrorism, the neat financial and arms network that has grown between the MILF, ASG group. It also attempts to analyse the reasons behind the shift in al Qaeda operation towards Southeast Asia, and the new challenges before the Manila government.

The third chapter lays stress on the government policies initiated to tackle the Mindanao Muslim militancy problem, from the implementation of the martial law under Ferdinand Marcos to the newly launched socio-economic programme under Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. This chapter is also an attempt to examine the deeper economic issues, the policy drawbacks that

has culminated in breeding the separatist movement in Mindanao. It also analyses the weaknesses of regional organisations like ASEAN that has been reluctant to address the problems relating to terrorism in Southeast Asia adequately.

The fourth chapter concludes the entire study, by summing up the Mindanao problem, and expresses confidence on the capacity of the Arroyo government, not only in combating terrorism, but also in finding a long lasting solution to the Mindanao problem.

THE PHILIPPINES



Calamba, Laguna	54.50
Catagan, Batangas	125.40
Camiling, Tarlac	159
Canlubang, Laguna	55
Daet, Camarines Norte	350
Los Baños, Laguna	62
Malolos, Bulacan	44.28
Narvacan, Rocos Sur	375
Obando, Bulacan	16.25
Paete, Laguna	102
Pagsanjan, Laguna	101.97
Paoyay, Ilocos Norte	470
San Fabian, Pampunian	230
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IJON SEA

PHILIPPINE SEA

SULU SEA

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Introduction

The task of nation building has posed an enormous challenge for post colonial Muslim leaders, especially for those committed to the creation of a nation based on Islamic rules, norms and visions. The inconsistency between a “parochial” national framework- based on religion and the modern reality of a nation-state framework is too great to be reconciled in this conventional paradigm. The role of Islam in the 20th century differs strikingly amid visions of nationhood and a wide range of ideological spectrums. Some seek the creation of an “Islamic state”: a state system based on the Islamic canons and tradition. Others adopt a less dogmatic approach, seeking to establish a moral order inspired by Islamic principles.¹

Since independence, Islamic elites in these Muslim countries felt that Islam was an impediment to modernity, and thus drastic actions had to be taken to catch up with the West. Secularism or complete separation between the state and religion became a popular idea among the western educated intelligentsia, although the majority of the people felt Islam to be their way of life. The modernisation efforts of the secularists, however, instead of leaving religion aside, targeted the mosques, because it felt threatened by it. The correct attitude should have been to revitalise and modernise Islamic thinking... in a sense to ‘Islamise modernity’. Partly as a response to the

¹ Astri, Suhreka, and Lela, Garner, Noble (eds.), *Ethnic Conflict & International Relations* (New York: Praiger, 1977).

'secular' attack, and partly as a way to establish and strengthen their identities, people became more religious. The more the rulers wanted their societies to leave religion aside, the more these societies became religious. Whether in Iran, Turkey or Tunisia, 'secular' regimes had to resort to violence and the use of arms as secularism became synonymous with dictatorship.² Political dissent being banned and punished, the mosques became the only place where people could meet and vent their frustrations. Radical militant Islam- the driving forces behind the ideology justifying international terrorism- emerged from Islam's conflict with Westernisation and modernity. Fereydoun Hoveyda, an Iranian scholar argues that Islamic civilisation has been impeded since the twelfth century as a result of major rises and confrontation with Christianity.³ During the eleventh century Muslims suffered a series of defeats as the Crusaders occupied the Levant and the Holy Land and established Christian states in areas claimed by Islam, while in the Iberian peninsula a Christian coalition slowly but decisively began the campaign to evict the Muslims from Spain and Portugal. The result of these setbacks was a backlash. Ruthless military commanders emerged to lead the armies of the believers to reclaim the lands of Islam. Saladin, Abdul Mumin from Morocco defeated Christian armies in Spain in 1146-1163 and again in 1195. But as these military leaders rose to

² <http://www.apcss.org/publications/Report-Islam-In-Asia/99.htm>.

³ Peter, Bergen, Inside Secret World of Osama Bin Laden (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001) p.55.

power, the once glorious Islamic culture and its civilisation crumbled. Having consolidated power by the strength of their swords, the new conquerors-turned-rulers had to prove their uniqueness- their “Islamness”. They revived religious extremism as the source of their legitimacy, sweeping the Islamic world with “intellectual rage” encouraged by leaders with a lust for absolute power and an inability to cope with the achievement of their predecessors.⁴

Mysticism, militancy and the quest for perpetual jihad had become the rallying cry of the latest generation of Muslim militant leaders. Sheikh Abu-Zahra of the Cairo al-Azhar University defined jihad as “not confined to the summoning of troops and the establishment of huge forces. It takes various forms. From all the territories of Islam there should arise a group of people reinforced with faith, well equipped with means and methods; and then let them set out to attack the usurpers, harassing them incessantly until their abode is one of everlasting torment.....Jihad will never end.....it will last to the Day of Judgement.”⁵ As new petrodollar wealth began to flow to these radical preachers they insisted Muslim youths to go beyond spiritual jihad; to actively assert their faith and values through violent means. Higher literacy rates, access to global communications has made Muslims more conscious of being part of a broader Islamic community. Moreover, as much of the Muslim world is afflicted with failed

⁴ The Making of A new Asia [http:// www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/95/1215.feats.htm](http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/95/1215.feats.htm).

⁵ Ibid

states, corrupt regimes, porous borders, Islamic activism promoted radical preachers to brainwash their followers. American resentment, its pro-Israel bias has created permanent religious fault-lines that bred and nourished Islamic animosity. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon illustrated the magnanimity of this Islamic animosity towards the West.

Growth of Radical Islam in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia the onset of the financial crisis in 1997 highlighted the salience of Islam not only for political and ideological reasons, but it also emphasised a recurrent theme lingering in these countries after independence: the uneasy relationship between Islam and nation building.⁶ In Indonesia the staunchly nationalistic postcolonial leaders, led by President Sukarno chose from the beginning to put Islam aside and install Pancasila as the philosophical foundation of the newly born Republic. This came about after long and heated debates concluded that national unity would be threatened if one “exclusivist” ideology- Islam in particular-was espoused as the basis of the state for the religiously and ethnically fragmented Indonesian people.⁷ However, recent inter- and intra-religious, ethnic strifes suggests that huge discrepancies still remain in the people’s perception of their national vision. For the 180 million Indonesian Muslims, it is quite

⁶ Nakamura, Mitsuo, Sharon, Siddique & Omar, Farouk, Bajunid (eds.), *Islam & Civil Society* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies) pp 184-201.

⁷ Ibid.

natural to share a single political or religious ideology. The Indonesian Muslim community is as diverse as the nation itself; its members are characterised more by inclinations than by official affiliations. In contrast to Indonesia, the Philippines with a 4.6% Muslim population represents a minority problem. Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in his classic study of *Islam in Modern History*, points out that historically Muslims have seen Islam as a closed system- embracing all aspects of the lives of Muslims, making no distinction between “secular” and “religious”- their fundamental conviction being that Muslims can never be fully Muslims without a state of their own. “Muslims” writes Professor Smith, “have either had political power or they have not. Never before have they shared it with others.”⁸ Muslim minorities in the Philippines and Thailand find themselves in a position comparable with that of the Indian Muslims. They are caught in the dilemma of having to reconcile the demands of their traditionalist conception of faithfulness to Islam with the demands of citizenship in modern states in which non-Muslims predominate and in which freedom of religion is restricted.⁹ The Muslim-Christian conflict in the Philippines shows how a democratic environment along with autonomy may not be sufficient to reduce conflict between religious communities. Democratic institutions and autonomy require sufficient economic resources and

⁸ Wilfred, Cantwell, Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1975) pp 27-40.

⁹ Amitav Acharya, “A New Regional Order in Southeast Asia, *Adelphil Papers*, (London: IISS), 279, 1993.

negotiations over crucial issues as land ownership, religious rights and adequate representation of Muslim minorities. At the societal level, years of civil war have prevented the development of sufficient social capital. Consequently, there is only a very weak network of civic engagement, along religious lines, and almost no organisations has been able to foster more interaction between Muslims and Christians. From a historical perspective, the grievances of the Moro people date back to colonial and post-colonial policies. The Moros gradually lost their ancestral lands to Christian settlers and became a minority in their own territory. Christian Filipinos filled most of the positions in the colonial administration. After independence there was a deliberate attempt to integrate the Moros into the larger Christian Philippines.¹⁰

In part as a solution to the problem of landless farmers in Luzon and the Visayas, a large number of Christians were encouraged to migrate to Mindanao. The Christians strengthened their control over the political and economic affairs of the Southern Philippines. Feeling increasingly threatened the Moros began to engage in active resistance against the Philippine government. The MNLF, created in 1972, rose partly in response to President Marcos' declaration of martial law in 1972. By 1973, MNLF, under the leadership of Nur Misuari demanded the withdrawal of government troops from Southern Philippines, return of lands taken away

¹⁰ Peter, G. Gowing, Moros & Khaek: The Position of Muslim Minorities in the Philippines & Thailand," in Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique & Yasmine Hussain (eds.), Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia (Singapore, IISS, 1985) pp 180-191.

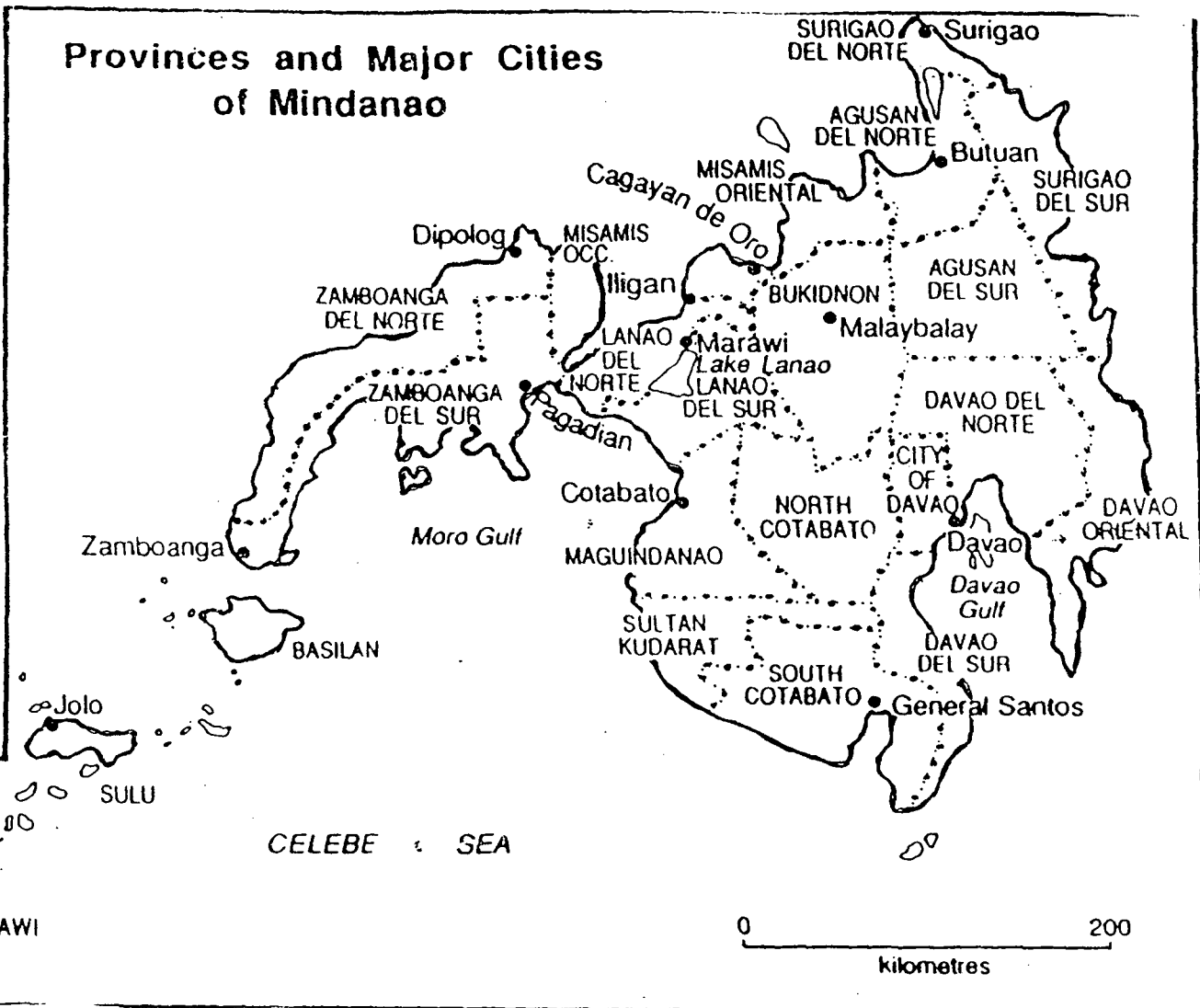
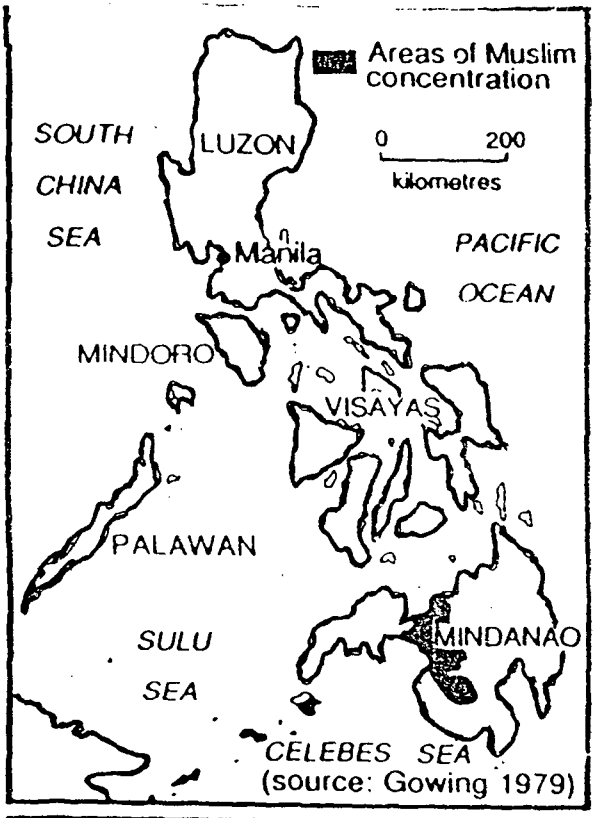
from the Moros, more autonomy and the practice of Islamic law in the Muslim areas.¹¹ The flexibility of Marcos government, Aquinos fluctuations, Ramos' and Joseph Estrada's heavy-handedness has only helped to foster the war in Mindanao for the last 30 years. Few concessions, military suppression, weak governance and economic deprivation have forced unemployed youth to be driven by the cause of ethnicity and religious ideology. The pillars of governance, both the ARMM and the SPCPD (concluded in 1996) were created to give more autonomy to Muslim Mindanao. It did not have much independent power and had to work within a limited scope. As such it could not initiate policies or implement them. The agreement fell short of providing independence to the Muslims, and the autonomy provided was a restricted one. Many people have not seen any change in their livelihood and are unaware of the implementation of any kind of development programme in their areas. Most of the economic investment in Muslim Mindanao has come from foreign donors. Yet, foreign assistance has not produced sufficiently quick results to stimulate the local economy. Even if some groups have benefited the programmes, the majority are still waiting for assistance. They have realised that the only change occurring in Mindanao are as a consequence of foreign assistance, while promised programmes from the government have not been implemented. The government which is truly committed to peace will have to ensure an

¹¹ David, Rosenberg (ed.), *Marcos & the Martial Law in the Philippines* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1979).

improvement in the living conditions of Mindanaoan Muslims. ¹² Thus the likes of MNLF, MILF, the ASG, the National People's Army, have taken the pretext of economic grievances as a means to tap young people into militant activities. Islam is just a medium to keep the struggle to go on and on. Although the new Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's economic package (the Mindanao-Natin) seeks to usher the rehabilitation of Muslim Mindanao with special attention to the conflict affected areas, while the US deployed troops continue to chase the Abu Sayyaf's, it is only a matter of time to see how well it helps to ensure peace and stability for Mindanao. ¹³

¹² David, B. Dewitt, Carolina, G., Hernandez (ed.), *Development & Security in Southeast Asia* (Ashgate Publishers, 2003) pp 205-206.

¹³ Government To Focus on Peace, Development of Mindanao [http:// www.medco.gov.ph /medcoweb/newsfeatl.htm](http://www.medco.gov.ph/medcoweb/newsfeatl.htm)



Chapter I

PHILIPPINES AMID MNLF, MILF AND ASG

Located on the big southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, the indigenous Filipino Muslims (constituting approximately 5% of the population), called the “Moros” (derived from the word ‘Moors’) have revolted against the Spanish colonisers from the 17th century on, the American colonisers of the early 20th century and the Philippines government since its independence in 1946.¹

For the past 30 years, the Philippines has been facing the “Mindanao problem.” Muslims who had accounted for 98% of the population in 1913, stood at a mere 40 percent by 1976. On the eve of colonisation, the Muslims owned most of the land; today they own roughly 15% with a tiny fraction of some four million Muslim settlers owning large-scale plantations and big businesses. The overwhelming majority had to eke out a living for themselves; the situation was ripe for experiencing questions of class and internal colonisation- at the deep ideological and cultural levels, questions of religion and culture were raised.²

Summary of Religious Groups in the Philippines

Religion	% of Population
Roman Catholic	83%
Protestant	9%
Muslim	5%
Buddhist and others	3%

Source: World Factbook, 1996, US Central Intelligence Agency

Table : 1

¹ Larry, Niksch, ‘Abu Sayyaf: Target of the Philippine-US-Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,’ *CRS Report for Congress*, January 25, 2002, pp1-8.

² Aijaz, Ahmad, “At The Mouth of a Volcano,” *Frontline*, July 19, 2002, pp 49-52.

Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk in their book, 'Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Southeast Asia' have underscored four main factors responsible for the Moro separatist sentiment. a) Fear of having religious, cultural and political traditions weakened by forced assimilation into a Catholic dominated Philippines Republic, b) transmigration that has dispossessed many Muslims of their ancient and communal land rights, reducing the Moro population to a minority in their own homeland, c) frustration with Mindanao's lack of economic development. Never a beneficiary of the Asian miracle, 15 of the Philippines poorest provinces are located in the south, which has the country's lowest literacy rate (75%) and life expectancy (57 years) coupled with d) a tradition of war-lordism, banditry and gory feuds.³

Mindanao's Colonial Past

Following the Spanish colonisation of the Philippines in the 16th century, a vigorous attempt was made to impose Catholicism throughout the archipelago, which was part of the overall attempt to forestall the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.⁴ Sulu was the first region in the Philippines to accept Islam, mainly under the influence of Mudum, an Arab missionary. Mudum came to Sulu about 1380 from Malacca. The Muslim princes, who arrived from Sumatra and Johore, established sultanates in Sulu and Mindanao. Islam gradually spread to the other islands of the Philippines as

³ Peter, Chalk, and Angel Rabasa, *Indonesia's Transformation and The Stability of Southeast Asia* (ISBN: Rand Publications, 2001) pp 85-98.

⁴ Teodore, A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines* (New York: Mentor Books, 1969) pp 27-43.

well. By the time the Spaniards came, even Manila was under a Muslim king, Rajah Sulayman. "Then there began a new era for the Filipinos," as Jose Rizal described: "little by little they lost their old tradition, the mementos of their past; they gave up their writing, their songs, their poems, their laws in order to learn by rote other doctrines, which they did not understand, another morality, another aesthetic different from those inspired by their climate and their manner of thinking..... To admire and praise whatever was foreign and incomprehensible; their spirit was dismayed, and it surrendered."⁵ The Christianisation of the northern and central Philippine districts proceeded rather quickly on account of the fragmented and unconsolidated nature of the tribes in the Luzon and Visaya areas. However, in Mindanao the Spaniards found highly organised Muslim societies that were effectively able to mobilise themselves, successfully resisting Christian religious coercion for nearly three centuries. Except for a few settlements in the northern and eastern parts of the island, the Treaty of Paris (1898) transferred Spanish sovereignty over the Philippines to the United States.

From 1899 to 1914, the US military conducted a number of campaigns to suppress Muslim insurgents in the southern islands. These campaigns were controversial due to heavy civilian casualties. Among the US policies, the most notable was the one undertaken for the re-settlement of Mindanao- encouraging Christian migration from the more crowded parts of Luzon to the less developed island in the South. The overall purpose was

⁵ Man, Mohini, Kaul , *The Philippines and Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1978) pp 10-25.

to attempt altering the regional demographic balance, so that the majority of Mindanao's population would support voluntary integration with the rest of the Philippines. Starting with a handful of settlements in 1913, migration from the north grew during the 1920s and 1930s, accelerating after independence considerably. This direct deprivation spurred in disputes, that periodically escalated into armed confrontation, as both the Christians and the Muslims organised themselves into self-defence militias- known as the Illagas (rats) and "Blackshirts" or "Barracudas".⁶ The Jabidah massacre of 1968 turned the overall situation in Mindanao towards the worse. The incident related to the summary execution of 20 Muslim recruits (who were being trained by the Philippine Army for infiltration into Northern Malaysia, to facilitate the Philippine claim on Sabah) by their Christian officers, allegedly for mutiny. This persecution resulted in a local resistance organisation, the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) formed by the Udtog Matalam with the objective of creating an independent Islamic Republic out of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. Rather a peaceful organisation, two subsequent developments altered the course of MIM.⁷ One was a complete unwillingness on the part of the Marcos regime to consider the creation of a separate Islamic Republic in the South. And the other was the increasingly explicit support given by the Philippines Army to the Christian colonisers to purge Islam from Mindanao. As a result in 1971 the

⁶ Peter, Chalk, "Militant Islamic Extremism in the Southern Philippines," in Jason, F. Issacson and Colin Rubenstein (eds.), *Islam in Asia: Changing Political Realities* (New Brunswick, London, 2002) pp 265-50.

⁷ Ibid.

peaceful MIM was replaced by the Moro National Liberation Front (led by Nur Misuari), which aimed at achieving independence for Mindanao through armed struggle against the (predominantly Christian) Philippine state.

Growth of Militant Islamic Organisations: The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

MNLF and its Objective

Since its creation, Nur Misuari's MNLF has served as the main focus for armed Islamic resistance in the Southern Philippines. Its main ideological tract is based on three main ideas:

- That the Moro people constitute a distinct Bangsa (nation) which has a specific Islamic historical and cultural identity.
- That the Bangsamoro have a legitimate right to determine their own socio-political future.
- That the MNLF has both a duty and obligation to wage a jihad against the Philippines state on behalf of the Bangsamoro and in pursuit of their objective.⁸

Between 1972 and 1976, the annual military expenditure rose from Peso 518 million to Peso 3.5 billion, while the personnel of the Armed forces of the Philippines (AFP) rose from 60,000 to 250,000. Even as President Ferdinand Marcos announced the "liquidation" of the MNLF in

⁸ Aijaz, Ahmad, "The War Against the Muslims," in Gutierrez, Eric (ed.), *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), pp.26-28.

1981, half of the AFP was still fighting the MNLF's military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA).⁹

AFP's Strategy Towards MNLF

From indiscriminate use of napalm and fragmentation bombs to "rural development" programmes, from "strategic relocation" and "based denial" to "resource control" operations, from "search and destroy" missions to the creation of "strategic hamlets" and secret armies, the AFP's entire strategy of war was patterned after the model of the Vietnam war. In less than a decade the Muslims vacated over a million hectares of land. By January 1977, Marcos himself acknowledged that there were more than 500,000 refugees in the south. A London based magazine (Impact) tabulated 50,000 as killed; 2 million as refugees; 200,000 houses burned; 535 mosques and 200 schools demolished; and 35 cities and towns wholly destroyed.¹⁰ One out of every three Muslims had become homeless even before the war really peaked up. Robert McAmis, a Christian missionary working in Mindanao, reconstructed the chronology of early events in the following manner;

- The war began in 1968-69, with the rise of Christian terror squads that were supported by the Philippines Constabulary (PC) and the AFP. The AFP conducted elaborate "search and destroy" missions in co-ordination with the terror squads

⁹ T.J, George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980) pp2-20.

¹⁰ Aijaz, Ahmad, op, cit., p.29.

- For the first two years, the war was confined to areas, where the overwhelming majority of the population was Christian. Its sole objective was to evict the remaining Muslims,
- The Sulu Muslims, who later came to dominate the leadership of the MNLF did not participate in the war until early 1972,
- A decisive Muslim counter-offensive began to take shape only with the spontaneous uprising in Marawi on 21 October 1972, one month after Marcos declared martial law,
- By the time the counter offensive began, there were nearly a quarter of a million refugees in Mindanao.¹¹

MNLF chairman Nur Misuari pointed out that the 'organisation, "did not surface formally until the colonial violence (military offensive of the AFP) became widespread, following Marcos' declaration of war on November 1972." Throughout 1973, the MNLF suffered heavy casualties because it lacked combat experience, its training having stressed conventional warfare and static defence. Such tactics relied on concentrated firepower that conceded added advantage of mobility to the AFP, whose helicopters, vessel and troop-carriers were able to encircle and smash the Muslim units through conventional siege operations including heavy bombing of the fixed bases. In the face of heavy defeat, MNLF started depending on the universal Muslim support through forged links with a

¹¹ Robert, D, Mc Amis, "Muslim Filipinos: 1970-72," in Peter, D. Gowing and Robert, d., Mc Amis (eds.), *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage & Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979) pp 180-89.

number of conservative Middle Eastern Islamic states. With the change in MNLF's strategy, the AFP too shifted from massive suppression to massive occupation. Bombing missions, stockades for torture, strategic hamlets, poison gas and assassination campaigns all became routine. The war on the city of Jolo (February, 1974), saw a combination of diversionary tactic of the MNLF to draw the AFP troops away from battle in the surrounding hills, surmising that AFP would not terrorise the civilian inhabitants for political reason. Instead, it simply set the city on fire, creating in one night 60,000 refugees and 2000 corpses.¹² A marked rise in the number of army personnel, building of new garrison sites, subjection of the entire population to new techniques of surveillance, signaled that by the end of 1975, the war had produced a stalemate. The need of a negotiated settlement became apparent.

MNLF and the Tripoli Agreement

According to Aijaz Ahmad, Marcos was under pressure to defuse the war in the south, and concentrate on the north (following opposition from the New People's Army to the "church radicals"). Abroad, the OIC, prodded by Libya, was finding it increasingly difficult to support the MNLF in the face of escalated terror. It was also exerting pressure on Marcos to open negotiations. The disastrous effect of war on the innocent civilians called upon the MNLF to react quickly. The stalemate in fact brought the political weakness of the MNLF to the forefront. Being primarily a military- not a

¹² Aijaz, Ahmad, op, cit., p.29.

political organisation, decentralisation of command structure, breaking up of its large contingents into small regional units, made it difficult to sustain its cohesion. Tendencies towards localism and war-lordism were rampant, with much of the Central Committee including Nur Misuari, directing the war through emissaries. There was a wide gap not only between the commanders and their avowed leaders, but also between the commander's themselves.¹³

The result was a Quadripartite Ministerial Commission composed of Libya, Senegal, Saudi Arabia and Somalia to convene negotiations between Marcos and the MNLF. The Tripoli Agreement (23 December, 1976) provided for the creation of a single 13 province Muslim Autonomous Zone within the Republic of the Philippines. The important clauses of the agreement included;

- a) The AFP to be withdrawn and " security forces" for the region to be created outside the AFP framework;
- b) A decentralised administrative apparatus with adequate Muslim representation, in-order to determine and implement the process for creating the autonomous zone
- c) A joint cease-fire mission consisting of representatives from the Philippines government, the MNLF and the OIC was to be established.¹⁴

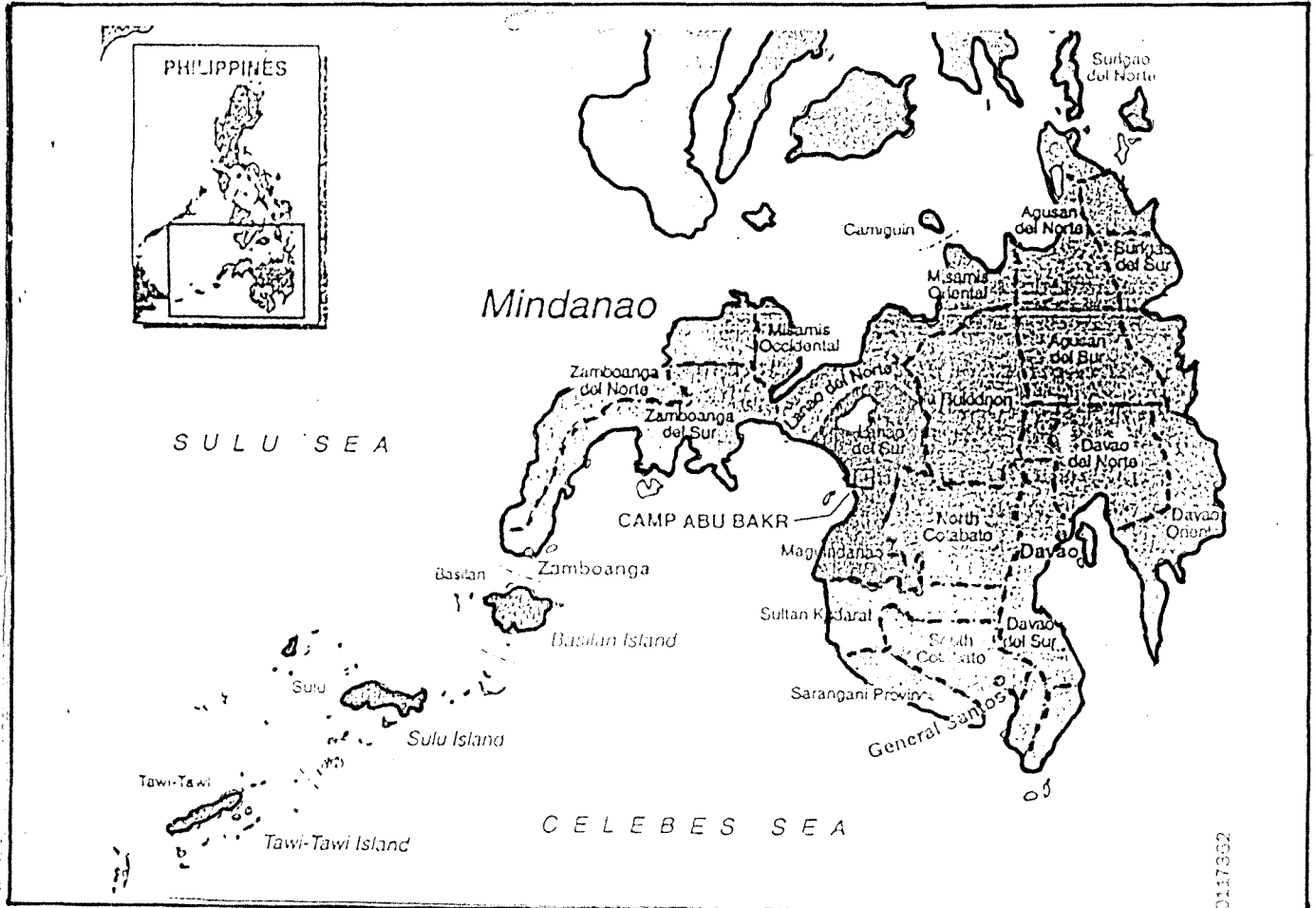
¹³ Adib, Caesar, Majul, *The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines* (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1985) pp 1-25.

¹⁴ Francisco, L. Gonzalis, "Sultans of a Violent Land," in Eric Gutierrez (ed.), *op. cit.*, *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), pp.85-90.

Hard-liners within the MNLF refused to endorse the autocratic decision of Misuari on grounds that the agreement did not provide for full secession. The Marcos regime, within a week, began to make contradictory announcements on the plebiscite in the 13 southern provinces. In six months, the Tripoli agreement was squashed. The second agreement by March 1977 between Muammar Quadaffi and Imelda Marcos included a proclamation of autonomy, announcing the allotment of 15 of the 29 seats in the provisional government to the MNLF. It outrightly rejected MNLF's clause to select its own representatives.

Nur Misuari boycotted the process. Marcos conducted a referendum on the autonomy issue and announced that 95% of the southern voters had rejected it. In May 1976, Misuari announced that the MNLF was returning to its original goal of secession, because the Marcos government had failed to respond positively to the autonomy formula. It took another 20 years, of intermittent negotiations, punctuated walk-outs and renewed hostilities before the MNLF and the Philippine government signed a Comprehensive Peace Pact and conducted a referendum (1989) across the 13 provinces and nine cities proposed at Tripoli. The result was the establishment of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), following an agreement signed by Nur Misuari and President Fidel Ramos on September 1996. The peace deal opened the way for MNLF's

Map of Mindanao showing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Camp Abu Bakr.



participation in the government. Misuari was elected governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).¹⁵

ARMM Under MNLF Chairman Misuari

ARMM under Misuari clubbed under three headings: inexperience, corruption and bureaucratic inertia compounded by the propensity of Misuari to absent himself from the administration. In an attempt to project Mindanao on the international stage for investment, Misuari spent more time in Manila and on high profile trips to Europe and the Middle East, than at his own desk in Cotabato. Insiders complained that Misuari was becoming too rigid with his ideology, monopolising decision making, failing to delegate sufficient authority and attempting to run the administration by remote control.¹⁶

Hashim Salamat, then the second important man in the MNLF, circulated from Mecca an 'Instrument of Takeover,' in which he declared his taking over the chairmanship of MNLF, ousting Misuari. He accused Misuari of financial fraud and "as diverted away from Islam, it's methodologies and objectives."¹⁷ Salamat, an illustrious cleric, trained at the prestigious Al-Azhar University, ethnically a Maguindanao, was enmeshed in his Egyptian and Saudi networks, in contrast to Misuari, who came from

¹⁵ Rigoberto, Tiglao, "Hidden Strength," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995, pp 22-27.

¹⁶ Rigoberto, Tiglao, "The Fire Next Time," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 28, 1995, pp 26-29.

¹⁷ Rigoberto, Tiglao, "Southern Discomfort," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 19, 1998, pp 26-27.

an urban professional background, and was educated at the University of the Philippines and moved in political circles that included Marxist intellectuals.

Misuari expelled Salamat from MNLF in February 1978, resulting in Salamat's laying the foundation of the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984. The MILF is a fundamentalist and extremist organisation, espousing more radical means for a separate Islamic state from the Philippines, unlike the MNLF, which scaled down its demand to autonomy.

A 1993 National Intelligence Assessment Showing the Moro Rebel Distribution (which includes breakaway MNLF Rebel Groups) in the ARMM

Sulu	4,230 MNLF rebels with 2,650 firearms
Maguindanao	2,810 rebels with 3,090 firearms
Lanao Del Sur	2,320 rebels with 1,700 firearms
Tawi-Tawi	180 rebels with 110 firearms

Table: 2

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

MILF and its Objective

Camp Abubakre-As-Siddique, the headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) cannot be traced on any official map of the Philippines. Guarding one of the largest forest areas in Mindanao, all the 20-odd MILF posts are linked by radio to this headquarter, a bustling community of 15,000, with it's own school, markets, land for food production, jail and places of prayer for MILF mujahideens. It also has an

arms factory and locally designed launchers for its standing army, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF).¹⁸

“An Islamic independent state or martyrdom” as the slogan goes, MILF has already carved out roughly a tenth of Mindanao- into two predominantly Muslim provinces- Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. It is traversed by the Narcis Ramos Highway, linking the cities of Cotabato and Marawi, which is a commuter route between the MILF’s two biggest bases; Camp Abubakre and Camp Bashra, about 20 kilometres from Marawi. The rebels simply leave their weapons in one camp, adorn civilian clothes, walk to the highway and get a ride on public transport to the other camp 100 kilometres away.

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Two noticeable components of the MILF besides the BIAF are:

- a) It’s sharia- or Islamic-justice system, complete with a supreme court.

Camp Abubakre has a prison, where criminals convicted under the sharia from as far away as Davao province in eastern Mindanao are held.

- b) A formal consultative assembly of about 80 people recommended by each of the organisation’s 13 regional commands appointed by the Central Committee.

