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## THESIS

**COUNTERING THE LINGERING THREAT OF THE ABU  
SAYYAF GROUP**

by

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**COUNTERING THE LINGERING THREAT OF THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis will argue that the most effective strategy for eradicating the U.S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), is to bolster the current peace talks between the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF has been providing support and sanctuary to the ASG which has hindered U.S.-Philippine counter-terror operations. This thesis will explain why a shift in U.S.-Philippine strategy is required by examining what historical circumstances led to the creation of the ASG; the supporting-supported relationship between the MILF and ASG; and lastly, the effectiveness of the U.S.-Philippine response to the ASG from 2001-2007.

If the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF succeed, they will lead not only to a loss of critical MILF support to the ASG, but will also allow the AFP to hunt down and eradicate the remaining ASG in areas that had previously been untenable. Successful execution of this strategy will bolster regional stability in Southeast Asia by defeating one of the targets of the Global War on Terror as well as diminishing one of the places of refuge utilized by other international terrorist organizations.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	BACKGROUND.....	1
B.	DEFINING TERROR.....	6
C.	COMBATING TERROR.....	11
D.	MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENT.....	12
II.	HISTORY OF MUSLIM SEPARATIST GROUPS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.....	15
A.	ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES.....	15
B.	MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) AND MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT (MILF).....	18
C.	THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG).....	22
III.	MILF-ASG INTERRELATIONSHIP.....	25
A.	BACKGROUND.....	25
B.	MILF EXPECTATIONS.....	30
C.	ASG EXPECTATIONS.....	31
D.	CONCLUSION.....	33
IV.	U.S. AND PHILIPPINE RESPONSE.....	35
A.	OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES.....	35
B.	EXERCISES AND OPERATIONS FROM 2002-2003.....	39
C.	MALAYSIAN SPONSORED CEASEFIRE.....	42
D.	EXERCISES AND OPERATIONS FROM 2005-2006.....	43
E.	OP PLAN ULTIMATUM.....	45
V.	CONCLUSION.....	47
A.	U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE RP/MILF PEACE PROCESS.....	47
B.	U.S. ASSISTANCE IN IMPROVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.....	49
C.	U.S. ASSISTANCE IN RP FIGHT AGAINST SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION.....	52
D.	CONCLUSION.....	52
	APPENDIX I: CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR ASG EVENTS.....	55
	APPENDIX II: U.S.-RP EXERCISE DIRECTORY.....	63
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	69
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST.....	73

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Map of the Republic of the Philippines. ....	2
Figure 2.	Map of the southern region of the Philippines, including Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. ....	16
Figure 3.	Provinces in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.....	20
Figure 4.	MILF Base Commands.....	33

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# I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis will argue that the most effective strategy for eradicating the U.S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), is to bolster the current peace talks between the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF has been providing support and sanctuary to the ASG which has hindered U.S.-Philippine counter-terror operations.<sup>1</sup> This thesis will explain why a shift in U.S.-Philippine strategy is required by exploring the following:

1. How the rise of Muslim secessionist groups in the Southern Philippines eventually led to the creation of the Abu Sayyaf Group.
2. The supporting/supported relationship between the MILF and ASG.
3. The U.S.-Philippine response to the Abu Sayyaf Group following the events of September 11, 2001.

In order to best deal with the remaining Abu Sayyaf threat, the U.S. must continue to assist in the Malaysian-sponsored peace talks between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF. A lasting peace will not only result in a loss of critical MILF support to the ASG, but will also allow the AFP to hunt down and eradicate the remaining ASG in areas that had previously been untenable. Successful execution of this strategy will bolster regional stability in Southeast Asia by defeating one of the targets of the Global War on Terror as well as diminishing one of the places of refuge of international terrorists.

## A. BACKGROUND

The Republic of the Philippines has been battling insurgent groups of differing ideologies for over four decades. In fact, the Muslim insurgency in the Southern Philippines has been particularly challenging to the young Republic. Despite early attempts at resolution by the Philippine government, the Muslim separatist movement has continued to grow in strength over time, splitting into three major factions.

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<sup>1</sup> Zachary Abuza, "Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf," Strategic Studies Institute. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB625.pdf>. Accessed 10 Mar 2007, 12.

Figure 1. Map of the Republic of the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> CIA World Factbook. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/rp.html>. Accessed 9 Feb 2007.



The first major group to be established was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the early 1970s. The second group to form was the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 1984. Last, and perhaps the most violent Muslim separatist group operating in the region, is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), or “Bearer of the Sword”. This group split from the much larger MNLF in the early 1990s with the main purpose of establishing an independent Islamic state, based on Sharia law.

The ASG rejected the non-violent practices adopted by the MNLF as the ASG prefers violent struggle, or “Jihad”, as its ideological strategy. The ASG successfully competed with the MNLF for the leadership of the Moros’ national struggle, successfully taking advantage of a pre-existing Islamic trend within the MNLF. During the 1970’s and 1980’s the Moros nationalist mainstream political force did nothing to inhibit the Islamists’ increased participation in the armed struggle against the Philippine government as they acknowledged the radicals’ contributions to the overall effort to drive the government to make political and territorial concessions. This was exacerbated by the return of radical Filipinos who had fought with the mujahideen against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the early 1980s. In 1991 the ASG split away from the MNLF as they were bitterly opposed to the concessions that were being introduced in the peace process between Manila and the MNLF.<sup>3</sup> The ASG wanted complete independence, not autonomy.<sup>4</sup> Although claiming to be a legitimate secessionist organization, the ASG’s continued use of crime and terror discredited the group and earned them a place on the United States’ list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations on October 8, 1997- a designation not shared by the other Muslim separatist groups in the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Elegant, “The Return of Abu Sayyaf,” *Time Magazine*. August 2004.  
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501040830-686107,00.html>. Accessed 10 Mar 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Octavio A. Dinampotavio, “A Last Extended Interview with Janajalani,” *Inquirer Headlines*, January 22, 2007.  
[http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view\\_article.php?article\\_id44761](http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view_article.php?article_id44761). Accessed 31 Mar 2007.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Republic of the Philippines was quick to offer the use of former U.S. bases, Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base, to the U.S. led coalition against international terrorism.<sup>5</sup> In response to the Philippine declaration of support to the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the United States committed almost 1,300 troops and \$93 million in military aid to assist the Philippine government's fight against the ASG on Basilan Island. Over a six-month period Philippine forces, with U.S. assistance, were able to rout the ASG's stranglehold on Basilan- forcing the remaining ASG to flee to relative sanctuary in areas controlled by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao and Jolo. Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) commanders attributed their successes to U.S. equipment, U.S. intelligence gathering, and U.S. assistance in planning AFP operations.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the attrition of roughly half of their forces by the joint U.S.-Philippine military and political actions after 9/11, the threat from the Abu Sayyaf Group has not dissipated.<sup>7</sup> Following their displacement from Basilan to Mindanao and Jolo, the ASG regrouped and resumed sporadic but significant domestic terrorist operations. In fact, since the conclusion of U.S.-Philippine bilateral operations in July of 2002, the ASG's tactics appear to have shifted from kidnap-for-ransom operations to bombings. This apparently dictates that the group has returned to its earlier radical, more politicized agenda in order to expand its capabilities and area of operations. The ASG motivation for operational change is apparently due to the resumption of peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF, which are slowly defusing the primary secessionist movement in the southern Philippines. Ultimately, the ASG believes

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<sup>5</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "Addressing International Terrorism in Southeast Asia: A Matter of Strategic or Functional Approach?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (August 2004): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Larry Nicksh, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *Congressional Research Service* (January 20, 2006): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Insurgent numbers were estimated in mid-2001 to be between 800 and 850. By mid-2006 AFP reports estimate 400 ASG remain.

that strict adherence to a radical Islamist ideology is paramount to their group becoming a viable separatist force in the Philippines.<sup>8</sup>

There are several examples of this operational shift: first, following the 2002 U.S.-Philippine bilateral exercise Balikatan, the ASG had a role in a roadside bombing outside a Philippine military base in Zamboanga that killed a U.S. Special Forces serviceman. Second, the leader of the ASG, Khaddafy Janjalani, taking advantage of the protections and support offered to the ASG by certain radical MILF commanders, established links with Jeemah Islamiyah (JI)<sup>9</sup> in March 2003 and requested that they train ASG and MILF members in bomb assembly and detonation.<sup>10</sup> Following this training ASG, JI, and MILF cadre then carried out bombings in Davao, Mindanao, which killed 38.<sup>11</sup> Third, Janjalani also established links with the Rajah Solaiman Movement, a radical Muslim group made up of Filipinos from the northern Philippines who had converted to Islam.<sup>12</sup> Together, these two groups carried out major bombings after 2003, including bombings in metropolitan Manila as well as the SuperFerry 14 bombing in Manila Bay, which killed approximately 194. Lastly, and of

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<sup>8</sup> In a recently released interview, the late Khadaffi Janjalani recognized that there had been a shift from kidnap operations to bombings. He would not admit to the reason, stating it was a military secret. Dr. Zachary Abuza, in *Balik-terror*, attributes the shift as a means to re-energize the Islamic separatist movement in the Southern Philippines.

<sup>9</sup> Jemaah Islamiyah is a Southeast Asian-based terrorist network with links to al-Qaida. The network recruited and trained extremists in the late 1990s, following the stated goal of creating an Islamic state comprising Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the southern Philippines, and southern Thailand. It was responsible for the bombing of the J. W. Marriott Hotel in Jakarta on 5 August 2003, the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002, and an attack against the Philippine Ambassador to Indonesia in August 2000. The Bali plot, which left more than 200 dead, was reportedly the final outcome of meetings in early 2002 in Thailand, where attacks against Singapore and soft targets such as tourist spots in the region were also considered. In December 2001, Singapore authorities uncovered a JI plot to attack the U.S. and Israeli Embassies and British and Australian diplomatic buildings in Singapore, and in June 2003, Thai authorities disrupted a JI plan to attack several Western embassies and tourist sites there. Investigations also linked JI to bombings in December 2000 where dozens of bombs were detonated in Indonesia and the Philippines, killing 22 in the Philippines and 15 in Indonesia.

<sup>10</sup> Nicksch, 5.

<sup>11</sup> United States Embassy to the Philippines website. <http://usembassy.state.gov/manila/wwwhrep4.html>. Accessed 10 Mar 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Nicksch, 15.

particular importance to the United States, in March 2004 Philippine authorities arrested an ASG cell whose bombing targets included the U.S. Embassy in Manila.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the remaining ASG threat, all bilateral exercises between the United States and the Philippines since 2002 have been focused on increasing AFP counter-terrorism capabilities.<sup>14</sup> This thesis will argue that this strategy, although still necessary, is not the most effective way of eradicating the remaining Abu Sayyaf threat. Instead, this thesis will argue instead for a three-pronged approach. First, that the United States should focus more on aiding the Philippine-MILF peace process that is currently being brokered by Malaysia. If the current cease fire holds, and a lasting peace can be maintained, it is plausible that the MILF support to the ASG will decrease considerably. A lasting peace agreement will also enable the AFP- whose counter-terror capabilities have been increased via U.S. assistance- to pursue the ASG in MILF controlled areas that had previously been both politically and operationally untenable. Second, the United States should continue to urge the Philippine government to institute economic reforms in crisis-ridden Mindanao. Lastly, the United States should provide the assistance necessary to track down and prosecute all cases of systemic Philippine governmental and military corruption which have facilitated ASG operations. The successful application of this three-pronged approach will ultimately lead to increased regional stability in Southeast Asia by defeating one of the targets of the Global War on Terror.

## **B. DEFINING TERROR**

There are two bodies of literature that contribute to the argument. First is the discussion of terror and how states should best develop effective counter-terror programs. Second are those works which specifically address the root causes of terror in the Southern Philippines, as well as how those groups that operate in the region share resources.

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<sup>13</sup> United States Department of State. 2004. *Country Reports on Terrorism*. <http://library.nps.navy.mil/home/tgp/tgp2.htm>, 94. Accessed 10 Mar 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Nicksch, 10-11.

There are many definitional and conceptual disagreements over the concept of “terror,” and as such there is no universal accepted definition. Two common factors come out of this discussion: the lack of agreement over what constitutes terrorist activities and related phenomena such as guerrilla or violent protest movements; and the difficulty of making a distinction between activities related to “legitimate” acts of national self-determination struggles and “illegal” acts of violence against governments. The phrase “One man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” is commonly used to point out this disparity.

Modern terrorism has been in a constant state of transition since its inception. It has gone from the semi-legitimate use of force in the late 1800s to the indiscriminate violence that is broadcast daily by the media. It is difficult to provide one universal label for terror due to the diverse methods and agendas utilized by terrorist organizations. Martha Crenshaw proposes a definition of terror which appears to be best: the systematic inducement of fear and anxiety to control and direct a civilian population, and the phenomenon of terrorism as a challenge to the authority of the state.<sup>15</sup> The Abu Sayyaf Group, with its campaign of bombings and kidnappings, falls squarely within this definition.

In order to explain the causes of terrorism, Crenshaw introduces the concept of preconditions (enabling or permissive factors) versus precipitants (direct causes).<sup>16</sup> “Preconditions” to terror include modernization, urbanization, social facilitation, transnational attitudes and beliefs, and the inability or unwillingness of a government to prevent terrorism. All of these factors are easily identified after review of the situation in the Southern Philippines: massive migration of Christians to the area; displacement of the Moros; and a weak or corrupt government unable to control the situation.<sup>17</sup> Direct causes, or

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<sup>15</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches,” in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David Rapoport (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 482.

<sup>16</sup> Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism” 483.

<sup>17</sup> Following World War II, the GRP began state sponsorship of large-scale Christian migration to the Muslim South. This migration marked the beginning of years of economic neglect and political discrimination, which in turn led to the creation of a Muslim nationalist separatist movement in the 1960’s. This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter II.

“precipitants,” of terror include the existence of concrete grievances among an identifiable subgroup of the population; the lack of opportunity for political representation; and lastly some sort of event that immediately precedes the outbreak of terrorism. Again, the conflict in the region fits well with this argument: impasses between the Philippine government and the Muslim secessionist groups over how best to govern the region; increasing economic neglect and political discrimination to the Moro minority; and perhaps most importantly, the introduction of radical leaders who had experience in fighting a “jihad” against the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>

Terrorism becomes an attractive strategy when the organization feels it has no other way to challenge the state’s authority. Using the ASG as the focus of study, it is apparent that they have resorted to terror to demoralize the Philippine government. One of the important leaders of the ASG, Hamsiraji Sali, was known to solicit telephone interviews with radio stations following ASG strikes where he taunted the Philippine government’s inability to stop his group. His actions serve ASG purposes two-fold: they point out the weakness in the government, as well as providing immediate international recognition to the ASG cause. The interviews also provide the ASG a means to spread their ideology in the hopes of recruiting more followers.