The assembly consists of respected *imams* from the various provinces, who are consulted on major decisions. “You have to understand,”

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¹⁸ Rigobert, Tiglao, “Crescent Moon Rising,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 30, 1995, pp 27-30.



says an MILF sympathiser. “If you’re asked by the *imam* to join the mujahideen, it’s like you’ll be going straight to paradise.”¹⁹

MILF’s Strategic Thinking and Political Organisation

MILF’s chairman, Hashim Salamat, is a near mythical and shadowy figure. Many of the organisation’s other leaders haven’t seen him in person, but he has contacts throughout the vast world of Islamic militancy. Having cultivated these ties as the secretary-general of the Organisation of Asian Students at the Al-Azhar University, and later in Pakistan, Salamat preaches Islam through regular radio broadcasts in Mindanao. Salamat’s strongest philosophical influences are said to be Syed Qutb of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and Syed Abul Ala Maududi of Pakistan’s Jamaat I Islami party. Initially Salamat found a secessionist organisation of Moro students in the Middle East in 1962. When he returned to the Philippines in 1970, those who gathered around him had either been trained in Arab religious institutions or in the *madrasah* network in the country. “It was our obligation as Muslims to help our brothers anywhere in the world,” says Salamat, who claims to have sent nearly 1000 Filipino Muslims to Afghanistan between 1982-93, first to help defeat the Soviet-backed Kabul government and later for military training through the *mujahideen Ittehad-e-Islami Afghanistan* (the Islamic Union of Afghanistan) and the *Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan* (Islamic party of Afghanistan). Salamat’s decision to

¹⁹ Anthony, Davis, “Islamic Guerillas Threaten the Fragile Peace on Mindanao,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10, May 1998, pp 30-35.

send MILF guerillas to Afghanistan, benefited the organisation in the sense that it “insulated” commanders from the Marcos government’s attempt to co-opt them.²⁰ More importantly, it created an officer corps with rigid military training and actual combat experience. “Officer for officer,” an MILF official boasts, “we may have more combat experience than the Philippines army.”²¹

The Front’s political organisation and strategic thinking, represents a unique case of Maoist techniques of revolutionary warfare and popular organisation in the service of revolutionary Islam. Focusing mainly on Muslim village communities, the creation of functional groups for women, youth and *ulema*, it has facilitated at the apex of the pyramid structure of village, township and provincial committees, a 28- man executive central committee headed by the chairman, vice chairman Ghazali Jafaar (political affairs), Al-Haj Murad Ibrahim (military affairs) and Alim Mimbantas (internal affairs). A 60-man council, or the *Majlis-e-Shura*, acts as a legislative body.²²

Politically, the MILF support base has been apparently growing. The Front has made a conscious effort to garner local backing across Mindanao, Sulu and Basilan, traditionally dominated by the MNLF. Independent analysts, who have visited many MILF –controlled areas recall that at

²⁰ Anthony, Davis, “Evolution in the Philippine War,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, July 2000, pp 28-44.

²¹ Rigoberto, Tiglao, “Hidden Strength,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995, pp 22-27.

²² Ibid.

mealtime, local residents never forget even today to set aside a scoop of rice for the rebels, no matter how poor they themselves may be. Generations of fighting and injustice have pre-disposed the ordinary villagers to respond to such calls to war easily. “ The movement is not unique here,” says an MILF sympathiser, “All over the world you ‘d see a resurgence of militant Islam. The Ummah rallied to the cause of our brothers in Afghanistan and is now rallying to the cause of Muslims in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Grozny. If war breaks out here, no one doubts that the Ummah will support their brothers here.”²³

MILF's Manpower and Armory

Today the BIAF claims to draw on a manpower pool of over 120,000 volunteers and to have entered a phase in which it is capable of meeting the AFP conventionally. On paper it is structured along traditional lines: six divisions composed of brigades, battalions, companies and platoons; including 13 major base-camps dotted across Mindanao. “Don’t mistake the front for a part-time amateur army,” says an MILF cadre. “These fighters are considered soldiers only after a three month full-time training.” Being a rotating battalion arrangement, one full time such battalion would mean 600 men for each brigade, in a six-division army, 21,600 regulars.²⁴

However, ground reality seems to be less threatening. AFP intelligence estimates put MILF armed strength at 8,500- 10,000.

²³ Anthony, Davis, “Philippine Army Prevents MILF Reorganisation ,” *Jane’ Intelligence Review*, March 2003, pp16-20.

²⁴ Ibid.

Independent assessments based on the intelligentsia suggest that the Front could field up to 15,000-armed guerillas. “ If they say we have just 8,000 men, why they have in the past year deployed nearly two-thirds of the Philippine army’s strength in Mindanao?” questioned Salamat.²⁵ Western intelligence sources, however, estimates MILF’s strength at 40,000 armed men, which dwarfs the 24,000 troops the communist-led New People’s Army had at its peak in 1985.

Given a conspicuous lack of weaponry, as well as limitations on small arms and logistics, MILF remains essentially a guerilla force capable of mounting battalion-sized operations. The weaponry, according to intelligence sources consists of the broadly Vietnam-era ammunitions that flooded Mindanao in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Front’s standard rifles are the M14 and M16, supplemented by Garand M1 carbines and FN FALs. M79 and M203 40mm grenade launchers are also common. Heavier weapons are limited to M60 general purpose machine guns, alongwith 60 mm and 81mm mortars and a sprinkling of 50 calibre heavy machine guns providing a limited anti-aircraft capability at base camps. In contrast to the 1970s, when weapon shipments were smuggled into the southern Philippines through Sabah, few significant infusions of external arms appear to be reaching Mindanao’s insurgents today. Moreover, MILFs financial constraint, has obliged it to purchase weaponry and ammunitions from corrupt AFP sources, although they do not come that cheap: an M16A1

²⁵ Anthony, Davis, “ Islamic Guerillas Threaten the Fragile Peace on Mindanao,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10, May 1998, pp 30-35.

assault rifle sells on the Mindanao black market for a minimum of P 27,000, while a round of 5.56 mm ammunition costs P 7 (US 17.5 cents).²⁶ The MILF since 1995, has developed a limited capability to produce RPG-2 launchers and ammunitions.

MILF and its Links To Foreign Terrorist Groups

Of the accusations made by the Philippine military against the MILF, one is that the organisation has links to foreign terrorist groups. MILF leaders have consistently disavowed links to al Qaeda or other terrorist groups. However in a rare interview to the BBC (7 February 1999), Salamat acknowledged that Osama had given financial support to the Muslim guerillas, the money being used to build mosques and help poor Muslim communities. Although the truth is yet unknown, experts point out that the organisation has some informal links with the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). While the MILF formally wants an independent Islamic state in all of Mindanao, willing to settle with full autonomy for those eight provinces of southern Philippines, where the Muslims have an impressive presence; the JI breeds more clandestine objectives of a huge Islamic state encompassing Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Mindanao.²⁷

From January to June 1997, about 67 people were abducted and held for ransom, most of them being in Central Mindanao. The AFP blamed the MILF for the abductions, claiming that the Front controlled 17 out of 57

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Aijaz, Ahmad, " At the Moth of a Volcano," *Frontline*, July 19, 2002, pp 49-52.

known kidnap gangs, which involved multi-million Peso enterprises. The most notable encounter between the AFP and MILF, involving one marine and several infantry battalions backed by helicopter gunships and artillery, took place against the Front's second largest base area at Camp Raja Muda, between 17-18 June. The assault was triggered by kidnapping 43 Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) personnel conducting seismic recording in nearby Sultan SA Borongis, Maguindanao. Fighting was intense as the two sides exchanged gunfire from as close as 50 metres. "We didn't want to take unnecessary risks," said Major Jolly Mabanta Jr of the 40th Infantry Battalion.²⁸ In response, the MILF massed troops on the national highway in Kabacan, where traffic were held for hours, and the AFP was engaged in a running gunbattle. The prospects of a full-scale war, resulted in the government to order a unilateral ceasefire on 30 June 1997. A few days later another major clash on the national highway in Baragay Pagangan, where AFP claimed that the rebels used civilians as human shields- the bombing and shelling left craters 10 feet deep. In October an Egyptian, a Pakistani were killed in a clash with troops inside the AFP's 6th Division base at Camp Siongco near Cotabato city. In the aftermath of the incident- 2000 troops closed in on Abu Bakre and threatened to overrun the enclave on the grounds that it served as a sanctuary for 'foreign terrorists'. A tense standoff was eventually defused without hostilities.²⁹

²⁸ Eric, Gutierrez, & Abdulwahab, Guilal, "The Unfinished Jihad," in Eric, Gutierrez (ed.), *Rebels, Warlords & Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000) pp 263-293.

²⁹ Anthony, Davis,

The build-up in military activities seemed to coincide with the meetings and stages of progress of the peace talks:

- The 18 October (1996), Basilan offensive came right after peace talks with the MILF were announced and before the exploratory talks could begin
- The January 1997 technical working committee discussions were preceded two days earlier by the Buldon encounter
- February's informal talks were preceded by a clash at the Kabulan irrigation dam
- The March and April meetings were marred by the Buldon shelling and the battles in Zamboanga
- The key decisions scheduled in 1997 to hammer out guidelines for the ceasefire was postponed because of the Rajah Muda offensive, that left 100 deaths on each side.³⁰

“They’re consolidating and training and trying to drag out these talks to gain more time and space. This whole strategy of negotiating is just delaying us,” Salamat asserted. A much more brisk campaign involves seeking a way to link the MILF with the Abu Sayyaf Group, which has been designated as an international terrorist group soon after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the US. As talks to date have focused largely on questions of territorial control and ceasefire modalities without broaching

³⁰ Eric, Gutierrez and Abulwahab Guilal, “The Reimagination of the Bangsa Moro”, in Eric, Gutierrez (ed.), *Rebels, Warlords & Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000) pp.305-310.

contentious political issues, the MILF seems to be engaged in the risky strategy of maintaining both military and political pressure on the government, while trying to avoid pushing both parties on the verge of any conflict. Anthony Davis rightly points out that behind the military posturing and calls for secession, it is political pragmatism rather than religious extremism that defines the agenda on the desirability of a separate Islamic state.³¹ To avoid an inevitable 'no' from the Christian majority, only native Mindanaons would be permitted to vote. Native Mindanaons are defined as Muslims, indigenous Highlanders and Christian settlers who settled before the 1935 Commonwealth Government:

The founding of a separate state, "the so called Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao," says Salamat, "does not represent real autonomy, so we are sticking with our idea that we cannot accept anything less than independence. But if some real, practical, attractive alternative were to come up, then it is possible we could change our minds."

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo voiced strong support for the United States in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. The Philippines, she said, is prepared to "go every step of the way" with the United States. Beginning in October 2001, the United States sent groups of military observers to Mindanao to assess AFP operations against the Abu

³¹ Anthony, Davis, "Islamic Guerillas Threaten the Fragile Peace on Mindanao," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 10, May 1998, pp 30-35.

Sayyaf, render advice, and examine AFP equipment needs. President Bush extended \$93 million in military aid when President Arroyo visited Washington in 2001, offering a direct US military role in combating Abu Sayyaf. "While the most visible military action is in Afghanistan," Bush reiterated, "we now have troops in the Philippines..." "It appears the Philippines is going to be the next target after Afghanistan." Two of the September 11th hijackers had spent time in Malaysia, while Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind behind the World Trade Centre bombing in 1993, used the Philippines as his base for operation.³²

There are 650 military personnel, 500 support/maintenance personnel, 150 Special Forces to perform training and advisory functions. However, the US military personnel are not to conduct independent operations, but they are armed and authorised to defend themselves. Such a role on Basilan, analyst feel would place US Special Forces in direct combat situations in AFP-Abu Sayyaf encounters.³³

ASG and its Objective

Abu Sayyaf (literally known as the "Bearer of the Sword") is a self styled fundamentalist insurgent group, whose origin can be, traced back to 1989. A small group of Islamic militants, who broke away from the Tableegh, initially formed the Mujahideen Commando Freedom Fighters (MCOFF). It renamed itself first the Jundullah ("Servants of Alaah") in 1992,

³² Peter, Chalk, "Light Arms Trading in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2001, pp 42-45.

³³ [http:// www. cdi.org/as-his.htm](http://www.cdi.org/as-his.htm). pp 1-4.

and then the Abu Sayyaf Group in 1993. Composed of dissidents from the MNLF and from those who fought along with Afghan mujahideens against the Soviet Union, Abdurajak Janjalani, the mastermind behind ASG, attended Islamic universities in Libya and Saudi Arabia before fighting the Soviets. He befriended Osama Bin Laden in Peshawar, and traveled with Ramzi Yousef back to the Philippines from the Khost camp at Afghanistan.³⁴

Janjalani was committed to waging a *jihad*, to create a pure Islamic state in the Moro islands based on Salafi Wahabism. Assessing its extreme terrorist mechanisms, unlike the MILF, which merely aims for independence, the ASG espouses no co-existence with other religious groups. It advocates the annihilation of all Southern Filipino Christians, in line with the worldwide Islamic outcry for global dominance, using kidnapping, extortion and killing as a means to achieve jihad.

ASG's Manpower, Armory and Financial Backup

An estimated support base of 1,148, volunteers and regular armed component consisting approximately of 330 militants, the majority of the groups members are Muslim youth between the ages of sixteen and their early thirties. The organisation's active backing is concentrated in Zamboanga, Basilan and Sulu, with pockets of residual support in the Southern Philippines, especially in the poverty stricken regions of Western

³⁴ Rohan, Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (C. Hurst & Company, London, 2002) pp169-70.

Mindanao, where 52 percent of the population falls below the poverty line. At the end of 1998, the AFP Southern Command put the total number of weapons in the group's possession at 387 firearms, down from 392 in 1997.³⁵ The majority of these arms are of the basic combat variety, including assault rifles, grenade launchers, and mortars mostly procured from stocks left over from the Afghan war. The group is also thought to have developed a limited ability to produce home made bombs. Its finances are mainly raised 'indigenously,' through kidnap-for-ransom, extortion and marijuana cultivation. In 1991, the ASG received some P 12 million in grants from both the Al Qaeda and Libya. It also received large deliveries of weapons from Victor Blout, a Tajik arms dealer, linked to both the Taliban and the Al Qaeda.

Unofficially called the 'dirty-tricks department' of the MNLF and the MILF, military intelligence report claim that MNLF veterans have been training Abu Sayyaf fighters, along with sons of MNLF guerillas killed by government forces in the 1970s, who feel duty bound to avenge their fathers. "Both the MILF and the MNLF see the Tableegh as harmless at worst, and at best, as helping to revive Islam among Muslim Filipinos," says a Cotabato based Muslim journalist, adding, "that its easier to convince someone to join a jihad if he's really practicing Islam. That's basically what the Tableegh is doing, countering the strong Westernising or secularising

³⁵ Peter, Chalk, & Angel Rabasa, op, cit., p.100.

influences of modernisation on Muslim youth.”³⁶ The MNLF’s attack on AFP units on Jolo island in November 2001 demonstrated the proximity of MNLF and Abu Sayyaf units. MILF’s chairman, Hashim Salamat, set up a network in 1980, which allowed some 1000 Filipinos Muslims to receive military training in Pakistan and Afghanistan. MILF trainees called their camps as the Abu Sayyaf camp. In October 1994, Janjalani had visited the MILF headquarters in Maguindanao to acquire high-powered smuggled arms for his organisation.³⁷

As of the MILF-ASG links to al Qaeda, an elaborate explanation is dealt with in the next chapter.

Terrorist Activities Conducted By The Abu Sayyaf Group

Beginning its terrorist attacks in the Philippines in 1991, ASG first killed two American evangelists in a grenade blast in Zamboanga city. In December 1993 the guerillas set off a bomb during a mass in a Catholic cathedral in Davao city. The explosion killed eight people and wounded several others. In June 1994, they stopped a busload of 60 people, many of whom were school teachers, on the Basilan island, 15 were immediately killed, 37 of them released except the Roman Catholic priest Cirilo Nacorda, while the rest were held hostage for weeks, before the payment of Peso 300,000- Peso 3 million as ransom to the militants. Nacorda was released only after the military commenced operations against the ASG hideouts.

³⁶ Zacharya, Abuza, “Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda’s Southeast Asian Network,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp 427-79.

³⁷ Rohan, Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (C. Hurst & Company, London, 2002) pp.197.

Nacorda's captors were wounded in the military action, while the gang leader of the mission, Barahama Sali was declared dead.³⁸ No sooner than the Chief of the Southern Command of AFP, announced that the military had, completely annihilated the Abu Sayyaf Group, that by September of 1994, three of the military's civilian guides were abducted by the Abu Sayyaf, followed by five surveyors working on a project for the Department of Agrarian Reforms in Cotabato. A ransom of Peso one million was demanded for the latter. In April, 1995, the police busted a network of international terrorists acting in Manila, in collaboration with the Abu Sayyaf, centering around the Ramzi Yousef terrorist cell, who was indicted for bombing the World Trade Centre in 1993. Known as the Bojinka plot, it included, a) attempts to bomb 11 US airliners, and assassination of Pope John Paul II, who visited Philippines in early 1995. While, the airlines bombing plan was tested on December 11, 1994, where the Philippines Airlines 747-200 Flight 434, carrying 273 passengers and 20 crew, en route from Cebu to Tokyo, was forced to make an emergency landing after a bomb went off in the cabin, killing a Japanese businessman, Yousef had also arranged for an "human bomb" to assassinate the Pope.³⁹ Computer discs, weapons and other confidential materials seized from Yousef's one bedroom apartment, including the arrest of Edwin Angeles, co-founder and second in command of the ASG, resulted in the arrest of several high ranking Abu-

³⁸ P. B. Sinha, "Muslim Insurgency in the Philippines," *Strategic Analysis*, August 1997, pp 635-652.

³⁹ Rohan, Gunaratna, op, cit., p.198.

Sayyaf personnel, including six suspected Arab terrorists hiding in Manila. Soon after, on April 4, about 200 ASG militants, armed with rocket launchers, recoilles rifles and bazookas swooped down on the coastal settlement of Ipil. A town of about 50,000 predominantly Christian population, about 760 km south of Manila, the Ipil massacre killed at lest 53 people, wounding another 44. President Fidel Ramos immediately declared a state of emergency in Ipil, ordering "immediate punitive action" on the town. In the subsequent fighting, 41 guerilla raiders, 20 civilian hostages (who were taken as "human shields") were declared as killed. Between 1995-98, Abu Sayyaf operations declined considerably, partly as a result of the 1996 settlement between the Philippine government and the MNLF. In 1998, Janjalani, the supremo within the ASG, was killed during a shoot-out with PNP forces in the Barangay Tumakid district of the Lamitan town in Basilan.⁴⁰

It gained international attention again in March 2000, when the group abducted 50 elementary school teachers and children on the island of Basilan, and attacked a tourist resort in Sabah, kidnapping 21 foreigners, including Malaysians, Frenchman, Germans, Finns and South Africans. The hostages were freed when Libya paid over \$20 million in ransom. Under the command of Khadaffy Janjalani, the militants used speedboats again on May 27, 2000, in venturing 300 miles across the Sulu Sea to attack a tourist resort on Palawan. It kidnapped 20 people, including three Americans. In June

⁴⁰ Mark, Turner, "Terrorism and Secession in the Southern Philippines: The Rise of Abu Sayyaf," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 17, No. 1, June 1995, pp 1-18.