Modern terrorists and rebel groups, despite their ideology or methods, are forced to learn to cope with a covert lifestyle or face operational disaster. Put another way, they must accept that they can never expect the blatantly easy life of the outside world which is enjoyed by their enemies. Namely, that they are forced into a life of secrecy and the seemingly insolvable communication problems that are inherent to this lifestyle. Terrorists and rebels must face every minute as if it were their last, constantly searching for some semblance of normalcy that will elude them. J. Bower Bell calls this domain the “Dragonworld”, where all experience and all objective reality is shaped and modified by belief.

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<sup>18</sup> The founder of the ASG was Abduragak Abubakar Janjalani, who led the group until December 1998, when he was killed by police in Lamitan village on Basilan Island. Janjalani was a veteran of the Afghan war against the former Soviet Union where he developed close ties with other Islamic radical groups.

This “Dragonworld” is by its nature covert and restrictive, as only true believers may enter. The legitimacy of their cause is without question in this environment, which makes any act of terror committed by them justifiable. Reality is filtered out of the equation in the Dragonworld.<sup>19</sup>

Bell also spells out the many inherent conflicts that arise due to the covert nature of the rebel or terrorist world. He explains that necessary tasks become exceedingly difficult: communication, command and control, etc. Two recurring conflicts are also identified in the terrorist world: an inverse ratio exists between secrecy and efficiency. Absolute secrecy guarantees absolutely that nothing works properly; and, a revolutionary ecosphere will assure survival but at the cost of competency. Terrorists also face many other difficulties that their enemies do not. Members are forced to learn to deal with the problems inherent to the Dragonworld solely via on the job training. If they cannot do so efficiently and correctly, they usually face quick arrest or death. Additionally, groups often face dramatically different operating areas while in pursuit of their cause. They may face overwhelming support in one area or merely toleration from the population in others. Additionally, both internal communication and external communication becomes hampered due to the nature of their covertness; the act of passing information does not always transmit to the adequate receipt or understanding of that information.<sup>20</sup>

Terrorist or rebel organizations are also inherently fractious, with severe penalties for division. History has shown that all long-lived armed struggles ultimately split over strategies, priorities, and personalities. This is also apparent in the Philippines: the split of both the MILF and ASG from the MNLF. Terrorists also face tactical dilemmas when they are forced to choose between a flexible or rigid command and control structure. They can either utilize centralized control and decision-making, which may result in the loss of initiative by field units, or utilize flexible and decentralized decision-making that may endanger the overall

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<sup>19</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, “Aspects of the Dragonworld: Covert Communications and the Rebel Ecosystem,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol 3.1 (1989): 17.

<sup>20</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *Revolutionary Dynamics: The Inherent Inefficiency of the Underground* (London: Frank, Cass & Co., 1990): 206.

strategic considerations of the group. Perhaps the most severe constraint faced by terrorist groups, which highlights their weakness as compared to the state, is “incompetence.” Terrorist organizations generally lack the assets to be effective over time: lack of proper planning, trained volunteers, weapons, supplies, etc. It is this in particular that drives them to utilize tactics which conserve scarce resources so as to enable survival of the group: improvised explosive devices, attacks on soft targets, etc.

Terrorist organizations also tend to blur the line between criminal activity and terrorism. As an organization they exhibit a high level of alienation from society. Because of this, they are more likely to push the boundaries of what is deemed legitimate behavior- if a kidnapping can bring a new source of income to the organization, it is therefore an acceptable option. Terrorists also tend to slowly escalate the level of violence over time. They build up a moral disengagement that makes it easier to justify their behavior, ignoring the conventional distinction between combatant and non-combatant and commit violence against a wider audience.<sup>21</sup> The ASG fits this description well, as they have graduated from kidnapping for ransom to extremely deadly bombings against civilians, such as the Superferry 14 bombing in February 2004. However, this choice of escalating violence against non-combatants by the ASG has prompted quick condemnation from the other Muslim separatist groups in the region, as they feel it is against Koranic law.

When all of these constraints are added together it shows that it is very hard indeed for a terrorist organization to survive over time. Terror groups have the deck stacked against them from the beginning. Their world is ripe with challenges to their survival: lack of resources, the absolute necessity to remain covert, etc. If the state can recognize and capitalize on these detriments, the terrorist organization will cease to exist. Ultimately, the terrorist organization can only hope that it can survive long enough to create enough fear in the target population so as to make the state cave in to its demands.

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<sup>21</sup> David Wright-Neville, “Dangerous Dynamics: Activists, Militants and Terrorists in Southeast Asia,” *Pacific Review* (March, 2004): 31.



### C. COMBATING TERROR

When considering how best to combat terror, it is worth mentioning some theoretical works compiled on the subject. As stated in the previous section, terrorist groups have enormous obstacles between them and operational success. In the case of the diminutive ASG, their long-term survival is dependant upon areas from which they can run to for sanctuary when they need to rearm or regroup. If the GRP can deny the ASG these areas, it will over time likely lead to an end of the ASG threat.

Martha Crenshaw and Christopher Hewitt, both esteemed scholars in the field of terrorism, have provided two works which study various anti-terror policies: Crenshaw's "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches", and Hewitt's *The Effectiveness of Anti-terrorist Policies*. Crenshaw's work explains that there are two basic explanations for why terrorist organizations behave in the ways they do: the Instrumental Approach and the Organizational Process Approach.<sup>22</sup> She concludes that in order to develop a successful anti-terror strategy, one must first understand terrorism and its consequences: this can only be accomplished by utilizing an amalgamation of both theories. In comparison, Hewitt utilizes detailed statistical analysis to determine the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policies against revolutionary and nationalist terrorist organizations. His research suggests that some policies simply do not work at all, in the sense that they have no impact on the overall level of violence, and that others are successful in certain situations but not in others. For example, Hewitt found that cease-fires with a terrorist organization rarely work in favor of the government; and that in the end it is the terrorist group that actually gains.<sup>23</sup> This fact became blatantly clear in July 2000 when,

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<sup>22</sup> Crenshaw's Instrumental Approach theory (IAT) purports that violence is intentional; terrorism is a means to a political end. The organization uses terror as a convenient strategy. In contrast Crenshaw's Organizational Process Approach states that terrorist behavior represents the outcome of the internal dynamics of the organization rather than strategic action.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Hewitt, *The Effectiveness of Anti-terrorist Policies*. (New York: Lanham, University Press of America, 1984): 41-54.

following a four month AFP campaign against the MILF, the MILF was able to reclaim many of its camps that had been captured during the offensive (see Chapter II for more detail).

Focusing on Southeast Asia, Dr. Zachary Abuza, in his work *Balik-Terrorism*, contends that the efforts to combat the ASG have been stymied by the protection offered to the ASG by the MILF. He also suggests that certain key MILF commanders would not support any peace agreement between the MILF leadership and the Philippine government that did not include outright independence for the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. If this were the case, the MILF might fractionalize which could result in hard-line elements joining even more closely with JI and Abu Sayyaf- undoubtedly leading to more terrorist operations.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to this view, the Philippine government is operating on the assumption that the MILF, with Ebrahim el Haj Murad as chairman, sincerely wants a compromise peace and opposes collaboration with the Abu Sayyaf.<sup>25</sup> However, there is yet another theory by some analysts that the MILF leadership has a relationship with radical MILF commands similar to that between the political organization, Sinn Fein, and its armed wing, the Irish Republican Army. According to this theory, the MILF leadership is acting as a front for the hard-line commands, shielding them from moves against them by the Philippine government and the AFP.<sup>26</sup>

#### **D. MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENT**

Many questions arise upon close inspection of the actions taken against the ASG in the Southern Philippines. What is the root cause of the violence in the Southern Philippines? What has been done or could be done to remedy the

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<sup>24</sup> Abuza, 39.