2001, it announced that it had beheaded one of the Americans, Guillermo Sobero of Corono, California. The US State Department put the group on its list of terrorist organisations soon after September 11, 2001, until January 2002, when ASG held Martin and Gracia Burnham of Wichita, Kansas, and Deborah Yap, a Filipino nurse as hostage. The AFP deployed 160 military advisers, complete with intelligence and logistic support, including 300 Navy Seabees in combating the terrorists.⁴¹ While, the highest officials denied any Bin Laden connection, in early June the Philippine Army, not yet trained by the US troops, chanced upon the group, returned fire in exchange of fire, which killed Martin Burnham and Deborah Yap, wounding Gracia Burnham, who called her abductors “common criminals” and declined to accept that they had anything to do with Islamic ideology.⁴²

AFP-US Programme To Combat ASG

The basic Philippine policy since August 2000, has been constant military pressure on Abu Sayyaf. In September 2000, President Estrada ordered AFP to commit over 1,500 troops into Jolo to conduct operations against the militant units that had taken foreign hostages in Malaysia. President Arroyo deployed some 4,500 troops to Basilan in 2001. The AFP estimated in December, 2001 that Abu Sayyaf strength on Basilan was reduced to 100 and about 500 on Jolo.⁴³ The US special forces instructors

⁴¹ Peter, Chalk, & Angel, Rabasa, op, cit., p.104.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Vitu, Manter, Danguilan & Glenda, M.,Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism & Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000) pp 220-75.

are due to move to Jolo this year, in an extension of the Balikpapan joint training and advisory programme clearly targeted on ASG remnants. On many occasions, the ASG has been described as decimated, a 'spent force' but often it has shown a phoenix-like quality of rising from the ashes of defeat. Its adherents might even adopt a new name. The AFP operations have been limited by several factors;

a) the mountainous jungle terrain of the two islands are pockmarked by underground caves, b) Although recent surveys of Muslims in Basilan suggest that many are disillusioned by Abu Sayyaf's violence tactics, but generally the support civilians form a major threat in accumulating information. c) the AFP suffers from limited military equipment, including absence of night vision surveillance equipment, shortage of helicopters, mortars, naval patrol craft, and even basic necessities like military boots, d) Internal corruption, nepotism within the AFP, as the failed encirclement of the Burnhams and the Filipino nun in Lamitan (2001) exhibited. Several AFP units pulled out of their positions without explanation, allowing the Abu Sayyaf unit to break out of the encirclement. A Catholic priest and other witnesses charged that the militants had bribed AFP commanders. This incident has called upon the Philippine Senate Committee to investigate the Lamitan incident thoroughly, e) The safety of the hostages has itself become a big concern. In 2000, the European governments reportedly pressured the Philippine government to refrain from "excessive" military operations. The Arroyo administration officials, including the AFP commanders were

restrained from air bombing and using artillery and mortars out of concern over the safety of the hostages, f) The AFP deployment of most of its forces in the Southern Philippines in the broader areas of Mindanao are dominated by the MILF and the MNLF. Only a small percentage of the Filipino troops are committed against the Abu Sayyaf. g) A final constraint is the danger of AFP operations producing a large numbers of civilian casualties, or displaced civilians. The Estrada administration came under criticism in 2000, over reports that the AFP offensive on Jolo caused civilian casualties and displacement among the islands more than 200,000 residents.⁴² The Arroyo administration is negotiating with Indonesia and Malaysia to form a mechanism for trilateral cooperation against terrorist groups. Some successes in this respect has been secured, as Malaysia has increased its naval patrols in the Sulu Sea, followed by Nur Misuari's arrest in November 2001. However, following the US deployment of troops from January 2002, it would undoubtedly supply the AFP with US military equipment, their advanced training and advice, as it would further revive the Philippine-US security alliance, since the signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1998.⁴³ As far as implications are concerned, successful military operations against the Abu Sayyaf would extend US military successes beyond Afghanistan, reinforcing Bush administration's message to governments everywhere, to prevent terrorism on all fronts. If the primary US objective is

⁴² Larry, Nicksch, 'Abu Sayyaf: Target of the Philippine-US-Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,' *CRS Report for Congress*, January 25, 2002, pp.1-8.

⁴³ M. Thomas, McKenna, *Muslim Rulers & Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Philippines* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998)

the rescue of hostages, the US military has to limit its role to precise operations, targeting the Abu Sayyaf Group on Basilan, with restraint on the use of bombing and other artilleries. Training and advice would probably focus on rescue operation on the ground and prior surveillance and intelligence operations.⁴⁴

In case of an equal priority to destroy Abu Sayyaf, US military activities would be broader in scope, to be carried on Jolo and areas of Western Mindanao, including maritime surveillance and maritime patrol. Another implication relates to confining the mission to Abu Sayyaf. As the Bush administration wants to avoid military involvement with the MILF, should the government truces with the MILF and the MNLF collapse, the AFP would undoubtedly use the military equipment, US training and advice committed against the MILF and the MNLF. US military personnel involved in clashes with MILF or MNLF units in close proximity with the ASG, use of aerial bombing or artillery, such policy deliberations on the part of the Americans contains the high risk of affecting large elements of the Muslim population of Mindanao, resulting in heavy civilian casualties.⁴⁵ The CRS Report for Congress on counter-terrorism, highlights the risk of severe political backlashes, in the neighbouring countries of Indonesia and

⁴⁴ Paul, Wolfowitz, "Making Friends, Taking Aims," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 20, 2002, pp 22-24.

⁴⁵ Larry, Niksch, 'Abu Sayyaf: Target of the Philippine-US-Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,' *CRS Report for Congress*, January 25, 2002, pp.1-8.

Malaysia, in case the US military role expands beyond mission against the Abu Sayyaf, with prolonged stay in the Philippines.⁴⁶

Southern Philippines is a classic example of a guerilla country, where more than the topography, what mainly sustains each of the main insurgent groups- be it the MILF, the MNLF, the Maoist or the Abu Sayyaf, is that they operate amid populations sympathetic to them, where bonds of a deep historical injury keeps getting worse as the years and decades go by. John Gersham in his article, ‘ Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?,’⁴⁷ rightly points out that, even if al Qaeda operatives in Southeast Asia are neutralised and Abu Sayyaf is crushed, the underlying conditions that facilitated the emergence of these movements- namely weak states unable to enforce basic law and order, the economic marginalisation and political subordination of large segments of their population will continue to exist. Given the present political context in the Philippines, any notion of granting independence to the south is out of question. The existence of a Catholic majority, which firmly upholds the vision of a fully unified and integrated Philippine Republic, ensures that no government would receive an electoral mandate to accede to the secessionist demands of a largely isolated Muslim minority. Notwithstanding; Mindanao’s enormous economic potential, the Manila government has been quite sluggish in this respect. To this, may be added the weaknesses in local governments, the porousness of borders, and the

⁴⁶ Renato, Cruz, De, Castro, “ Special Relations and Alliance Politics in Philippine US- Security Relations, 1990-2002, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2003, pp 137-164.

⁴⁷ John, Gersham, “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, 2002, pp 60-138.

absence of international cooperation, lax immigration controls, all of which has made it easy to breed terrorism. As of February 1, 2002, the Philippines and Indonesia has both been named by the International Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering as non-cooperative in efforts to fight the crime. Thailand passed its first anti-money laundering law only in 1999, Philippines passed its version in 2001; while Indonesia has yet to enact any such legislation. Besides, money laundering and illegal transfers, other kinds of crime also remain rampant in the region. Acts of piracy in Southeast Asia increased significantly after the end of the Cold War, reducing the presence of warships in the area, sending locals scrambling for alternative sources of income.⁴⁸ Indonesian waters, for instance, are now deemed to be the most dangerous in the world. Although, poverty may be the source of crimes as piracy, groups like the Laskar Jihad, the Abu Sayyaf and the JI, has successfully exploited the relative failure of the Indonesian and Philippines states to meet the basic needs of the people. In both Thailand and the Philippines, Muslim regions have the worst poverty, income inequality, infant and maternal mortality, and literacy rates- all of which has made recruitment easier.⁴⁹ Although Manila granted autonomy in the 1980s, but a combination of factors- including Manila's failure to provide the autonomous government with adequate resources or massive inequalities in access to land and natural resources, as well as corruption and incompetence

⁴⁸ David, Martin, Jones & Mike, Smith, "Identity Politics in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 2000, pp 28-33.

⁴⁹ Michael, Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia* (Routledge, London, 1998)

on part of the local administration has frustrated public expectations. The US military role thus has wide political role to play in Mindanao. The Bush administration might have to face sentimental, social issues underlying Filipino Muslim discontent: the scope and extent of autonomy of the Muslim populated region; the role of Islam in education; and economic development issues in the region. US involvement in these issues has already been evidenced by Bush's promise to President Arroyo in November 2001 of US \$55 million in development aid for Mindanao.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Larry, Niksch, op, cit., 'Abu Sayyaf: Target of the Philippine-US-Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,' *CRS Report for Congress*, January 25, 2002, pp1-8.

Chapter II

AL QAEDA'S FINANCIAL, ARMS NETWORK IN MINDANAO

Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, Osama –Bin Laden's brother-in-law is known to have opened branches of Islamic charities in the Zamboanga City, to funnel money to the ASG and other al-Qaeda cells located in the Philippines. The Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum blueprints is unlikely to end terrorist financing in the country. Criminal actors have devised multiple means to generate, store and transfer funds, including network nodes; narcotics and weapons sale; charity use and abuse; corporate vehicle manipulations, financial benefactor and the legitimate banking system.¹

Financial activities to support terrorism in the Philippines have included the misuse of charitable institutions as conduits: extortion's, kidnapping and ransom-taking in addendum. The International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) and the Mercy International directly funds the ASG, MILF and several other breakaway factions in Manila. Khalifa is also known to head the International Relations and Information Centre (IRIC), the Benevolence Corporation (BIC) and the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide (IWW) which reproduces radical Islamic publications in the country. Other businesses run by Khalifa include the Dawl Imam Al Shafee Incorporation, E.T Dizon Travels and the Khalifa Trading Industries with some of the most prominent and influential Philippine citizens serving on their boards. From

¹ Simon, Reve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama Bin Laden & The Future of Terrorism* (London, Andre Deutsche, 1999) pp.i-xx.

the Philippines, Khalifa established links with Islamists in Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Russia, Malaysia, the UAE, Syria, Pakistan, Albania, the Netherlands and Morocco, enabling ASG to develop relationships with terrorist groups throughout the Middle East and Asia.²

Bin Laden, MILF, ASG Nodal Network

Actually Bin Laden developed links with the MILF and the ASG early in the 1990s, after he met several hundred Moros who arrived in Afghanistan from Mindanao. His special relationship with Abdurajak Janjalani made him send Khalifa to establish an al Qaeda presence in the Philippines. At Bin Laden's request even Ramzi Yousef traveled to the Philippines with Janjalani between December 1991 and May 1992, to train ASG terrorists in the Madin camp of Basilan. Together with his cell members Abdul Hakim Murad and Wali Khan Amin Shah, Yousef rented an apartment (1993) in Manila where they prepared to launch Oplan Bojinka. Its principal elements were to assassinate Pope John Paul II, US President Bill Clinton, President Fidel Ramos, Catholic churches, vital government installations, and bomb 11 US passenger aircraft flying over the Asia-Pacific region.³ But on 6 January, 1995, as Yousef was preparing a device from the chemicals he had purchased, a fire broke out in his apartment promoting a police raid. The encrypted data on his personal computer revealed Bojinka, resulting in Murad and Shah's arrest. Yousef slipped the

² Rohan, Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda* (C.Hurst & Company, London, 2002) pp 167-198.

³ Rohan, Gunaratna, "Al-Qaeda's Infrastructure in Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 2002, pp18-20.

net, escaping to Peshawar where he stayed in Osama's House of Martyrs 'Beit- Asheehada'.⁴ He planned to get to Thailand in order to bomb the US Embassy, before betrayal within his own accomplices resulted in his arrest. Being extradited to the US on eleven charges relating to the WTC bombing in 1993, Yousef is serving a 240-year sentence in America's most secure prison currently. Coded files in Yousef's computer unwrapped Bojinka. The plan was to; plant a bomb on a United Airlines flight from Manila to Seoul. The plane would have continued toward San Francisco from Seoul, but would have exploded in mid air. The second bomb would be planted on a Delta flight from Seoul to Taipei, which would explode on the continuation of the flight to Bangkok. Mirqas would leave the plane in Taipei and fly to Singapore, and then home to Karachi.

Similarly "Markoa" would plant a bomb on a Northwest flight from Manila to Tokyo. It would continue toward Chicago, but would explode over the Pacific. Then he would board a Northwest flight from Tokyo to Hong Kong and plant a bomb that would set to explode a day later over the Pacific on the way to New York. He would later fly to Singapore and then back to Pakistan

"Obald" would plant a bomb on a United flight from Singapore to Hong Kong, set to detonate in mid flight on the next leg of its journey to Los Angeles. He would board a United flight from Hong Kong to Singapore, and plant a bomb that was to go off on the return leg to Hong Kong.

⁴ Ahmed, Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (Yale University Press, 2000).

“Malbos” would fly from Taipei to Tokyo on the United and would plant a bomb that would go off as the plane heads to Los Angeles. He himself would fly from Tokyo to Hong Kong and place a bomb aboard another United flight that would go off as the plane flies from Tokyo to New York.

“Zyod” planned to fly from Bangkok to Tokyo on a United flight, placing a bomb set to explode over the Pacific as the flight nears Los Angeles. He would fly to Taipei via Seoul and place a bomb on a second United flight before flying back to Bangkok on a United flight and place a third bomb. He would escape to Karachi, while the second and third planes are set to explode on their way to the US.⁵

Wali Khan Amin Shah’s court trials exposed a neat network of monetary flow among the terrorists. Shah admitted funneling money to Adam Sali, an alias used by Ramzi Yousef through a Philippine bank account that belonged to Syrian-born Omar Abu Omar. Shah laundered financial inflows through bank accounts that belonged to his Filipino girlfriend, female employees of local retail food outlets and bar hostesses.⁶

Yousef also corresponded with Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (one of the suspected operation chiefs of the September 11, 2001 attacks), requesting him financial support, who in turn wrote to an anonymous potential financier seeking monetary support. Mohammed who attended the meeting in Malaysia in January 2000, (along with the two September 11 hijackers,

⁵ Rohan, Gunaratna, op, cit., p. 200

⁶ Amin Shah’s Financial Network [www.philstar.com/2003/ Amin Shah/html](http://www.philstar.com/2003/Amin%20Shah/html).

Khalid al-Midhar, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Mustafa Ahmed al-Hiwasi), traveled widely in Southeast Asia in the 1990s before he moved to the Philippines to help his nephew to launch Bojinka. Al-Hiwasi has been described as a Bin Laden financial operative who wired and received money from the United Arab Emirates to September 11 hijackers in the US. Mohammed's recent arrest in Rawalpindi is supposed to open new bolt-holes to nab more terrorist, as Western intelligence agencies believe that the Kuwaiti-born Mohammed was No. 3 in the al Qaeda hierarchy after Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁷ One such breakthrough was the arrest of Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi in Manila by the Philippine Police, for activities that linked him to multiple terrorists attacks in the country.

According to the Philippine police press statement, AL-Ghozi was convicted by a court for illegal possession of firearms and sentenced to ten years in prison. Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, a Singaporean businessman of Malaysian descent (who held a position on the Jemaah Islamiah's regional shura) acted a financing conduit to AL-Ghozi, in addition to directing him to initiate contacts with the MILF. AL-Ghozi reportedly phoned Bafana after explosions rocked Manila in December 2000. Al-Ghozi had opened a bank account in Zamboanga. In 1999 he established links with Mukhlis Yunos, an explosives expert linked to the MILF. Bafana provided Al-Ghozi with \$5,000 to transfer to Yunos, who had requested financing support for bombings in Manila. During November 2001, apparently in preparation for

⁷ Ahmed, Rashid, "The Net Tightens on Al Qaeda Cells," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 13, 2003, pp 12-14.