<sup>25</sup> S. P. Harish, *The GRP-MILF Peace Process: The Quest for International and Domestic Legitimacy*. Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies (19 January 2006): 1.

<sup>26</sup> Nicksch, 19.

situation? How much support is being provided to the ASG by other separatist groups in the region? Can the ASG survive without this assistance?

This thesis attempts to answer these questions within the following four chapters. Chapter II will survey the history of Muslim separatist groups in the Southern Philippines, and how the fractionalization over agenda resulted in the creation of the Abu Sayyaf. Chapter III will explore the supporting/supported relationship between the MILF and the ASG. It will also examine the methods utilized by the ASG to raise, store, and transfer funds used in its operations. Chapter IV will then examine attempts by the United States and Philippine governments from 2001 to the present to combat the ASG. The final chapter will then detail a three-pronged strategy to eliminate the remaining ASG threat. Successful execution of this strategy will bolster regional stability in Southeast Asia by defeating one of the targets of the Global War on Terror as well as diminishing one of the places of refuge of international terrorists.

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## **II. HISTORY OF MUSLIM SEPARATIST GROUPS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

The Republic of the Philippines has been battling insurgent groups of differing ideologies for over four decades. This chapter will detail what underlying conditions contributed to the creation of the major Muslim separatist groups in the Southern Philippines. By examining the different groups' motivations as well as how they ultimately fractionalized over agenda, this chapter will also explain how the Abu Sayyaf came to be.

### **A. ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES**

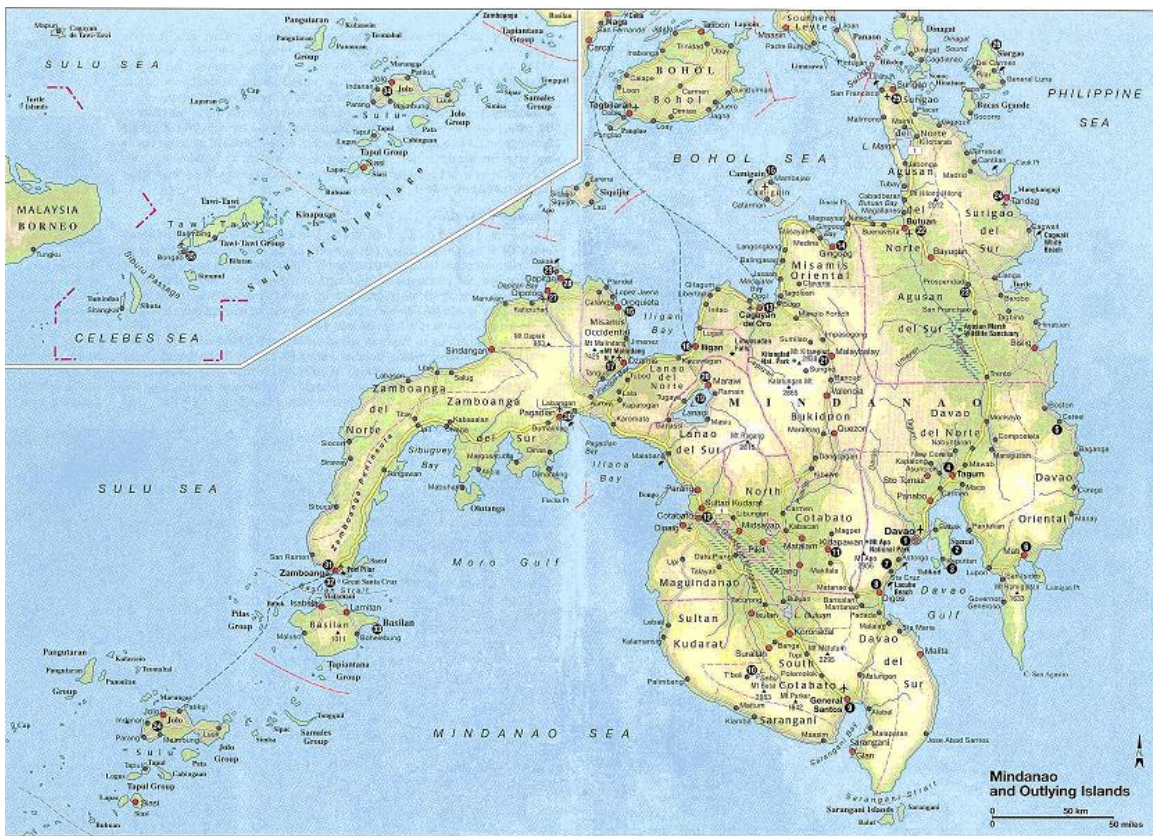
Islam was introduced to Southeast Asia by maritime merchants during the 12th century.<sup>27</sup> In the regions of what is now Indonesia and Malaysia an overwhelming majority of the population accepted the Islamic identity, while in the Philippines Muslims were to remain a minority. The Filipino Muslims, also called Moros, constitute 5% of the Philippines' population and are mainly concentrated in the southern portion of the archipelago. Organized under independent sultanates, the Moros successfully avoided Spanish conquest and became the masters of Mindanao and Sulu, where they originally constituted 98 percent of the population.

Upon the conclusion of the Spanish American war they fell under United States sovereignty. A reluctant colonial power, from the outset the U.S. stated that its policy was to slowly groom the Philippines for eventual self-rule. At the time the Philippine commonwealth was established in 1935, government policy was already geared toward assimilating the Moros into the larger Philippine society. On July 4, 1946, the United States stuck to their promise and formally declared the independence of the Philippines, effectively turning all of its inhabitants into citizens of the Republic of the Philippines (RP).

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<sup>27</sup> John Gershman, "Moros in the Philippines." Self-Determination Regional Conflict Profile. [http://www.fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/Philippines\\_body.html](http://www.fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/Philippines_body.html). Accessed 5 Jun 2006.

Figure 2. Map of the southern region of the Philippines, including Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.<sup>28</sup>



Many Southern Muslims viewed this action as a betrayal of trust as the vast majority of Moros did not consider themselves Filipinos due to their religious and cultural differences, while making the additional claim that as they had never been conquered by the Spanish, they deserved to be an independent state.<sup>29</sup> Despite these complaints, some members of the Muslim political elite aligned themselves with the policies of the new state, which included state sponsorship of a large-scale Christian migration to the Muslim South. As large Christian resettlement communities sprouted quickly in Mindanao from the 1930s onward, the Moros became the minority in the land they considered their own. The proportion of Moro inhabitants to the total population fell from 98 percent to 40

<sup>28</sup> Honorary Philippine Consulate South website, <http://www.pwsdb.com/FortLauderdalePCG/Maps-Phil.php>. Accessed 9 Feb 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Christos Iacovou, *From MNLF to Abu Sayyaf: The Radicalization of Islam in the Philippines*, Institute of Defense Analysis, Greece (July, 2000): 1.

percent by 1976, and to around 20 percent currently.<sup>30</sup> This migration marked the beginning of years of economic neglect and political discrimination, which in turn led to the creation of a Muslim nationalist separatist movement in the 1960's.

In an attempt to unite the country the Philippine government sent several young men from non-elite Muslim families to Manila universities on scholarships with the goal of integrating the Muslim minority into the Philippine nation. In the Muslim South, some of these newly educated young men would return to become popular separatist leaders as they provided an alternative to the established Muslim leaders who had failed to prevent the massive Christian migration.<sup>31</sup>

Over the next several years the separatist movement slowly achieved success as many of those Muslim leaders who had collaborated with the state in the 1960's now joined forces with the separatist leaders. Concurrently, in an effort to quell unrest the Philippine government was integrating rebel commanders into the state bureaucracy by offering positions which allowed them to govern large numbers of Muslims on the condition of defecting from separatist activities. Numerous violent clashes between the predominately Christian government and the Muslim minority continued until the early 1970s. The 1971 elections allowed many Christian politicians, armed with the help of President Ferdinand Marcos and the ruling party, to capture many provincial and municipal offices which had traditionally been held by Muslims.

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<sup>30</sup> Currently, Muslims in the Philippines make up 5 percent, or around 4 million, of the Philippines' total population of 82 million. They are geographically concentrated in the islands of Mindanao and Sulu in the southern Philippines, where they constitute around 20 percent of the region's population of more than 16 million. They belong to three major (and ten minor) ethno-linguistic groups: the Maguindanaoans in the Pulangi River Basin of central Mindanao, the Maranaos of the Lanao Lake region in central Mindanao, and the Tausugs in the Sulu archipelago. Muslims are in the majority in five provinces (Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) and in the Islamic City of Marawi, which are currently constituents of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Source: United States Institute for Peace. "The Mindanao Peace Talks." Special Report 131. January 2005. [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org). Accessed 9 Feb 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Iacovou, 2.

## **B. MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) AND MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT (MILF)**

Despite all attempts by the Philippine government, it was unable to pacify the growing secessionist sentiments in the South. Foremost in the secessionist struggle was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which was formed in the late 1960s by a small group of students and intellectuals. The MNLF was chaired by Nur Misuay, who had been a faculty member at the University of Philippines. Misuay argued that only through a free and independent state could the Muslims free themselves from corrupt leaders and fully implement Islamic institutions. To him, the Moros constituted a separate and distinct people—the Bangsamoro people. With Misuay as the chairman, the stated goal of the MNLF is self-determination and independence, defined as a prerequisite for the unhindered implementation and enhancement of Islamic institutions among the Muslim minority in the Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

The secessionist movement grew rapidly after the eruption of violence in Cotabato between 1969 and 1971. This violence prompted President Ferdinand Marcos to declare martial law in September 1972, whereupon the government began to disarm the Muslim minority. This led directly to open rebellion as the Moros feared both armed Christian groups as well as military retaliation. The peak of the rebellion came in 1975, when the military arm of the MNLF, the Bangsa Moro Army, was able to field some 30,000 armed fighters. The AFP responded by deploying 70 to 80 percent of its combat forces against them. Destruction and casualties, both military and civilian, were immense: an estimated 50,000 people were killed.

In response to the unrest, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and other Muslim international organizations successfully exerted pressure on the Philippine government to negotiate for a peaceful settlement to the conflict which resulted in the Tripoli Agreement of December 1976. The Philippine government officials and MNLF leaders agreed to a settlement which called for a cease-fire and granted autonomy to thirteen predominantly Muslim provinces.

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<sup>32</sup> Iacovou, 3.



Unwilling to accept the negotiations with the RP government, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was formed in 1977 when Hashim Salamat, supported by ethnic Maguindanaos from Mindanao, split from the MNLF.<sup>33</sup> The MILF, fielding around 9,000 troops, refused to accept the accord and initiated a brief offensive primarily against the Philippine security forces which ended in a truce later that month. Unfortunately, the truce did not last and conflict continued sporadically until the most recent cease-fire agreement was signed in 2003.<sup>34</sup>

By mid 1977 the separatist struggle in the Southern Philippines had slowly transformed into a popular-based, relatively peaceful movement marked by isolated clashes with the RP government.<sup>35</sup> With the collapse of the Marcos regime in 1985, MNLF leaders, with widespread support from ordinary Muslims, entered into main-stream popular politics with the goal of political autonomy for Philippine Muslims.<sup>36</sup> In 1996, the MNLF signed an agreement relinquishing its goal of independence for Muslim regions and many of its troops were assimilated into the AFP as well as the Philippine National Police force.

MILF military activity, which was primarily aimed at the Philippine security forces, continued at a relatively low level throughout the 1980s. Following a 1989 referendum, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was established, based in Cotabato, consisting of the four provinces of Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. In 2001 it was expanded to include the island of Basilan and Marawai City in central Mindanao (See Fig. 3). Many previous leaders of the MNLF joined the political institutions of this body. However, the MILF strongly rejected the ARMM as a legitimate institution, believing it to be wrought with corruption and unable to succeed in the stated goal of the MILF: complete Muslim independence in the Southern Philippines.

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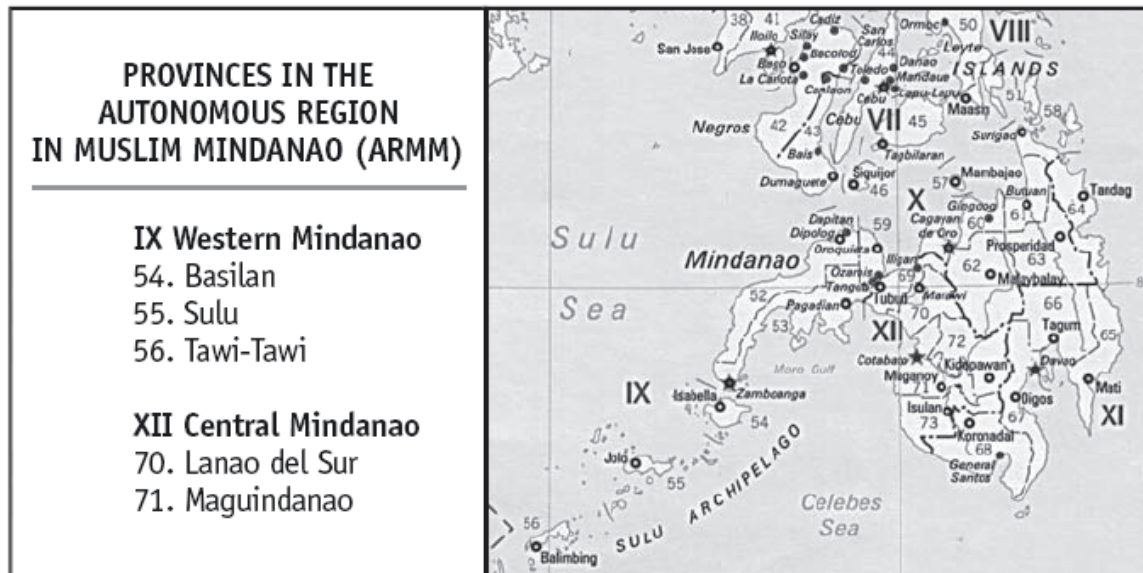
<sup>33</sup> Intelligence Resource Program website, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/milf.htm>. Accessed 4 Jun 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Paul A. Rodell, "The Philippines and the Challenge of International Terrorism," in *Terrorism and Violence in Southeast Asia : Transnational Challenges to States and Regional Stability*. Ed. by Paul J. Smith, ed. (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2005): 129.