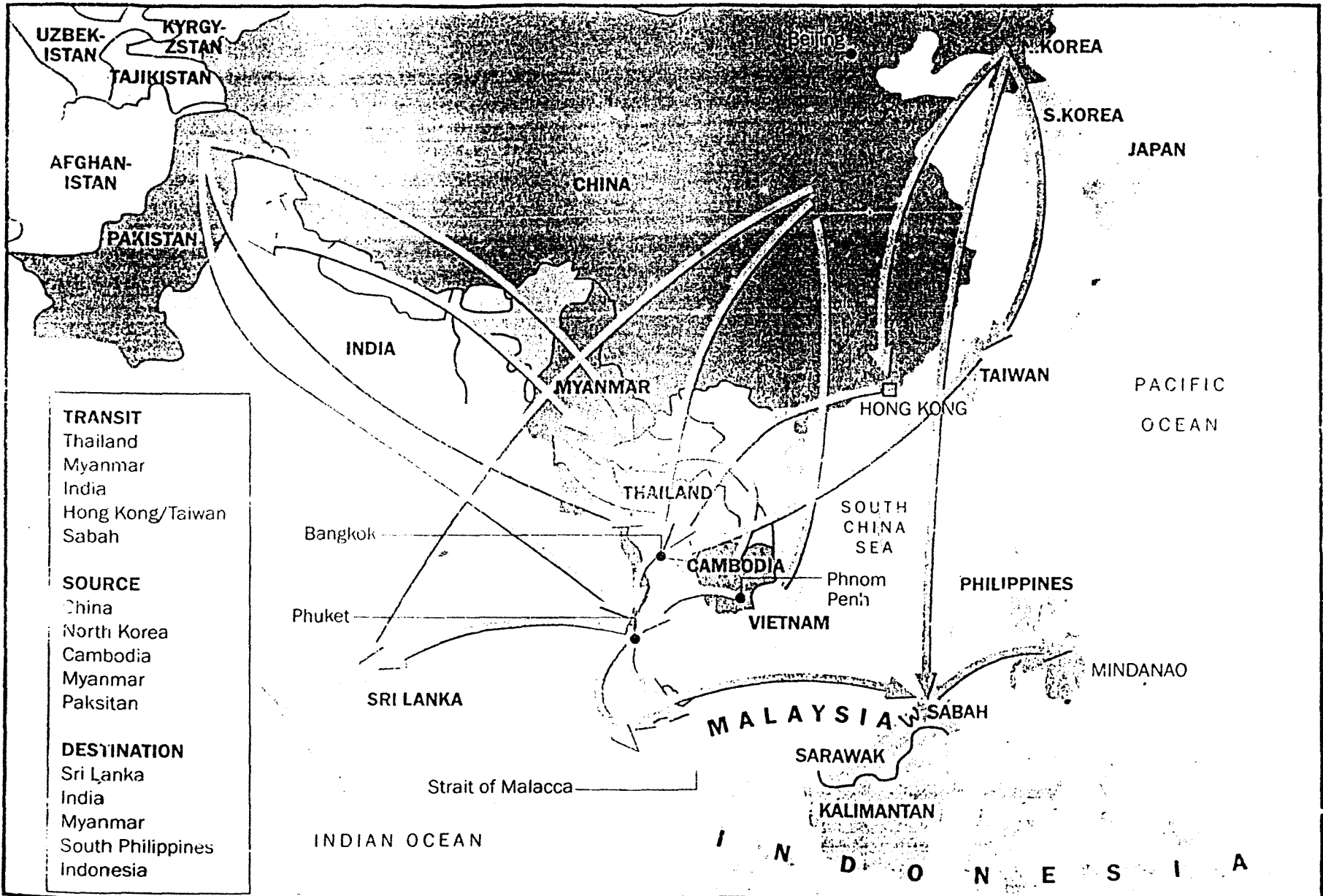
the Singaporean bombing plot, Bafana diverted \$18,000 to Al-Ghozi for the procurement of explosives. Bafana's arrest in Singapore (December 2001), opened another network surrounding a Jordanian named Falah Awward al-Dhalain. Al-Dhalain financed Islamic groups in the Philippines through the manipulation of a school for Muslim converts in the northern province of Pangasinan. The money was apparently directed to finance training and weapons procurement for the ASG.⁸

ASG-al Qaeda Logistic Support

Whenever an opportunity arose, the Abu Sayyaf under the penultimate instructions of Osama Bin Laden has sought the release of Yousef, Murad, Shah, and other jailed by the US government in connection with the New York airliner bombings. ASG continues to kidnap or kill foreigners, in lieu of the release of these al Qaeda terrorists, their strategy encompassing huge ransom deals to procure more weapons and logistic support. The ASG reportedly gained access to \$20m during 2000, and another \$5.5m in a separate deal when negotiations were brokered to buy the freedom of kidnapped foreigners. Although media accounts, alluded Libya as playing a role in the release of hostages, Philippine officials blamed the ASG of receiving some \$300,000 for the release of Martin Burnham (January 2002). Burnham's death alerted Philippine monetary authorities, and they increased their monitoring of bank accounts after surges in the level

⁸ Brian Joyce, "Terrorist Financing in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2002, pp 23-25.

SMALL ARMS TRAFFICKING ROUTES IN SOUTH ASIA



of peso and dollar were noticed in Basilan, Jolo, Sulu and the Zamboanga city.⁹

The ASG is also suspected of maintaining protection rackets against residents, small businesses, officials and teachers as a means of revenue. These ‘revolutionary’ taxes are usually demanded on a monthly basis, protection fees being assigned through letters to Basilan officials. Arms cache is sent to the ASG through a typical system- in trucks, on the back of camels and even by post to their headquarter in Basilan. Harakat al-Mujahideen, a Pakistani militant group with ties to al Qaeda moves weapons to the ASG by using boats owned by the Sri Lankan Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). ASG members then transfer a portion of the arms to various Indonesian groups. In recent years, Cambodia has emerged as the lynchpin “where LTTE officers have been sourcing their weapon purchases.” The standoff weaponry, notably small multiple-barrel rocket launchers systems and mortars are easily supplied by the Chinese arms market in Cambodia. While Cambodia is the hub of the LTTE’s East Asian market, Thailand continues to serve as the most important country for trans-shipment of munitions and coordination of logistics. Most consignments appear to be shipped through Myanmar to Thailand, as MILF and ASG militants are known to have purchased sizeable quantities of arms through

⁹ Ibid.

dealers in Phuket and Ranong, most of which have been smuggled back to Mindanao via the porous Sabah border.¹⁰

ASG-Al Qaeda Structural Organisation

The ASG structural organisation, resembles a typical al Qaeda network. The al Qaeda network is headed by the emir-general, (represented by Osama Bin Laden), the Shura Majlis below it, and additional four committees- the military, religio-legal, finance and media reporting to the majlis. Similarly, the Abu Sayyaf organisational structure consisted of Abudrajak Janjalani at the top (regional emir), the hit squad, the demolition team, and the recruitment team immediately under him. The functional team consists of support, security, finance, supply, logistics recruitment and intelligence staffs, the territorial units being based in Tubuan, the Pilas island in Basilan, and the Zamboanga city.¹¹

<u>Al Qaeda Structural Organisation</u>	<u>ASG Structural Organisation</u>
↓	↓
Emir-General (Osama Bin Laden)	Regional Emir (Janjalani)
↓	↓
Shura-Majlis (consultative council)	Hit Squad, Demolition, Recruitment Team
	↓
	Territorial Units (based in Tubuan and Pilas Island)

Table : 3

¹⁰ Peter, Chalk, "Light Arms Trading in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2001, pp 42-45.

¹¹ Zacharya, Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol.24, No. 3, December 2002, pp 427-64.

Actually the ASG, MILF terrorist group's support and networks are compartmentalised. Only authorised persons from the operational cell maintain links with the support cells. Dependent on the mission, the support cell can be clandestine or semi-clandestine. Support cell members operate through innocuous political, human rights, socio-economic, welfare, humanitarian, educational and cultural organisations to maintain contact with their host communities. The support cell replenishes human losses and material losses, which is critical for maintaining organisational growth. The members of the support cell provide language skill, forged documents, safe houses, vehicles and other forms of assistance important for the success of the operation.¹²

MILF-ASG Financial Ties

As soon as ASG was identified by the PNP, al Qaeda strengthened its ties with the MILF support cells. Throughout the second half of the 1990s, al Qaeda ideology and finance penetrated the Islamic communities via the MILF network of domestic and Islamic NGOs. Abu Zubaydah, under the cover of MAK in Pakistan was in regular contact with Hashim Salamat, MILF Finance Committee chairman Yusof Alongan, and MILF's liaison officer in Manila, Abdul Nasser Nooh. At a military level, foreign instructors imparted specialised training to MILF members at Camp Abubakar. These included AL Maki Ragab, a Saudi, and Muhammad Gharib

¹² Anthony, Davis, "Philippine Army Prevents MILF Reorganisation," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2003, pp 16-21

Ibrahami Sayed Ahmed, an Egyptian. Sayed and Ragab staged a suicide attack on the Philippine army at Camp Siongco Awang, Cotabato City on October 14, 1997 with grenade launchers and M-16 assault rifles.¹³ After killing three Filipino soldiers and wounding ten civilians, both were shot dead. Two Algerian-born French nationals, suspected of being al Qaeda members and convicted for possession of explosive devices were deported to France by the Philippine authorities in December 1999.¹⁴ Throughout 2000-01, intelligence reports confirmed that al Qaeda members were entering the country in the guise of Islamic missionaries and charity workers. As surveillance at airports increased, many arrived by sea. The Philippine navy, the coastguard and the land forces lacked the capability to seal the waters off the southern coast of Mindanao effectively.¹⁵ However, in keeping with MILF policy, its officials always denied having links with the al Qaeda. Hashim Salamat went to the extent of stating that he had not heard the name al Qaeda, until in a rare interview to the BBC (7 February, 1999), Salamat acknowledged that Osama had given financial support to the Muslim guerillas, the money being used to build mosques and help poor Muslim communities.¹⁶

¹³ Rohan, Gunaratna, op, cit., p.207.

¹⁴ Sheehan, Deidie, "Philippine Held To Ransom," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 May, 2000, pp 20-21.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ James, F. Hoge, Jr. & Rose Gidon (eds.), *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001) pp 325-70.

Bin Laden and His Asian Network

Pan- Islamism, and not pan-Arabism has driven Bin Laden to form his Asian network. Since September 9/11 al Qaeda networks have disrupted in the West and East Africa significantly. Given its geographic proximity and the existence of numerous insurgent and rebel groups, along with a notable Muslim population, Southeast Asia has provided a logical hub for exploring the possibilities of expansion, support and presence of al Qaeda throughout the region. Three types of groups come under the direct tutelage of Osama Bin Laden: Groups fighting regimes led by Muslim rulers, which they believe are compromising Islamic ideals and interests (Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia); groups that are fighting regimes perceived as oppressing and repressing their Muslim populace (Kosovo, India and Indonesia); groups fighting regimes to establish their own Islamic state (Palestine, Chechnya, Dagestan and Mindanao).¹⁷

From his cave headquarters, Laden supervises a tangled web of financial entities, both his own and those of the Islamic movements. According to Western intelligence agencies, Laden's personal inherited fortune is estimated around US \$280-\$300 million. There is no distinct Bin Laden Inc or Zawahari Inc, but among the several interacting cores, the first core is the Amsterdam-Anvir-Luxembourg triangle. The bulk of the contribution and other transactions from the Persian Gulf are laundered through this core. Contributions from individuals and "other entities"

¹⁷ Phil, Hirschhorn, Rohan, Gunaratna, Ed. Blanche, and Stefan Leader, "Blowback," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 2001, pp 42-45.

throughout the Arabian peninsula are collected by two separate financial networks, one dominated by Kuwaiti and the other by Qatari businessmen. They route the money through area banks and London accounts. From there the money is transferred to a host of accounts in the triangle core, into a web of Luxembourg, Amsterdam, Anvir companies that can use the money.¹⁸

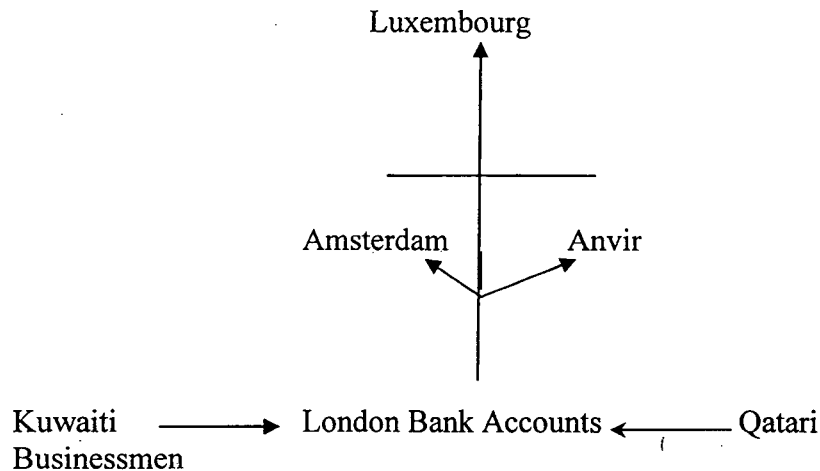


Figure 1: Diagram showing the Anvir-Amsterdam Network

The other main centres of Islamic terrorist activities are in Indonesia and Malaysia. Money from the Persian Gulf reaches here again through Qatar and Kuwait networks, as well as networks in Hadhramaut (in Yemen) and Italy. From the Indonesian and Malaysian hub, money gets channeled to MILF, Abu Sayyaf, JI, KMM and Thai militants. In addition, Laden maintains an interest in politically correct businesses, to keep Sudan, Yemen and Afghanistan economically afloat. To do this he maintains large deposits in key local banks and heavy investments through covers, fronts,

¹⁸ Peter, Bergen, *Inside Secret World of Osama Bin Laden* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001) pp55.

partnerships in a wide variety of local companies and businesses. A few months earlier, Taliban's annual income from the drug trade was estimated at US\$ 8 billion. It is alleged that Bin Laden laundered them through the Russian mafia- in return for a commission of 10-15%, providing an annual income of about a billion dollars.¹⁹

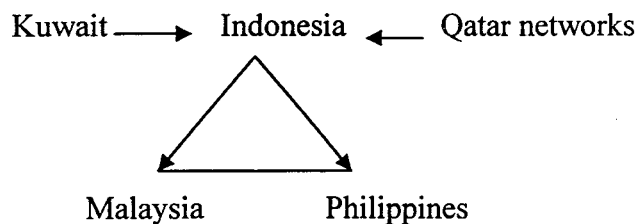


Figure 2: Diagram showing the Financial Inflow to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

The September 11 cell funding flowed unimpeded to the terrorists who attacked the WTC and the Pentagon, without the discovery of any assistance from corrupt officials, patterns of suspicious transactions, the flagging of large scale cash deposits, or effective mechanisms for correspondent banking. At least \$325,000 was entered into approximately 35 US accounts without generating currency transaction or suspicious activity reports to the Treasury Department, with primary transactional reliance coming from 14 Sun Trust Bank accounts. In fact, Al Qaeda's financial arrangements display several noteworthy characteristics:

- Accountability between members;

¹⁹ Ibid.

- Awareness of enforcement techniques and understanding of institutional obligations for reporting financial transactions;
- Diversity of dollar generation;
- Strategic flexibility
- Variant modes of money transfer, and
- The exploitation of vulnerabilities across specific corporate and financial sector platforms.²⁰

The Financial Task Force on Money laundering, comprising 31 members includes both Indonesia and the Philippines on its Non Cooperative Countries and Terrorist List. The USA's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network has an active circular network that stresses the deficiencies and risks of investment in the Philippines. Malaysia received a favourable joint review from the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering and Offshore Group of Banking supervisors during September 2001, although an overview by the US department of State highlights a number of avenues susceptible to illegal exploitation. Apparently, the complex links between multiple regional groupings and al-Qaeda requires a detailed analysis of terrorist-related crimes and the financial transactions that preceded them, as well as the analysis of past attacks to build a comprehensive assessment with present day vulnerabilities.²¹ In December 2001, the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision met to discuss terrorist

²⁰ Brian, Joyce, op, cit., "Terrorist Financing in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2002, pp 23-25.

²¹ Manila Declaration on The Prevention and Control of Transnational Crime [http:// www.aseansec.org/564.htm](http://www.aseansec.org/564.htm).

financing as part of the wider war on terrorism. The resulting document released in April 2001, outlined information gateways accessible to authorities in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, tracing the need to take the following measures:

- Signing treaties for Mutual Legal Assistance;
- Imposing of financial Intelligence Units; and
- Enhancing supervisory channel coordination throughout the banking sector by supporting existing frameworks with a Memorandum of Understanding.

The Basel Committee stated, that “the overall fight against terrorism needs coordination among prosecutors, financial intelligence units and banking supervisors in affected jurisdictions.....many of the participants in the meeting felt that the work needed to be done to co-ordinate between interested government bodies, within a jurisdiction and across national boundaries. Unfortunately, Southeast Asian governments currently lack this coordination.”²²

However, at the Seventh ASEAN Summit in Bandar Seri Bagawan, the head of the Southeast Asian states issued the 2001 Asean Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism. The May 2002, Asean Ministerial Meeting on terrorism convened in Kuala Lumpur ended with a communiqué for joint action. An outstanding part of that communiqué was the formulation of a Work Programme that would apart from dealing with more general

²² Ibid.

transnational crime issues, has undertaken projects to combat terrorism in the region. Moreover, the ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to dangerous Drugs (ACCORD) Plan of Action Task Forces, held in Bali (November 2001), has designated 2002-03 as the "ASEAN Drugs Awareness Year." ASEAN is working closely with NGOs and the mass media to support the drug awareness campaign. As in a recent statement President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo asserted "terrorism could strike anywhere at anytime. It is for us to constantly keep up our guard and be responsible for another's safety. All the perpetrators will be brought to justice. Nothing in our fight against terrorism will deter us from punishing terrorists and bringing them to justice."²³

In analysing al Qaeda's Southeast Asian networks, two issues should be born in mind: the regional context and the international context. Geographically, Southeast Asia has one of the largest concentrations of Muslim population in the world. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei are Muslim majority countries, while the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Cambodia are home to a visible Muslim minority.²⁴ Although Islam distinguishes Muslims from the non-Muslims, but in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Southeast Asia, such a distinction is quiet absurd. In Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, represented the Muslim religious

²³ Acimovic, Ljubivoje, "Confronting International Terrorism," *Review of International Affairs*, April-June 2002, No. 1106, pp 50-51.

²⁴ Nakamura, Mitsuo, Sharon Siddique & Omar, Farouk, Bajunid (eds.), *Islam & Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001) pp 177-202.

organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama, before taking over as the President of the country.

In Malaysia, political Islam, (which has always been important in the country's system of parliamentary democracy), has been strengthened following the impressive performance of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party in the general election held in 1999. Likewise, in Thailand and Cambodia, the Muslims have assumed unprecedented degree of public prominence. Between 1995-2000, there were 14 Muslim parliamentarians and several Muslim senator in the Thai Parliament, while two senators, each representing the Funcinpec (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia) and the CPP have been included in the Cambodian Parliament. The Philippines, inspite of being overwhelmingly Catholic, elected Nur Misuari as the governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. Muslims in Southeast Asia live and operate in overlapping contexts, as inhabitants of the region, as citizens of their respective countries, as members of different political parties, as members of professional bodies and voluntary associations, maintaining overlapping identities in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance with the others. Thus, it would be utterly wrong to view the Muslims as a separate, isolated, compartmentalised group, strictly orthodox and Islamic in faith.²⁵

However, in order to comment on radical Islam, this privileged 'few' has to be separated from the deprived 'many'. A keen observation will show

²⁵ S. Rodan, *The Prospects for Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997).

that where-ever the state has been negligent, where economic inequality, illiteracy, and gross deprivation looms high, there ethnic conflict has made its durable presence. Whether in Aceh, Mindanao, or in Southern Thailand, state negligence has percolated into the psyche of these groups. A fear of extinction, the question of survival, has sought to make these groups look for other means of dominance.²⁶

Moreover, weak governance, unused natural resources, corruption has never let the big slices to reach the truly needy people. In Mindanao itself, even if billions of pesos of aid are poured into the Moro area, the money would make no significant impact, because the social infrastructure is severely damaged from inside. This money would most probably be used by those with access to the state's resources, or those who are powerful enough to undertake self-interested projects.²⁷

Internationally, the debate on the clash between Christianity and Islam, has attracted attention of the scholars for quite sometime. Every incident, from Yugoslavia to Kashmir, was been viewed from this perspective. September 9/11 practically demonstrated this fact. America went bizarre. In full strength the US has started its campaign against al Qaeda and 'the axis of evil'. As soon as Iraq, Afghanistan got targeted, their borders sealed, acting governments overthrown, there has been a slight shift in militant Islamic movement. The new area of action has gradually shifted

²⁶ Zara, Dian, "September 11 and Pacific Asia's Security," *Asian Defence Journal*, September 2002, pp 4.

²⁷ Carle, Lande, "Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Accomodation and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 33, No.4, 1999, pp89-117.

to the Southeast Asian theatre. In the face of a disintegrating Indonesia, a crumbling ASEAN, weak governments, and porous borders, it has been rather easy for extremist Islam to make quick inroads into the region. Militant Islam has percolated those places in Southeast Asia, where socio-economic faultlines exist, along with mass-scale deprivation fostered by the state.²⁸ Abu Sayyaf's, PULO and new PULO are examples of such faultlines where the likes of al Qaeda, Laskar Jihad has found safe houses to rest and spread their tentacles. In Indonesia, Malaysia the problem is a bit different. Here militant Islamic groups like the JI or the PAS, are motivated by Islamic thoughts that transcend beyond their national frontiers. In these places, the numerical presence of the Muslims, their strong political hold in the administration, has corrupted their minds, pampered their wants, making them greedy for more wealth and power, that can only be assured by recourse to more militant Islamic thoughts and activities. Experts have expressed concern over the spillover effects of such derogative militancy in the region. Already, Ramzi Yousef's arrest in the Philippines along with his other cell members have exposed the intricate financial network, weaponry, arms cache, and illegal trafficking that has cropped up in the region, resulting in troubled relation among member nations. Philippines accusation of Malaysia sponsoring the terrorist insurgents in Mindanao, following their contention over Sabah, while Malaysia suspects that the hundreds of thousands of Indonesian migrants in the country, includes many Acehnese

²⁸ Pierre, P., Liezze, " Civil Society & Regional Security: Tensions and Potentials in Post-Crisis Southeast Asia, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 22, No. 3, December 2000, pp551-567.

suspected of links with secessionist organisations in Indonesia.²⁹ Under such circumstances, scholars have proposed the need of civil societies in the Southeast Asian conflict prone areas. Civil society, defined here to include NGOs, independent research organisations, and organised institutions. Most NGOs that began as traditional, religious, and welfare organisations, later moved into developmental and other issue-related areas, that has created news jobs, income-generating methods for the unemployed youth. In Indonesia, for instance, the number of NGOs ranges between 4000-6000. In Thailand, there are 8,408 general non-profit associations and 2,966 foundations registered with the National Cultural Commission. In the Philippines, upto 1999 there were 14,398 NGOs and People's organisation.³⁰ As such NGO movements have been stimulated by international organisations like the UNICEF, UNHCR, UNIFEM, WHO and UNFPA, as they hold the key to normalise the economic disparity in the disputed areas to some extent. However, Rodan in his recent work entitled, *The Prospects for Civil Society In Southeast Asia (published in 1997)*, claims that unless a liberal civil society is established in Southeast Asia, major sections of the society would remain politically marginalised.³¹ It is clear that new state-sponsored and state-administered social safety nets, without hampering the traditional safety nets, have to be created to reinforce social cohesion among

²⁹ Peter, Chalk & Angel Rabasa, *Indonesia's Transformation and the Stability of Southeast Asia* (New York: Rand Publication, 2001) pp185-70.

³⁰ David, B. Dewitt, Carolina, G. Hernandez, (eds.), *Development and Security in Southeast Asia*, (Ashgate Publishers, Vol.II, 2003) pp206-226.

³¹ Rodan, *Prospects for Civil Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1997) pp 4.

the ethnic groups in the region. Such safety nets can only be created in a steady-state subsistence economy, as there is a direct relationship between social cohesion and economic growth in Southeast Asia.³²

³² Sharon, Siddique, "Social Cohesion and Social Conflict in Southeast Asia," in Nat.J, Colletta, Teck, Ghee, Lim, & Anita Kelles-Vittanen, *Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia* (Washington, D.C, The World Bank, 2001) pp17-42.

Chapter Three

GOVERNING MINDANAO: FROM MARCOS TO GLORIA MACAPAGAL ARROYO

Joseph Estrada embarked on an all-out-war policy on the impoverished south. In contrast President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has promised a 'mini Marshall Plan' in order to kick start economic growth in the potentially rich, but poverty-stricken Mindanao.

From Ferdinand Marcos (1965-86) to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001-till date), the Philippine state has dwindled between conflicts over the identity of the nation-state, over regime legitimacy, and socio-economic inequality, that has created tension between the state and the populace at large. This limited coercive and administrative reach of the state is manifest, according to Christopher Collier, in the continued prevalence of private armed forces, rebel guerillas, oligarchic politicians and paramilitary troops particularly prevalent in the countryside.¹

National security in the Philippines, since the time of President Marcos, has actually evolved from a highly state-centred notion to a more society-centred approach. From a historical perspective, the most extensive political units in the archipelago, since the arrival of the Spanish colonisers were loose groupings of villages (*barangay*) along with several Muslim

¹ Noel, M., Morada, and Christopher, Collier, "The Philippine: State Versus Society?," in Alagappa Muthiah, (ed.), *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) pp 549-575.

sultanates. Under the Spanish, feudal land grants established a pattern of decentralised power, and the state came to be viewed as a source of patronage and an instrument for plundering society. The intensification of export agriculture under the Americans, gave rise to a landed oligarchy whose position depended on access to state power, the interests of the state and oligarchy being intimately intertwined. Soon after independence in 1946, “national” security of the country, came to mean the security of landed interests.² Rather than undertaking substantive land reform, the state combined repression with token reforms, encouraging peasants to resettle from the overcrowded northern islands to the sparsely populated Mindanao frontier. As indigenous Muslims were displaced by this historic migration, constant deprivation resulted in the emergence in the 1970s of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Nur Misuari.

Formally structured around a loose two-party system, the faction actually rested upon chains of patron-client ties extending down into the rural power bases of landed politicians. As the commercialisation of agriculture accelerated with growing integration into global markets, patronage ties weakened and coercion intensified. Militarisation, centralisation, and cronyism over the ensuing 13 years undermined the security that followed Marcos’s ouster in 1986.

² Ibid.

Security Under Marcos

During his term Marcos embarked upon a “revolution from the centre.” In 1972, he justified the martial law, asserting that it was needed to combat “the threat posed by the growth of rebellion and subversion”³ both from the left and right, as well as the secessionist movement in the South. Ideally, the kind of social change Marcos envisaged, promised to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor ‘simply for the sake of social stability’. In practice, however, his regime failed to achieve its stated goal, because political order and stability were given priority at the expense of basic individual rights and freedom. Corruption, militarisation, and cronyism spurred continuing communist and Muslim insurgency, in the face of a steadily declining economy. Gross National Product declined from an average 6.3% (1975-79) to 1.3 % in 1980-84. By the time Marcos was forced into exile (February 1986), the Philippines’ foreign debt had surged close to \$30 billion, with much of its “behest loan” in favour of Marcos’s family and his close associates.⁴

Diplomacy supplemented the military approach, in the case of the Muslim secessionist problem. Against the “total war” policy adopted against the MNLF and its related groups, (whereby more than half of the AFP was deployed in Mindanao and Sulu in the mid-1970s), Marcos complemented the military approach with social and economic instruments, in an effort to

³ David, Rosenberg, (ed.), *Marcos and Martial Law in the Philippines* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1979)

⁴ Ibid.

win some of the MNLF supporters to the government side. Arabic instruction was permitted in some public schools in the predominantly Muslim provinces; university scholarships for Muslims were expanded; a Code of Philippine Muslim Personal Law was promulgated; the Philippine Amanah Bank provided financial assistance to Muslim entrepreneurs on generous terms; Muslim title to ancestral land was recognised legally. Marcos also increased the appointments of Muslims to government positions.⁵

However, according to Christopher Collier, what pushed Marcos, to consider a negotiated settlement of the Muslim insurgency problem was pressure from the oil-rich Arab countries following the oil crisis of 1973. Marcos with the aim to make concessions to those countries, allowed several high ranking representatives from member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to visit the Philippines on a fact finding mission to Muslim provinces. The team concluded that only a political solution- not the military and socio-economic approach could bring an end to the conflict in the impoverished south. At its foreign ministers conference (Kuala Lumpur, 1974), OIC recommended that the Philippine government hold direct negotiations with MNLF chief Nur Misuari, as an earnest political effort to end the Muslim insurgency. The Tripoli agreement, under Libya's mediation (signed in December 1976), provided for an autonomous government in the 13 provinces and 11 cities of Muslim Mindanao. Within a

⁵ Teodore, A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines* (New York, Mentor Books, 1969) pp.165-182.

week, Marcos started making contradictory announcement about whether or not there would a plebiscite in the 13 provinces. In March 1977, Muammar Quadaffi personally intervened to strike a new agreement with Imelda Marcos.⁶ The second agreement called for a referendum on autonomy, but it was boycotted by a majority of Muslims who doubted Manila's good faith in implementing its terms. Marcos regime did attempt to improve his image throughout the Muslim world, but internally he failed to establish a political solution, which revived only after the accession of Corazon Aquino to power in 1986.⁷

Security Under Aquino

Riding on a wave of "people power," Aquino's priority was the reestablishment of the traditional democratic institutions. According to the 1987 constitution, separation of power among the three coequal branches of government was restored along with the system of checks and balances. An elaborate set of provisions to prevent the recurrence of abuses committed under Marcos was written off. Distinctly, Aquino's government policy towards the insurgents was shaped with two aims in mind, a) the offer of general amnesty to those who would lay down their arms, and b) talks with the rebel leadership to negotiate a cease-fire, ostensibly enabling her government to address their legitimate grievances. Initially the rift between Aquino and the military widened, as the President refused to act on the

⁶ Eric, Gutierrez, *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000) pp25-36.

⁷ W, K, Che, Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines & The Malays of Southern Thailand* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989) pp 230-50.

AFP's counterinsurgency proposals. But a series of abortive coups, open criticism of Aquino's policy towards the communist insurgents, restive coup threats by RAM rebels, induced the government to unleash a war in the south, even more violent and "total" than her predecessor.⁸

Although an agreement was signed with the MNLF in September 1986 following a meeting between Aquino and Misuari, Hashim Salamat of MILF and Dimas Pundato (of the MNLF Reformist Group) stressed upon autonomy as the basis of negotiation with the Aquino government. Talks with the MNLF collapsed in July 1987, following Aquino's call for "total war" against the insurgents. Misuari ordered his troops to take a defensive position vis-à-vis the AFP even as the Philippines Congress started to draft autonomy bills for Mindanao. "Low intensity conflict," as the counter guerilla warfare was fashionably dubbed, went hand in hand with higher artillery and aerial bombardment. The autonomy law which needed the ratification of both the Christian and Muslim residents, was hailed by less than 50% participation in the referendum held on November 19, 1989. Misuari was not satisfied and stated that the 1976 Tripoli agreement had promised a much fuller degree of autonomy for the Muslims than the autonomy proposed by Acquino. Christopher Collier and other scholars, have attributed Aquino's failure to resolve the insurgency problem the

⁸ Noel, M., Morada and Christopher, Collier, op, cit., p.576.

civilian-military relations that failed to stretch long term stability and peace in the region.⁹

Security Under Ramos

Acquino's administration was actually a transitional period. Once President Fidel Ramos came to power, he embarked on putting the Philippines on a "newly industrialised" status. Unlike the Marcos regime, which saw the need to solely rely on the state's military forces to bring about internal peace and order, Ramos regime stressed on rapid economic growth and development. Economic development under Ramos became a priority, a means to attain higher social equity and increased economic opportunities for the majority of Filipinos. Ramos administration pursued full deregulation of the economy by dismantling protectionist barriers and providing proper incentives and support to make the nation's industries more efficient and competitive in the world market. The banking, shipping, telecommunications, and insurance industries were opened to foreign competition that provided local industries more efficiency and better services. External security also loomed high in the government's agenda, following American military withdrawal from the Subic Naval Base and the Clark AirField in the late 1990s. The full realisation of the country's vulnerability to external threats came in February 1995, when the AFP

⁹ Mark, Turner, R.J. May, & Lulu Respall Turner (eds.), *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promises* (New Day Publishers, Quezon City, Philippines, 1992) pp i-xxi.

Major Military Operations, 1991

OPLAN TARABAY-SILAWAN
503rd IB, PA (5 battalions)
PNP Recom II
Marag Valley
Kalinga Apayao

OPLAN SALIDUMAY/NAKILALA
501st, 54th, 65th IB, PA
Zinundungan Valley
Cagayan

MILITARY OPERATIONS
42nd, 76th IB, PA
Gen. Luna
Quezon

SEARCH & DESTROY OPERATIONS
16th IB, PA
Barangay Bagong Silang
Camarines Sur

OPERATION SUMMER STORM
215th PNP Coy
Borgabong
Oriental Mindoro

OPLAN WHITE FLOWER
261st PNP Coy
Abra de Ilog
Occidental Mindoro

OPLAN SKYLARK
9th IB, PA
CAFGU
Salay Municipality

OPLAN IPITAN
57th, IB, PA
336th PC Coy
CAFGU, PUTIANS
Sta. Catalina
Negros Oriental

OPLAN ROLLING THUNDER
23rd, 28th, 29th, 36th, 8th IB, PA
Andap Valley
Surigao del Sur

OPLAN STRONGHOLD
36th, 8th, IB, PA
Prosperidad
Agusan del Sur

OPLAN RAINBOW
32nd, 33rd, 44th, 55th IB, PA
PAF, CAFGU
Zamboanga del Norte
Zamboanga del Sur
Misamis Oriental

Abbreviations:

IB - Infantry Battalion
Coy - Company
PA - Philippine Army
PAF - Philippine Airforce
PC - Philippine Constabulary
PNP - Philippine National Police
CAFGU - Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Units
Putians - Religious Fanatics/ Armed Vigilantes

Source: Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace, quoted in IBON 31 August 1992.

discovered a Chinese military build up on Mischief Reef, in the disputed Spratlys of the South China Sea.¹⁰

In dealing with the country's insurgency problem, Ramos announced four initiatives to promote "peace and security" under his government: a) Repealing the anti subversion law which effectively legalised the Communist People's Party (CPP) and similar organisations; the grant of amnesty to insurgents and military rebels; the creation of a National Unification Commission (NUC); and the review of all cases of rebels under detention or serving sentence. Even as the framework for a political settlement of the insurgency problem was being laid down by the government, military operations by the AFP against the rebels were sustained.¹¹ The 6th Infantry Division under General Raul Urgello used the device of "dirty tricks," in chasing MILF hideouts and its political supporters, resulting in over 300 deaths and millions of pesos of worth of civilian property being destroyed.¹² In October 1992, MNLF leader Nur Misuari returned to the Philippines from self-exile in Libya to negotiate with the government following exploratory talks in Tripoli. Misuari agreed to negotiations without precondition, and the Philippines was offered observer status to the OIC in the peace negotiations with the MNLF. Despite the factional divisions within the MNLF, the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf, the

¹⁰ A.B. Villanueva, "The Post Marcos: The State of Philippine Politics and Democracy During the Fidel Ramos Regime," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 14, No. 2, September 1992, pp.174-187.

¹¹ Eric, Gutierrez, op, cit., p. 355.

¹² Aijaz, Ahmad, "The War Against the Muslims," in Eric, Gutierrez (ed.), *Rebels, Warlords and Ulema* (Quezon City : Philippine Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000) pp 25-36.

government and the MNLF agreed to a full proof political settlement on September 2, 1996. The agreement provided for the setting up of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), with Nur Misuari as the elected governor of the 14 autonomous provinces in Mindanao. In April 1997, the Ramos administration announced an allocation of \$ 1.6 million for Mindanao to develop its infrastructure, power, housing, irrigation and livelihood projects in the region. To attract foreign investors to the ARMM, a number of business projects involving Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and member countries of the European Union were undertaken. However corruption, restricted independence, lack of legitimacy and the lack luster performance of Nur Misuari as governor undermined the SPCPD.¹³ Thus the May 1998 elections resulted in the defeat of several MNLF leaders. President Joseph Estrada was elected as the new President of the Philippines in the same year.

Security Under Estrada

Estrada hardened his military stand, as he viewed the peace negotiations as little more than a MILF ploy to gain time, and strengthen its military hand. As early as January 1999, Estrada echoed heavy military showdown on the insurgents. "If this peace process doesn't work we will have no choice but to crush the MILF."¹⁴ Estrada appointed General Edgardo Batenga in January 2000 on grounds of his ability to get effective results. In

¹³ Bertrand, Jacques, "Peace & Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement is Fragile," *Pacific Affairs*, 73, Issue (Spring 2000) pp 37.

¹⁴ Anthony, Davis, "Evolution in the Philippine War," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 2000, pp.28-33.

retaliation to AFP attacks, the MILF overthrew several towns in Maguindanao, Kauswagan and Bilal.¹⁵ The AFP was feeling frustrated over growing MILF guerilla strength, the status of no-go areas within the MILF camps, and the apparent lack of progress at the negotiating table. Estrada committed 1,500 troops in Jolo to conduct operations against the Abu Sayyaf units that had taken foreign hostages in Malaysia. MILF-AFP clashes also followed amidst reports that MILF troops were extorting travelers across the Narciso Ramos National Highway. Manila demanded that these posts be immediately dismantled. As tensions rose, an emergency meeting of a joint government-MILF Cease-Fire Coordinating Committee was held in Cotabato on 27 April, 2000.¹⁶ By midnight a compromise was hammered out to diffuse the situation, within hours the deal collapsed when a Marine Corps patrol advanced towards a MILF position near the Abu Bakr. Hostilities spread to Matanog, where by 29 April, AFP ground forces backed by artillery and airstrikes launched a full-scale road clearing operation along the highway.¹⁷ These operations during Estrada's regime highlighted the AFP's two pronged strategies- war to tame the MILF on the one hand, and then to return to negotiations on its own terms. This had resulted in an unsuccessful policy vis-à-vis the Moro problem. In Manila, the President was facing charges of corruption and perjury. Estrada was

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Trish, Saywell, "Common Ground," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 24, 2002, pp 20-23.