<sup>35</sup> D. R. SarDesai, *Southeast Asia, Past and Present*. Fifth edition. (California, Westview Press, 2003): 218.

<sup>36</sup> Iacovou, 4.

Figure 3. Provinces in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.<sup>37</sup>



Up through the mid 1990s the MILF conducted numerous operations against the AFP and select members of the Philippine government. It also focused its violence against Christian communities in the form of arson and bomb attacks on churches as well as murders in remote Christian villages. In April 1995 the MILF committed its worst atrocity to date when a group of guerrillas from the MILF and members of the Abu Sayyaf raided the town of Ipil and massacred over 50 people. They also took over 30 others hostage whom they later killed. The violence did not stop here as yet more MILF members conducted another attack on a cinema in Iligan, Mindanao which resulted in the deaths of another 14 people.<sup>38</sup> In 2000, the MILF attacked a bus carrying Christian plantation workers, resulting in 13 murdered and 14 injured.

As the Muslim insurgency in the Southern Philippines was becoming increasingly costly in terms of both men and equipment, the Estrada administration was prompted to initiate several attempts at a ceasefire with the

<sup>37</sup> United States Institute for Peace. "The Mindanao Peace Talks." Special Report 131. January 2005. www.usip.org. Accessed 9 Feb 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Maria Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia*. (New York, Free Press, 2003): 41-43.

MILF.<sup>39</sup> In early 2000, MILF military and political confidence grew against the backdrop of the first ceasefire attempt, thereby signifying the beginning a dangerous game of military brinkmanship. The MILF sought Manila's recognition of its military camps as well as a demilitarized zone. Much to the consternation of the AFP commanders, recognition of this sort would create areas in which the MILF would be free to train and recruit.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, neither the AFP nor the MILF gave the DMZ any regard, as both launched sporadic attacks against the other with each side blaming the other for the ceasefire violation.

By April 2000 the AFP had grown tired of the stalemate and began a four-month campaign against the MILF supported by sustained air and artillery bombardments. This offensive was described by Manila as operations to free a major highway from MILF control. However, military operations extended beyond the disputed highway and concluded only after government troops established control over 47 major and satellite MILF camps. The greatest coup for the AFP was the capture of Camp Abu Bakr in July. Unfortunately, the AFP flaunted its success by hosting then-president Joseph Estrada at a celebration with beer and roast pork near the ruins of the camp's main mosque. This obviously was a tremendous insult to the Muslim community.

The four-month campaign against the MILF appeared to be a banner success to the GRP as it both boosted both AFP morale and President Estrada's public image in the Christian north. Upon further inspection, the campaign provided questionable results. The AFP did in fact achieve its military goals of disproving MILF claims that they had graduated from predominately guerilla operations to a credible conventional war-fighting capability.<sup>41</sup> But this success

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<sup>39</sup> De Castro, "Adjusting to the Post-U.S. Bases Era," 121.

<sup>40</sup> This is exactly what Christopher Hewitt discovered in his work *The Effectiveness of Anti-terrorist Policies*. Hewitt examined the governments' responses to terrorism and analyzes the six separate counter-terrorist policies that were implemented in the various countries. One of Hewitt's conclusions was that when states consider negotiating a ceasefire with the terrorists, the data shows that prudence is necessary and that a ceasefire is often a short-sighted policy. Negotiations between the state and the terrorist organization will not lead to resolution of the conflict. Furthermore, Hewitt found that if the ceasefire is protracted the terrorist organization rather than the government ends up benefiting the most.

<sup>41</sup> Renato Cruz, "Addressing International Terrorism in Southeast Asia: A Matter of Strategic or Functional Approach?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Aug. 2004): 4.

came at a cost, as it not only was a huge drain on the AFP's budget, but it also required large numbers of troops to remain in the area to prevent MILF re-infiltration of its six major camps. The campaign also resulted in over 600,000 displaced persons, of which most were Muslim. This, coupled with the AFP's disregard for cultural sensitivities as exhibited in the Camp Abu Bakr celebration, provided ample motivation for new recruits into the MILF.

### **C. THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP (ASG)**

As discussed in the previous section, despite early Philippine attempts at resolution, the Muslim separatist movement had grown in strength over time, with different factions splitting off along the way. Of those groups who split off from the mainstream, perhaps the most violent Muslim separatist group operating in the region is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), or "Bearer of the Sword". The group split from the much larger MNLF in the early 1990s with the intent of establishing an Islamic state based on Sharia law on the islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.<sup>42</sup>

The ASG rejected the non-violent practices adopted by the MNLF as the ASG prefers violent struggle, or "Jihad", as its ideological strategy. The ASG successfully competed with the MNLF for the leadership of the Moros' national struggle, successfully taking advantage of a pre-existing Islamic trend within the MNLF. During the 1970's and 1980's the Moros nationalist main-stream political force did nothing to inhibit the Islamists' increased participation in the armed struggle against the Philippine government as they acknowledged the radicals' contributions to the overall effort to drive the government to make political and territorial concessions. In 1996 the ASG split away from the MNLF as they were bitterly opposed to the apparent concessions that were being introduced in the peace process between the Philippines and the MNLF.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Simon Elegant, "The Return of Abu Sayyaf," *Time Magazine*, (Aug 2004).  
<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501040830-686107,00.html>. Accessed 21 April 2006.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Abubakar Janjalani, the son of a fisherman on Basilan Island, originally formed the Abu Sayyaf Group in the early 1990s. While fighting against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Janjalani had become connected with a Muslim fundamentalist movement called the Al Islamic Tabligh. Janjalani continued his studies in Saudi Arabia and Libya where he became radicalized. When he returned to Basilan, he recruited two groups into the ASG: dissidents from the MNLF and as well as other Filipinos who had fought with the Afghan mujaheddin. Janjalani led the ASG until December 1998, when he was killed by police in Lamitan village on Basilan. After his death, his brother, Khaddafy Janjalani, emerged as the ASG's new leader and consolidated power until his death during a firefight with the AFP in December, 2006.<sup>44</sup> Despite this change in leadership the ASG claim to an Islamic ideology with a focus on Jihad still guides their radical objectives and strategy.<sup>45</sup> Although the ASG presents itself as a legitimate secessionist organization, the facts tell a different tale.

Slowly refining their use of violence as a policy tool, the ASG have transformed into a credible terrorist organization. In the early 1990s the ASG is reported to have received funding from Al Qaeda through Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, who was Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law. Additionally, Ramzi Yousef, a known Al Qaeda operative, visited Basilan Island in 1995, where he reportedly trained 20 ASG members. Following this visit, Yousef established an Al Qaeda cell in Manila where he planned several attacks including: an assassination of Pope John Paul II, the planting of bombs aboard 12 U.S. airliners flying trans-Pacific routes, as well as a plan to crash an airplane into the Central Intelligence Agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. The plots were uncovered by the Philippine National Police in 1995 as they were investigating a fire in Yousef's Manila apartment. Yousef was later arrested in Pakistan and extradited to the United States for trial over his complicity in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism* (2004): 93.

<sup>45</sup> Iacovou, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Nicksch, 5.

Ultimately, it was the ASG's choice of sensational terrorist actions, like bombings and kidnappings of foreigners, that placed the ASG on the international agenda, as well as adding their name to the U.S. government's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in October, 1997.<sup>47</sup> In April 1995 the ASG undertook its first large-scale action against the town of Ipil in Mindanao, which resulted in 53 deaths. By the year 2000 the ASG began to use terror primarily for financial profit, engaging in kidnappings for ransom, assassinations, and extortion. In April of 2000, an ASG faction kidnapped 21 persons, including 10 Western tourists, from a resort in Malaysia where they gained nearly \$20 million USD in ransom from the governments of Malaysia, Libya, Germany and France.<sup>48</sup> It was these events as well as the group's ties to Al Qaeda that would soon draw increased scrutiny from the United States. The extent of the U.S. involvement will be described in detail in Chapter IV.

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<sup>47</sup> Audrey Cronin, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," *Congressional Research Service* (October 2004): 4.

<sup>48</sup> United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*. 94.

### III. MILF-ASG INTERRELATIONSHIP

#### A. BACKGROUND

The MILF has waged a secessionist campaign in the southern Philippines since 1978, when they broke away from the secular MNLF. Their avowed goal is to establish an independent homeland for the Moro peoples that will be governed by Sharia law (Islamic law).<sup>49</sup> Though initially armed and supported by the Libyan and Malaysian governments, by the early 1990s, the MILF had lost much of its state support. It was at this time that it began to establish links with the Abu Sayyaf Group.

By 1991, both the MILF and the ASG were funded through a financial network established by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law. Khalifa, officially the regional director for the Saudi-based charity Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO), was dispatched to the Philippines in 1991 to establish a network of Islamic charities.<sup>50</sup> As with most of the Islamic charities that have been implicated in terrorist financing, Khalifa's charities did in fact provide some necessary services to the Moros.<sup>51</sup>

The IIRO's charitable activities provided much needed infrastructure to the Moros in Mindanao, including the construction of an orphanage and dispensary in Cotabato City and dispensaries and pharmacies in Zamboanga. The IIRO also funded a mobile, floating clinic to serve Muslims in remote areas of western Mindanao. Food and clothing were also provided to many displaced Moros who were fleeing the fighting between the separatists and the AFP. The IIRO was also a key contributor to an important front organization of the MILF, the Markazzo Shabab Al-Islamiyah (MSI). Based in Lanao del, Mindanao, the MSI was engaged in da'wah and recruitment activities for both the MILF and ASG.

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<sup>49</sup> S. P. Harish, "The GRP-MILF Peace Process: The Quest for International and Domestic Legitimacy." Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies (19 Jan 2006): 1.

<sup>50</sup> Abuza, 5.

<sup>51</sup> International Crisis Group. "Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts." *Asia Report* (19 Dec 2005): 4.

Additionally, the IIRO used scholarships as an attempt to broaden the base of support for the MILF and ASG by recruiting from both rural and urban areas. These scholarships were provided to encourage students to become Islamic scholars.<sup>52</sup>

Although the IIRO was providing funding legitimate relief and livelihood projects, it was also channeling funds for the purchase of arms for both the MILF and ASG. According to an interview with an ASG defector by Philippine intelligence, only 10 to 30 percent of the foreign funding went to humanitarian projects and the rest ended up funding terrorist operations.<sup>53</sup> Due to competition for these funds the ASG and MILF soon developed a rivalry.

Despite the ASG-MILF competition over resources, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa was also able to forge working ties between the two groups. Khalifa's IIRO funded the establishment of a mosque/madrassa in Marawi, Mindanao where the MILF and ASG sent operatives for religious training before going on to military training in camps operated by the MILF. The school provided almost 150 cadets between 1990 and 1993. The classes, of roughly 50 cadets each, were divided between MILF and ASG. Abdurajak Janjalani, the founder of the ASG, was a graduate of the class of 1992.<sup>54</sup>

In an attempt to bring the two organizations closer together a key al Qaeda operative, Omar al-Faruq, was dispatched to the region in 1994-95 by Abu Zubaidah. Al-Faruq was sent to be a trainer at the MILF camps to create a stronger jihad force out of the ASG and the MILF. Due to differences over ideology and tactics the division between the MILF and ASG began to widen, as the ASG did not consider the MILF to be a reliable jihad partner. Many of the ASG members were also upset that the MILF did not share much of the resources and funding from the Saudi charity network established by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa. However, joint training continued at MILF camps through the mid-

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<sup>52</sup> Abuza, 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ressa, 21.



1990s due to the presence of al Qaeda trainers, which included Al-Mughirah al-Gaza'iri and Abu al-Abbas al-Khatami.<sup>55</sup>

Following the discovery of the Bojinka Plot<sup>56</sup> led by Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the ASG began a steady decline. Up to date, the Yousef-bin Laden connection had been the major source of their funding, and without a steady supply of al Qaeda money, the operations budget began to wither. The ASG was further weakened by a number of arrests and the death of their founder, Abdurajak Janjalani in December 1998. The combination of these factors led the ASG to begin a series of violent kidnappings. The group gained international notoriety in 2000 with high-profile raids on diving resorts in Palawan and Sipidan, Malaysia, which led to the deaths of several tourists, including Americans.<sup>57</sup> These kidnappings netted the ASG roughly \$20 million USD in ransom form various Western nations.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was quick to offer the use of former U.S. bases, Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base, to the U.S. led coalition against international terrorism.<sup>58</sup> In response to the Philippine declaration of support to the Global War on Terror (GWOT), the United States committed almost 1,300 troops and \$93 million in military aid to assist the Philippine government's fight against the ASG on Basilan Island. Over a six-month period Philippine forces, with U.S. assistance, were able to rout the ASG's stranglehold on Basilan- forcing the remaining ASG to flee to relative sanctuary in areas controlled by the MILF in Mindanao and Jolo (this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV). AFP

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<sup>55</sup> Abuza, 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Responding to a Manila apartment fire in 1995, Philippine investigators uncovered an al-Qaeda plot to assassinate the Pope that was scheduled to take place when he visited the Philippines one week later. While investigating that scheme, they also uncovered Operation Bojinka, planned by the same people: 1993 WTC bomber Ramzi Yousef and 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. Cooperative Research website. <http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/context.jsp?item=a0195bojinka>. Accessed 8 Jan 2007.

<sup>57</sup> SarDesai, 225.

<sup>58</sup> De Castro, "Addressing International Terrorism..." 1.

commanders attributed their successes to U.S. equipment, U.S. intelligence gathering, and U.S. assistance in planning AFP operations.<sup>59</sup>

During the 2002 U.S.-Philippine bilateral operation against the ASG, an MILF spokesman condemned the ASG's attacks and kidnapping as being completely un-Islamic when he stated, "Most of their activities are against Islam. We do not sanction most of their activities."<sup>60</sup> This statement was made in an effort to distance the MILF from the ASG, as the MILF and the Philippine government were currently in a cease-fire agreement. In fact, during the 2002 operation exercises, a trilateral agreement was reached between the U.S., the AFP and the MILF, to assure the MILF that joint U.S.-Philippine patrols in Basilan would not enter MILF-held zones. Unfortunately this agreement boded especially well for the ASG as it allowed them a place to turn to for sanctuary.<sup>61</sup>

Following their displacement from Basilan to Mindanao and Jolo, the ASG regrouped and resumed sporadic but significant domestic terrorist operations. In fact, since the conclusion of U.S.-Philippine bilateral operations in July of 2002, the ASG's tactics appear to have shifted back from kidnap-for-ransom operations to a systematic campaign of bombings. The first incident was the joint ASG, MILF, JI operation that killed a U.S. Special Forces Officer in 2002. Second, in February 2004, ASG operatives with assistance from members of the Rajah Solomain Movement (RSM) set an explosive device which blew up and sank

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<sup>59</sup> Nicksh, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Abuza, 14.