¹⁷ James, Hookway, "A Local War No More," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 12, 2003, pp14-16.

charged of receiving P 545M in kickbacks from illegal gambling, P130m from the diversion of tobacco excise duties, and around P 3.2bn in gifts and kickbacks deposited in the Jose Velarde account at Equitable PCI Bank. The court impeached Estrada, and vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was made the President of the country.¹⁸

Security Under President Arroyo (Feb 2001-till date)

Gloria Macapagal's tenure should be viewed from two perspectives, the pre-September 11 and the post September 11 dynamics. Arroyo's plan distinctly combines military action along with social development programmes in the impoverished South to win control of rebel areas from the MILF, while she expects the US forces to help AFP hunt down the much smaller Abu Sayyaf extremist group.¹⁹

Following the capture of Saifulla Yunos, a key MILF operative, the MILF took the unusual step of adopting a unilateral ceasefire, the pact having been signed in Kuala Lumpur on 7 August, 2001. Involving the deployment of monitoring teams from Malaysia, Indonesia and Libya, representing the 56-member OIC, the unity agreement is seen as an important step in facilitating autonomy and development in the south. "This means it would be easier to co-ordinate with them regarding plans to develop Mindanao and to deal with our demands for autonomy," asserted a MILF supporter. The Manila- MILF ceasefire coincided with Arroyo's state

¹⁸ Shehan, Deidie, "Estrada's Mindanao/ Trouble Grows Worse," *Far Eastern Economic Review*," May 2000, pp 50-53.

¹⁹ Anthony Davis, "Prospects for Peace Emerge in the Southern Philippines," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 2001, pp 7.

visit to Malaysia (late August, 2001), the first visit by a Filipino president since 1993.²⁰ Arroyo also signed an agreement on tourism co-operation with Malaysia, where by Malaysian investment in Mindanao's agro-industry, improved transportation and financial links will be crucial in anchoring the peace process economically and injecting life into the East Asian Growth Area (EAGA) concept, which also embraces Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia. The agreement has apparently validated Arroyo's overall security strategy of coaxing the MILF and the communist New People's Army into the national mainstream, while isolating the Abu Sayyaf Group.

The situation was however volatile, as Philippine intelligence officials feared that JI had been radicalising the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf, thus eroding the chances of peace. "We still have a long way to go," stated a Philippine security official. "Yunos is just one man. There are many people we are still looking for." Yunos's arrests offered a fresh glimpse into the inner workings of terrorists groups in Southeast Asia, their networks being interconnected despite arrests in Indonesia and the Philippines. The militants have often used Sabah as a transit point between MILF camps and the rest of the region.²¹ The Malaysian police intercepted five Indonesians and one Malaysian returning home through Sabah from the southern Philippines, where they allegedly studied bomb-making with the MILF.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ David, Martin, Jones and Mike Smith, "Identity Politics in Southeast Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November, 2000, pp 44-45.

Thus one observes that pre September 11, Manila was stressing greater integration with its neighbours in Southeast Asia as most of them were facing problem from increased activities of Muslim terrorists. It was perceived that the issue was no longer localised, but concerned the security of all the ASEAN nations. After September 11, terrorism was approached globally, allowing Gloria Macapagal to get the US to commit troops to tackle the militants in the Philippines.

Initially the Philippine Congress refrained to renew the US bases agreement in the country, as the constitution forbade the deployment of foreign troops on its soil. Soon after the US State Department put Abu Sayyaf on its list of terrorist organisations with Bin Laden connections, President Macapagal who formerly designated the extremist group as “a money crazed gang of criminals”, immediately joined the Bush administration’s “global war on terrorism.” During their November 2001 summit meeting in Washington, the Filipino President offered the use of the former US military bases- the Clark airfield and the Subic Bay to “train, advise and assist” their Philippine counterparts.²² The Bush administration gave \$2 billion military and economic grant, plus a further \$2 billion in investments from US companies and \$ 261 million in multilateral aid. The Arroyo administration approved the deployment of 660 US military personnel to the province of Basilan- the biggest deployment of US troops outside Afghanistan. “Even as we talk, we will not allow terrorists attacks to

²² Tom, Holland, “ The Costs of War,” Far Eastern Economic Review, January 16, 2003, pp. 18-19.

go unpunished,” Gloria reiterated. “Even as we talk patiently, we will not tolerate enclaves of terrorism to exist within our country’s territory.”²³ Balikpapan 2002, as the name goes, American forces include not only 160 military advisers complete with intelligence and logistical support, but also some 300 Navy Seabees involved in construction projects. The US Special Forces comprising nine “A- Teams” across Basilan, each comprising 12 men have intentionally ventured into known Abu Sayyaf territory in an attempt to reassure locals, while dissuading rebels from operating openly. Although slogans like “fight US imperialist intervention,” “Yankees go home!” chase the Americans throughout the country, however it is reported that since the arrival of US troops on Basilan, there have been no kidnappings or beheading by the ASG.²⁴ In fact the situation seems to be improving, as some of those forced to flee the group’s ten-year reign of terror are beginning to return home, some previously boarded-up stores are re-opening. The American assistance and equipment has greatly improved the morale among Filipino troops, as they have been receiving much-needed tuition in marksmanship, map reading, emergency medical response and basic military skills and teamwork. Previously, restricted to daylight operations, AFP troops have also developed a 24-hour capability with the help of American training and are now flying and fighting at night for the first time. US aerial surveillance and increased patrolling by Philippine

²³ Government To Focus on Peace, Development of Mindanao [http:// www.medco.gov.ph /medcoweb/newsfeatl.asp.html](http://www.medco.gov.ph/medcoweb/newsfeatl.asp.html).

²⁴ [http:// www. cdi.org/as-his.htm](http://www.cdi.org/as-his.htm), pp 1-4.

naval vessels are believed to have hindered Abu Sayyaf's ability to use the sea as an escape transit route, while four new bases in the Basilan interior has constrained the militants movement on land. Estimates show that AFP has gunned down some 50 guerillas by October 2001.²⁵ Their strength has been estimated around 50-60 men, having broken into small groups dispersed across the island. General Roy Cimatu, calls Abu Sayyaf a "spent force," indicating that the US mission there is all but over. "I believe we've handled this well, a US Army personnel said, " We didn't come in and try to take anything over. All Americans have been very conscious of the concerns of the Philippine government."²⁶ However, for a phoenix like militant group as the Abu Sayyaf, it is hard to say that the US mission is all but over. The Burnham hostage crisis (January 2002) has itself been an eye opener, where the Philippine Army and the US troops brought the Abu Sayyaf under heavy firing, which resulted in the killing of hostages Martin and Deborah Yap. The US officials declared the rescue mission 'most successful' and claimed that it was all owed to US 'training,' even when Gracia called her abductors " common criminals" with hardly any Islamic inclining.²⁷

Opposition within the government has called upon President Arroyo to thoroughly investigate the alleged collusion between the military, police and the Abu Sayyaf. The Bangsa Moro Council chairman stated "you cannot solve this problem of the Abu Sayyaf unless you cut the {groups}

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Renato, Cruz, De, Castro, " Special Relations and Alliance Politics in Philippine-US Security Relations, 1990-2002," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 27, No.1, 2003, pp 137-164.

²⁷ Aijaz, Ahmad, "At the Mouth of a Volcano," *Frontline*, July 19, 2002, pp49-52.

connection inside the AFP and the PNP.” Citing past records, the chairman pointed out that the Philippine army on June 2, 2001 had the chance to wipe out virtually the entire Abu Sayyaf leadership based in Basilan. After a 12-hour standoff, in which the Islamists were pinned down by tanks, helicopters and 3000 soldiers at a walled hospital and church compound, the army pulled its troops away from the rear building. The rebels escaped along with most of their captives. But before they fled, three of their hostages walked free. Presumably the businessman bought his freedom for P 25 million, which Abu Sayyaf then split with local government and military officials who let the rebels escape.²⁸ The Philippine Senate has held an inquiry into these allegations, but the results have yet to be released. The Estrada government too released hostages for millions of dollars of ransom money that allegedly did not reach the militant group. This has called upon the Arroyo government for an open and transparent evaluation. “If you want to solve the problem of the Abu Sayyaf,” a MNLF supporter said, “ then the government should act to implement socio-economic reforms, foremost of which is to ‘stop illegal fishing around the areas of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, as it has been detrimental to the livelihood of small fishers in the area.’”²⁹

Thus, fresh from her successful state visits in US, Korea and Japan, President Arroyo proceeded to Mindanao on an eight-day working visit to

²⁸ John, Gershman, “ Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002, pp60-138.

²⁹ S. Jayasankaran, “ Malaysia Turns Around,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 23, 2002, pp.40-41.

the island between 10-17 June 2003. “While the gains from these visits will benefit the whole country,” said Gloria “but I have tried my best to focus the benefits in favour of Mindanao.” Mindanao Natin is a 10- point development programme of President Arroyo that seeks to usher the rehabilitation of Muslim Mindanao with special attention to the conflict affected areas. Under the ten-point programme, a total of \$ 4.09 billion aid package on bilateral cooperation in defence and security, poverty alleviation, and assistance on financing multilateral institutions have been targeted for comprehensive rehabilitation. The program also involves;³⁰

- Psycho-social, medico civic-services, livelihood support through micro and SME credit
- Implementation of the rebel returnees programme;
- Establishment of one-stop action centre for land documentation and titling programmes;
- Distance learning programmes through mobile vans of the Technology and Livelihood Resource Centre (TLRC)
- Youth and cultural sensitive programmes on sports, arts and entertainment
- Implementation of community-scale quick gestation infrastructure projects, prioritisation and fast tracking of major infrastructure projects.

³⁰ Gloria Kicks Off Weeklong Mindanao Visit [http:// www. medco.gov.ph/medcoweb/news featl.asp](http://www.medco.gov.ph/medcoweb/newsfeatl.asp), pp134-174.

“I am sure that the business community in Mindanao will respond with entrepreneurial vigour in translating the government’s development policies and projects into sustainable production, income and livelihood opportunities for the people of Mindanao,” Gloria asserted. President Arroyo’s administration has admitted that injustice, neglect, underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance, and economic exclusion have largely bred the armed conflict in Mindanao. It is only a matter of time to see how Arroyo’s development package for Mindanao benefits the poorest and the most vulnerable population in the second largest island in the country.³¹

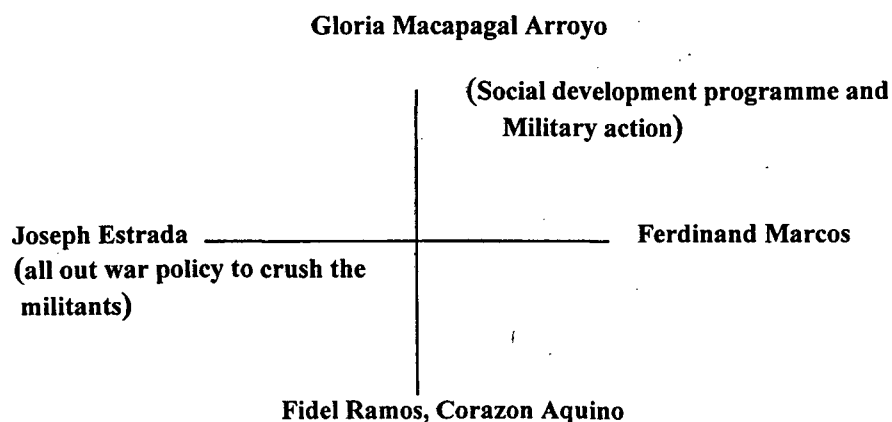


Figure 3: A comparison of the policy initiation on Mindanao, under different Presidents of the Philippines.

Distinctly, if one tries to analyse Philippines in the light of the Southeast Asian region, many similar problem dynamics will come to the forefront. One group of scholars would blame the ethnic disintegration on the economic debacle of 1997. The cohesive “glue” that bound the heterogeneous societies seems to have fallen like a house of cards. Southeast Asia, according to Sharon Siddique had no room for U-turns, as no serious

³¹ Ibid.

attention was paid to the possibility that progress could be dramatically reversed. Social fault-lines along religious, ethnic, and class lines fractured the internal stability of the countries of the region. In Indonesia itself, incidents of violence in Ambon, Kalimantan, Irian Jaya and parts of Java occurred in tandem with a rise in the estimated incidence of poverty from 11% to more than 14% during 1997-98.³² In the Philippines, the heavily capital-intensive, import- substituting development strategy which the country adhered to for several decades, engendered inefficient industries, penalised agriculture and labour-intensive exports, stifling the countries competitiveness in the world market. In Southeast Asia the economic fissure was a spark to kindle the secessionist movement in the region. The separation of East Timor, unleashed a large-scale ethnic and religious violence in the Moluccas, Aceh, Mindanao and the southern Thailand.

A second group of scholars have pointed out two distinctive- although somewhat contradictory forces, as threatening the fabric of the state: a) Islamic fundamentalism and b) the impact of globalisation. The rise of radical Islamic groups in the Middle East and South Asia during the 1990s, their seemingly greater focus on countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, has made Islam in Southeast Asia an issue of international concern. Scott B. MacDonald and Jonathan Lemco have, however, presented two opposing views in lumping Southeast Asian tradition with Middle Eastern radicalism. According to them significant differences exist between

³² Sharon, Siddique, "Social Cohesion and Social Conflict in Southeast Asia," in Nat, J., Colletta, Teek Ghee Lim & Anita-Kelle Vittanen (eds.), *Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia* (The World Bank, Washington, D.C, 2001) pp 17-42

the Islamic revivalist movements looking to cultural and spiritual renewal that has swept Southeast Asia against transnational terrorist networks active world-wide. Radical Islamic groups active in Southeast Asia, are either tied to al Qaeda or fellow travelers, the likes of Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiya, the MMI, or the Malaysian Muslim Group, who are religious fanatics, anti-American in political outlook and embrace Islam as an ideology.³³ On the eve of the 1986 elections in a campaign speech, Corazon Aquino described Mindanao as a “land of unfulfilled promises, a war zone, a land forced into fratricidal strife, a land where everyday Filipinos kills brother Filipinos, a land of avaricious exploitation”.³⁴ Members of ASG are drawn from those lower socio-economic sectors for whom a fair square meal is enough to lure them to Islamic fundamentalism. The Bali bombings (October 12, 2002), bomb explosions at bus stations, street markets and church services in the Philippines, has exposed the internal weaknesses of the regional powers. Ironically, Indonesia has just begun to crack down both on possible international terrorists and on local militant groups. Since September 11, it had been cooperating with Americans behind the scene, while trying to appease local militants with a non-committal public stance. No move has been taken against Laskar Jihad, or the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), or Abu Bakar Basyir, an extremist preacher considered to be the leader of JI,

³³ Scott, B., MacDonald & Jonathan Lemco, “Radicals and Revivalists in Southeast Asia,” *Current History*, November 2002, pp 388-392.

³⁴ Mark Turner, R.J. May & Lulu Respall Turner (eds.), *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promises* (New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 1992)

responsible for the Bali bombing.³⁵ In the Philippines, repression and weak intelligence describes the army judiciously. The AFP was reduced to tracking Abu Sayyaf by following the runners who delivered pizzas to the insurgents. Their security services are under-funded, indisciplined, under-trained and over-stretched to tackle porous maritime boundaries, teeming cities and steaming jungles, which have plenty of good hiding places, especially for local terrorists. Thanks to American 'advice and assistance' it seemed to have solved the deficiencies of the Philippines army.³⁶ Endemic to these causes are the drawbacks of regional institutions like ASEAN. The ASEAN Way, as it came to be known, emphasised multilateral cooperation- primarily through informal ASEAN mechanisms- as the preferred path to resolution of regional conflicts and disputes, decision-making through consensus, and non-intervention in each other's internal affairs.³⁷ Until the second half of the 1990s, this model constituted what appeared to be one of the world's most successful examples of regional cooperation. The economic crisis undermined important conditions of the old model, ASEAN's decision to expand its membership by incorporating Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar- with less developed, more authoritarian and rudimentary market economies- diluted ASEAN's cohesion and further decision-making process.

³⁵ Zacharya, Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 24, No. 3, December 2002, pp 427-479.

³⁶ James, Hookway, "A Local War No More," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 12, 2003, pp14-16.

³⁷ Ingo, Tobias Nischalke, "Insights from ASEAN: Foreign Policy Cooperative. The ASEAN Way," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 22, No.1, 2000, pp89-112.

Grave domestic problems among its principal members, notably Indonesia, have disabled ASEAN to exercise its customary regional leadership. ASEAN has been left to drift alone passively, as demonstrated by the East Timor crisis of 1999, despite INTERFRET and the United Nations Transnational administration in the region. The Asian model has become less tenable in the more economically and politically developed countries of the region. Widening cracks are visible in Indonesia and in Malaysia as well, where Prime Minister Mahathir sought to maintain the status quo through economic policies designed to insulate Malaysia from global capital markets. In fact the non-intervention doctrine of ASEAN has lost its past glamour. The Malaysian government in the past has periodically offered tacit support to Muslim separatist organisations in southern Mindanao and the Pattani's in Thailand, aggravating relations with Buddhist Thailand and the Catholic Philippines. The Philippines claim to Sabah has been a thorn in the Filipino- Malaysian relation. Moreover, former Philippine Foreign Minister Siazon's meeting with Aung Sung Suu Kyi, criticism in the Singaporean press of the Indonesian government's failure to prevent or control the fires in Sumatra, causing the unprecedented haze, President Estrada's protest of Mahathir's treatment of his former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and the Thai proposal to replace non-intervention with a new concept of "constructive criticism" are indicative of this change in Southeast as a whole.³⁸

³⁸ Peter, Chalk & Angel Rabasa, *Indonesia's Transformation & The Stability of Southeast Asia* (ISBN, Rand Publications, 2001) pp 4-7

With the collapse of the Suharto order, the separation of East Timor, separatist movements in Aceh, Irian Jaya, the Moluccas, Mindanao and the southern Thailand has been emboldened with a new life. There are well-established arms pipeline from Cambodia through Thailand and Malaysia that serves Muslim insurgents in Aceh, Mindanao, the LTTE, and the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO). ASEAN's own security agenda has broadened over the years, including challenges as diverse as piracy, drug trafficking and illegal migration. The 1997 economic meltdown has played a key role in promoting the salience of these threats with more and more people resorting to black market activities as a way of "compensating" for falling wages, higher prices and job losses. There are hundreds of thousands of illegal Indonesian migrants in Malaysia, including many Acehnese suspected of links with secessionist organisations in Indonesia.³⁹

Weak governments, porous borders, lawlessness, and religious fanaticism underpin Southeast Asian politics currently. Whether it is Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines or Thailand, social collusion, intra-community and inter-community conflicts have overhauled the state as an expression of its particular identity to the exclusion of others, while others may demand special rights or a degree of autonomy from the state, or even see to secede to form their own state. Central to this upsurge, specially in countries like the Philippines, where Muslims form the minority, economic backwardness, large scale human rights violation, have shaped ideology,

³⁹ Ibid.

separatism as a means to protest against the centre. They do not hold specific political agenda as portrayed by the media. Extortion's, kidnappings, ransom payments are key to survival for these groups.⁴⁰ Teungku Yacob talks of state- sponsored and state-administered social safety nets to foster conflict management, while Amartya Sen argues that only when these groups gain a voice in the democratic process that their diverse needs will be duly addressed. Sen's observation, cited in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) studies, calls for recognition of the importance of "protective security" which can make social safety nets an integral part of the development agenda.⁴¹ As a major breakthrough, Malaysia and the Philippine government (24 July, 2003) have decided to fix a date for permanent peace negotiations with the MILF, to be held in Kuala Lumpur, early next week. The peace talks will be held between the MILF head, Hashim Salamat, MILF spokesman, Eid Kabulal, and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo under the supervision of the Malaysian government.⁴²

⁴⁰ Rohan, Gunaratna, " Terror Unlimited," *Frontline*, October 12, 2001, pp 28-30.

⁴¹ Sharon, Siddique, op, cit., p.57.

⁴² Anthony, Davis, "Evolution in the Philippine War," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 2000, pp.28-33.

CONCLUSION

Sixteen years after the restoration of democratic rule in the Philippines, the country still faces a difficult and contentious process of democratic consolidation, and continues to contend armed challenges from several insurgency movements. The most prominent being the threat from the Muslim rebels who have been demanding secession from the Philippines. The movement has assumed such complexity, to which no easy solution seems to be in sight. The Philippine politics towards the Muslim problem has been half-heartedly addressed. From Ferdinand Marcos to Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, military repression to fight terrorists has combined with the government effort to bring socio-economic development to the poverty-stricken parts of the region. While, military campaigns against the Abu Sayyaf and other Moro organisations have displaced as many as 150,000 civilians, (fostering large-scale human rights violation on the island of Basilan and elsewhere), on the other hand the government's promise to bring sustainable economic development to the Muslim population of Mindanao has faltered at different stages. Filipino political elite has often clubbed the Mindanao issue with other insurgency prone areas of Southeast Asia. They have it seems failed to see that the 30 years long 'Moro' conflict is not just an attempt at ethnic assertion or the recent trend towards Islamic revivalism but is a problem with a past.

Soon after the Spanish colonizers came to the Philippines in the 16th century, they made a vigorous attempt to impose Catholicism throughout the archipelago, which was seen as part of the overall attempt to forestall the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Sulu was the first region in the Philippines to accept Islam. By the time the Spaniards came, even Manila was under a Muslim king. The Philippines was brought under Spanish sovereignty by Miguel

de Legazpi, who took Manila in 1565 after a bloody battle with the local ruler. Later Legazpi conquered other islands of the Philippines, and by the time he died in 1572, the Visayas and Luzon had been mostly brought under Spanish rule. The Spaniards, however, could not extend their sway over Mindanao which was then controlled by the Muslims, called "Moros" by the Spaniards. Under the Spaniards, the Muslims continued with their own cultural and political system. The Muslims in the Southern Philippines were effectively able to mobilize themselves, resisting Christian religious coercion for nearly three centuries. Except for a few settlements in the northern and eastern parts of the island, the cultural basis of the Filipino Muslims remained intact. However, the Treaty of Paris (1898) transferred Spanish sovereignty over the Philippines to the United States. Soon after things began to change drastically. Since the Spaniards had not been successful in bringing Muslims under their rule, the Americans first turned their attention to the southern Philippines. They created a Moro Province on 1 June 1903. General Leonard became the first Military Governor of the Moro Province. Many battles ensued between the Muslims and the Americans before the former were defeated in the face of American military superiority. Besides, General Wood was ruthless in the face in his suppression of the Muslims, which led to many uprisings during his reign. The Muslims ultimately accepted American rule in 1915 with the signing of the Carpenter Agreement. The Americans by establishing a separate government for the non-Christian Filipinos, which included Muslims, alienated non Christians from the Christians. The policy of "divide and rule" has left its unfortunate repercussions to this day. Besides, the American colonizers also started the re-settlement policies, encouraging Christian migration from the more crowded parts of Luzon to the less developed islands in the south (with the overall purpose of altering the regional demographic balance). This deprived the people of

Mindanao of their ancestral land rights, their exclusion from better living conditions, access to education and higher posts in the government offices.

The Muslims, however, opted to become the citizens of the Philippines on its independence, after Christian Filipino leaders had given them assurances. Independent Philippines patterned its government after Western models while Muslims wished to retain their pre- Spanish pattern of government. What divided the Filipino Muslims from the Filipino Catholics is the exclusivity characteristic of the two faiths, which polarize humanity into two divisions: the Catholics divided humanity between Catholics and heretics; and the Muslims and infidels. No wonder, the Christian-dominated Philippine government was looked upon with suspicion by the Filipino Muslims. They felt that they must struggle in preserving their culture, religion and society. Similarly, the Christian Filipinos, because of their Hispanisation, thought of the Muslims as ‘Moro’- people who were basically different from them.

The migration of the Christian Filipinos continued and the Muslims were reduced to a minority in many of the provinces where they were earlier in a majority. This influx resulted in endless land disputes between the Muslims and the Christians. THE Muslims also suffered due to their refusal to send their children to school for fear of conversion to Christianity. The Muslims, thus, remained backward and isolated, and were at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the literate Christian settlers who gradually acquired their land. The Muslims could not do much to prevent this due to their ignorance of law. With the passage of time, the Filipino Muslims suffered from many fears regarding their status in the Philippines.

It was in 1968 that the Muslim problem became a serious threat to the stability of the Philippines due to the formation of the Mindanao independence movement demanding

secession. By 1972, the threat from the Muslims to secede from the Philippines became real. The Muslims had also become better organized, and were getting political support from almost all the Islamic countries. Immediately after Marcos declared martial law, he justified it by asserting that it was needed to combat “ the threat posed by the growth of rebellion and subversion” both from the left and right, as well as the secessionist movement in the south. Although ideally, he thought that such a policy would help to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, but corruption, militarisation, and cronyism within the government officials, failed to address the insurgency problems adequately. The result was a steadily declining economy, (Gross National Product declined from an average 6.3% in 1975-79), huge foreign debt (it had surged close to \$30 billion), with much of its “behest loan” in favour of Marcos’s family and his close associates. Partly, the martial law was the cause of the growth of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under the leadership of Nur Misuari. Diplomacy supplemented the military approach, in the case of the Muslim secessionist problem. Marcos followed two policies to meet the MNLF separatist groups, total war policy versus social and economic packages to win some of the MNLF supporters to the government side. Arabic instruction was permitted in some public schools in the predominantly Muslim provinces; university scholarships for Muslims were expanded; a Code of Philippine Muslim Personal Law was promulgated; the Philippine Amanah Bank provided financial assistance to Muslim entrepreneurs on generous terms; Muslim title to ancestral land was recognised legally. Marcos also increased the appointments of Muslims to government positions. As a good will effort, Marcos concluded the Treaty of Tripoli with Misuaru in 1976, which provided for the creation of a single 13 province Muslim Autonomous Zone within the Republic of the Philippines.

However within a week, the President began to make contradictory announcements on the plebiscite in the 13 southern provinces. In six months, the Tripoli agreement was squashed. The second agreement by March 1977 between Muammar Quadaffi and Imelda Marcos included a proclamation of autonomy, announcing the allotment of 15 of the 29 seats in the provisional government to the MNLF. It outrightly rejected MNLF's clause to select its own representatives. Misuari boycotted the process. In May 1976, Misuari announced that the MNLF was returning to its original goal of secession, because the Marcos government had failed to respond positively to the autonomy formula. It took another 20 years, of intermittent negotiations, renewed armed hostilities before the MNLF and the Philippine government signed a Comprehensive Peace Pact and conducted a referendum (1989) across the 13 provinces and nine cities proposed at Tripoli. The result was the establishment of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), following an agreement signed by Nur Misuari and President Fidel Ramos on September 1996. The peace deal opened the way for MNLF's participation in the government, with Misuari elected as the governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). ARMM under Misuari was full of corruption and bureaucratic inertia. Misuari, an intellectual from the University of the Philippines, was often absent from administration, he spent more time in Manila and on high profile trips to Europe and the Middle East, than at his own desk in Cotabato. Insiders complained that Misuari was becoming too rigid with his ideology, monopolizing decision making, failing to delegate sufficient authority and attempting to run the administration by remote control.

Internal factionalism, lack of authority, gave Hashim Salamat, the second important man within MNLF to give a wider call for greater Islamic integration of Mindanao. Educated

in the Al-Azhar University of Cairo, Salamat's strongest philosophical influences were Syed Qutb of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and Syed Abul Ala Maududi of the Pakistani Jamaat I Islami party. In 1970, when Salamat returned to the Philippines, he had gathered around him Moro militants, who had either been trained in the Arab religious institutions or in the *madrassah* network in the country. Its camp in Camp Abu Bakre Siddique had a rigid military training system, that claims to have more combat experience than the Philippines army. AFP blamed MILF for abductions, claiming that the Front controlled 17 out of 57 known kidnap gangs, which involved multi-million Peso enterprises. Fighting between AFP and the MILF has often been intense, opening the prospects of a full scale-war on several occasions. However as the government has been confronted with huge amount of monetary expenditure in fighting the militants, on 30 June 1997, it ordered a unilateral ceasefire. But these talks have often been focused on questions of territorial control and ceasefire modalities, without broaching contentious political issues. The government seems to be engaged in the risky strategy of maintaining both military and political pressure on the MILF, while trying to avoid pushing both parties on the verge of any conflict.

Actually, the Filipino presidents, from Ferdinand Marcos to Joseph Estrada have restored the Mindanao problem either to draw international attention or to hide their own administrative weaknesses. They have never been concrete in sketching their policy towards Mindanao- either economic rehabilitation or complete usurpation of the rebellions. Since the question of complete autonomy does not arise, it is obviously visible that socio-economic development, employment generation, utilization of Mindanao's huge natural resources, can be one of the many means to cease separatist activities. It is true that when we look back at MNLF in comparison to the growth of Islamic militancy world-wide, their activities has been

quite passive and one of appeasement. It is largely due to the lack of good governance, adequate privileges to the Moros, that militancy has overgrown over the years to take form of organizations like the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF. The ASG is suspected of maintaining protection rackets against residents, small businesses, officials and teachers as a means of revenue. These ‘revolutionary’ taxes are usually demanded on a monthly basis, protection fees being assigned through letters to Basilan officials. Arms cache is sent to the ASG through a typical system- in trucks, on the back of camels and even by ordinary post to their headquarter in Basilan. Harakat al- Mujahideen, a Pakistani militant group with ties to al Qaeda, moves weapons to the ASG by using boats owned by the Sri Lankan Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). ASG members then transfer a portion of the arms to various Indonesian groups. In recent years, Cambodia has emerged as the lynchpin “where LTTE officers have been sourcing their weapon purchases.” The standoff weaponry, notably small multiple-barrel rocket launchers systems and mortars are easily supplied by the Chinese arms market in Cambodia. While Cambodia is the hub of the LTTE’s East Asian market, Thailand continues to serve as the most important country for trans-shipment of munitions and coordination of logistics. Most consignments appear to be shipped through Myanmar to Thailand, as MILF and ASG militants are known to have purchased sizeable quantities of arms through dealers in Phuket and Ranong, most of which have been smuggled back to Mindanao via the porous Sabah border. Soon after the arrest of Ramzi Yousef in Manila, the Philippine police tracked down more terrorist networks active in the country.

Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi was convicted by a court for illegal possession of firearms and for his links with Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafana, a Singaporean businessman of Malaysian descent (who held a position on the Jemaah Islamiyah’s regional shura) who acted as a

financing conduit to AL-Ghozi, in addition to directing him to initiate contacts with the MILF. AL-Ghozi reportedly phoned Bafana after explosions rocked Manila in December 2000. Al-Ghozi had also opened a bank account in Zamboanga. In 1999 he established links with Mukhlis Yunos, an explosives expert linked to the MILF. Bafana provided Al-Ghozi with \$5,000 to transfer to Yunos, who had requested financing support for bombings in Manila. During November 2001, apparently in preparation for the Singaporean bombing plot, Bafana diverted \$18,000 to Al-Ghozi for the procurement of explosives. Bafana's arrest in Singapore (December 2001), opened another network surrounding a Jordanian named Falah Awward al-Dhalain. Al- Dhalain financed Islamic groups in the Philippines through the manipulation of a school for Muslim converts in the northern province of Pangasinan. The money was apparently directed to finance training and weapons procurement for the ASG. Manila, under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, stressed greater integration with its neighbours in Southeast Asia, as most of them were facing problem from increased activities of Muslim terrorists in the region. It was perceived that the issue was no longer localized, but concerned the security of all the ASEAN nations. Soon after September Macapagal committed US to troops to tackle the militants in the Philippines. Initially, the Philippine Congress refrained to renew the US bases agreement in the country, as the constitution forbade the deployment of foreign troops on its soil. Although the United States worked constantly to improve its image in the Philippines, but its policy towards Mindanao has always been one of divide and rule. During the Cold War period the Philippines and the US had grown special relationships. The Manila government opened the Clark Airfield and the Subic naval Base to the Americans. The Americans used the Philippines, to avert the growth of communism in the whole of the Southeast Asian region.

But soon after the Cold war ended, the military bases treaty forged by Washington and Manila also ended and the Americans handed Clark Air Base to the Philippines on November 26, 1991 and the Subic Naval Base, a year later. This event marked the end of almost 100 years of American military presence in the Philippines, and somehow cooled off the “special relationship” between the two allies.

It is this utilitarian attitude of the Americans that the deployment of US troops to the Philippine soil soon after September 11, 2001 events that followed mass-scale opposition in the country. Balikatan 2002, as the name goes, American forces include not only 160 military advisers, complete with intelligence and logistical support, but also some 300 Navy Seabees involved in construction projects. The US Special Forces comprising nine “A- Teams” across Basilan, each comprising 12 men have intentionally ventured into known Abu Sayyaf territory in an attempt to reassure locals, while dissuading rebels from operating openly. Since the arrival of the US troops on Basilan, government reports enlisted lesser kidnappings or beheading by the ASG. According to them the situation seems to be improving, as some of those forced to flee the group’s ten-year reign of terror are beginning to return home, and open up stores for running their own business. The American assistance and equipment has greatly improved the morale among Filipino troops, as they have been receiving much-needed tuition in marksmanship, map reading, emergency medical response and basic military skills and teamwork. Previously, restricted to daylight operations, AFP troops have also developed a 24-hour capability with the help of American training and are now flying and fighting at night for the first time. While some scholars have pointed out that the government has reduced the strength of the Abu Sayyaf Group to some 50-60 men, but the Burnham incident of January 2002 has brought the Manila government under massive criticism once again. Citing past

records, one of the MNLF spokesman pointed out that the Philippine army on June 2, 2001 had the chance to wipe out the entire Abu Sayyaf leadership based in Basilan virtually. After a 12-hour standoff, in which the Islamists were pinned down by tanks, helicopters and 3000 soldiers at a walled hospital and church compound, the army pulled its troops away from the rear building. The rebels escaped along with most of their captives. But before they fled, three of their hostages walked free. Presumably the businessman bought his freedom for P 25 million, which Abu Sayyaf then split with local government and military officials who let the rebels escape. The Philippine Senate has held an inquiry into these allegations, but the results have yet to be released. Internal corruption, central mishandling, years of socio-economic deprivation of the Mindanao problem, has called in President Macapagal to undertake fresh economic packages aimed at the upliftment of the Muslims in the region. Between 10-17 June, 2003, President Macapagal after her successful state visits to the US, Korea and Japan, she proceeded to Mindanao on an eight-day working visit to the island. "While the gains from these visits will benefit the whole country," said Gloria "but I have tried my best to focus the benefits in favour of Mindanao." Mindanao Natin is a 10- point development programme of President Arroyo that seeks to usher the rehabilitation of Muslim Mindanao, with special attention to the conflict affected areas. Under the ten-point programme, a total of \$ 4.09 billion aid package on bilateral cooperation in defence and security, poverty alleviation, and assistance on financing multilateral institutions have been targeted for comprehensive rehabilitation. President Arroyo's administration has admitted that injustice, neglect, under-development, poverty, ignorance, and economic exclusion have largely bred the armed conflict in Mindanao.

Moreover weak governments, porous borders, lawlessness, and religious fanaticism underpin Southeast Asian politics currently. Whether it is Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines or Thailand, social collusion, intra-community and inter-community conflicts have overhauled the state as an expression of its particular identity to the exclusion of others. Especially in countries like the Philippines, where Muslims form the minority, economic backwardness, large scale human rights violation, have shaped ideology, separatism as a means to protest against the centre. They do not hold specific political agenda as portrayed by the media. Extortion's, kidnappings, ransom payments are key to survival for these groups. Amartya Sen argues that only when these groups gain a voice in the democratic process that their diverse needs will be duly addressed. Sen's observation, cited in the Asian Development Bank (ADB) studies, calls for recognition of the importance of "protective security" which can make social safety nets an integral part of the development agenda. As a major breakthrough, Malaysia and the Philippine government (24 July, 2003) have decided to fix a date for permanent peace negotiations with the MILF, to be held in Kuala Lumpur, early next week. The peace talks will be held between the MILF head, Hashim Salamat, MILF spokesman, Eid Kabulal, and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo under the supervision of the Malaysian government. However, the most commendable point the Muslim problem brings to the fore is the attitude of Malaysia and Indonesia. They managed to show that ASEAN countries are unified in spite of different religions. It is mainly due to their efforts that the Islamic Conference has adopted moderate resolutions towards the Philippines in its handling of the Muslim problem. In the final analysis, the Muslim problem can be solved permanently, only when the grievances of the Muslims which have existed since historical times are addressed seriously.

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