<sup>61</sup> During its operations on Basilan, the ASG developed contacts with the MILF's so-called "4th Division", which fields some 800 to 1,000 guerrillas on the island (its 402nd Brigade) and a larger number on the Zamboanga peninsula (401st Brigade). In early 2002 the MILF leadership vigorously denied AFP accusations that its commanders on Basilan were giving sanctuary to ASG kidnapers holding hostages from the Dos Palmas resort. However, the subsequent debriefing of U.S. hostage Gracia Burnham detailed that the ASG had been given shelter at a MILF camp for several weeks. Source: David S. Maxwell. "Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: What Would Sun Tzu Say?" *Military Review* (Fort Leavenworth: May/June 2004).

Superferry 14 out of Manila, killing 194.<sup>62</sup> Third, on Valentine's Day, 2005, they executed a triple bombing across three cities.<sup>63</sup> These attacks dictate that the group has apparently abandoned their notorious kidnap-for-ransom operations and returned to their earlier radical, more politicized agenda in order to expand their capabilities and area of operations.

Zachary Abuza, a renowned Southeast Asia terrorist expert, believes that the ASG has shifted back to terrorism due to three factors. First, there was an internal change in leadership within the organization. Abu Sabaya and Ghalib Andang, the leaders most responsible for the kidnappings, had been either killed or captured. This allowed Khadaffy Janjalani, the younger brother of the group's founder, to consolidate his leadership and bring the organization back to its radical Islamist roots.<sup>64</sup>

Second, the ASG was also trying to benefit from the ongoing peace process between the GRP and the MILF, which is slowly defusing the primary secessionist movement in the southern Philippines. In this apparent shift in doctrine and tactics, Khadaffy Janjalani sought to improve ties with the largest independence movement remaining in the southern Philippines, the MILF. The ASG began to search for renegade commanders of the MILF, who they felt would reject an autonomy agreement with the government. Ultimately, the ASG believes that strict adherence to a radical Islamist ideology is paramount to their group becoming a viable separatist force in the Philippines.

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<sup>62</sup> The emergence of the RSM in 2005 presents a new terrorist threat to the Philippines. Unlike Muslims of the southern Philippines, the RSM appears to be composed primarily of Filipinos from the northern Philippines. The RSM has emerged from the estimated 200,000 Filipinos who have converted to Islam since the 1970s; many of these are Filipinos who worked in the Middle East where they converted. The RSM's manpower strength is unknown, but Philippine intelligence reports indicate that it has cells throughout the main island of Luzon, including metropolitan Manila. The RSM has cooperated with Abu Sayyaf in several bomb plots including the February 2004 Manila ferry bombing. The RSM also has received financial support and training from elements within the MILF. The RSM leader, Ahmed Islam Santos, underwent bomb training in the MILF's Camp Bushra on Mindanao in December 2001. Source: Abuza, 35-37.

<sup>63</sup> Abuza, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Khadaffy Janjalani led the Abu Sayyaf until his death in a firefight with the AFP on Jolo in December, 2006.

Lastly, in 2002, the leaders of Indonesian based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), were suffering attrition due to a number of arrests of operatives that had occurred around the region. That year they decided to forge closer ties with the ASG and invited them to begin training with JI within the MILF's camps in Mindanao- to which the ASG readily agreed.<sup>65</sup> While the MILF publicly denies the relationship with both the ASG and JI, a number of arrests of key JI suspects in the Philippines confirmed that JI is providing training to MILF and ASG members in MILF camps.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, evidence proves that members of the MILF and ASG have been engaging in joint terrorist operations.<sup>67</sup>

## **B. MILF EXPECTATIONS**

Abuza believes the MILF will gain from continued involvement with the ASG for three reasons.<sup>68</sup> First, it keeps AFP forces spread thin. Because the AFP maintains a limited number of forces in the area, any AFP operations against the ASG translates to no operations against the MILF. Second, it gives the MILF a degree of plausible deniability when it chooses to engage in terrorism as it can blame the event on the ASG. As of mid-2003, the MILF is currently involved in a Malaysian sponsored peace talk with the Philippine government and has a public image to uphold. Although there is no current proof of formal agreements between the ASG and the MILF, continued sightings of ASG fighters in MILF controlled camps suggest that some sort of arrangement exists. Philippine intelligence sources have observed ASG members using MILF boats in Tawi-Tawi, in the Sulu archipelago. Additionally, there is proof that the MILF

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<sup>65</sup> Two of the bombers responsible for the 2005 Valentine's Day attack in Makati, Abu Khalil Trinidad and Gamal Baharan, admitted that Khadaffy Janjalani recruited them into the ASG. In the summer of 2004, they were dispatched to Butig, the seat of the MILF's 103rd Base Command, where they met with Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman, and were trained in bomb making by Rohmat (aka Zaki), an Indonesian JI liaison officer. Baharan stated that there were two other ASG members who were being trained there at the same time.

<sup>66</sup> As of March, 2007, JI as it was once known has suffered immensely as an organization due to an intense counter-terror campaign by Indonesian Security Forces. Scores of arrests have been made from 2004-2006 which have made it difficult for the group to reorganize and have forced it to splinter. The extent to which it is still capable of conducting large-scale terrorist attacks outside of Indonesia is unknown.

<sup>67</sup> Ressa, 138.

<sup>68</sup> Abuza, 16.

has reached out to Khadaffy Janjalani. Reportedly, U.S. signals intercepts have tracked Janjalani through several MILF camps where he could not have been without explicit MILF approval, knowledge, or support.<sup>69</sup>

Lastly, the MILF is seeking to increase its ties with the differing ethnic and social networks throughout the archipelago so they can supplant the MNLF as the dominant political voice and action arm of the Bangsamoro people. It is doing this via three ways: first, the MILF is catering to the ASG to gain the trust of its ethnic Yaccan base. Second, the MILF is nominating ethnic Tausogs, a predominately MNLF ethnic group, into positions of authority within their organization. This is being done to maintain an ethnic and geographical balance to the MILF leadership.<sup>70</sup>

Ultimately, the MILF clearly hopes to use the ASG to keep government forces spread thin and to help build up its network in the Sulu archipelago. This factor, coupled with Janjalani's rejection of kidnapping in favor of a Moro-national liberation struggle, has led to much closer ties between the two organizations. Concurrently, hard-line elements of the MILF are predisposed ideologically to the more radical ASG and JI<sup>71</sup>, and are therefore actively creating alliances with these two groups.

### **C. ASG EXPECTATIONS**

First, the MILF can provide what the ASG does not possess: training, infrastructure, firm control over large areas of land, popular support and logistics assistance, and help with operations. The ASG is obligated to assist the MILF whenever they can as the MILF allows the ASG to exist, operate, train, recruit, and raise funds in MILF controlled areas. Although it appears that this relationship is strong, the ASG-MILF relationship does not appear institutionalized. Instead, it is stronger with individual commanders of the MILF,

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<sup>69</sup> Abuza, 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> Abuza, 17.

<sup>71</sup> MILF's ties to JI have been dramatically reduced in recent years due to successful counter-terror operations in both the Philippines and Indonesia.

and in particular to the 106th and 109th Base Commands (see Figure 4). In fact, the ASG appears to be forging closer ties with commands that are less inclined to support the MILF's senior leadership in the peace process.<sup>72</sup>

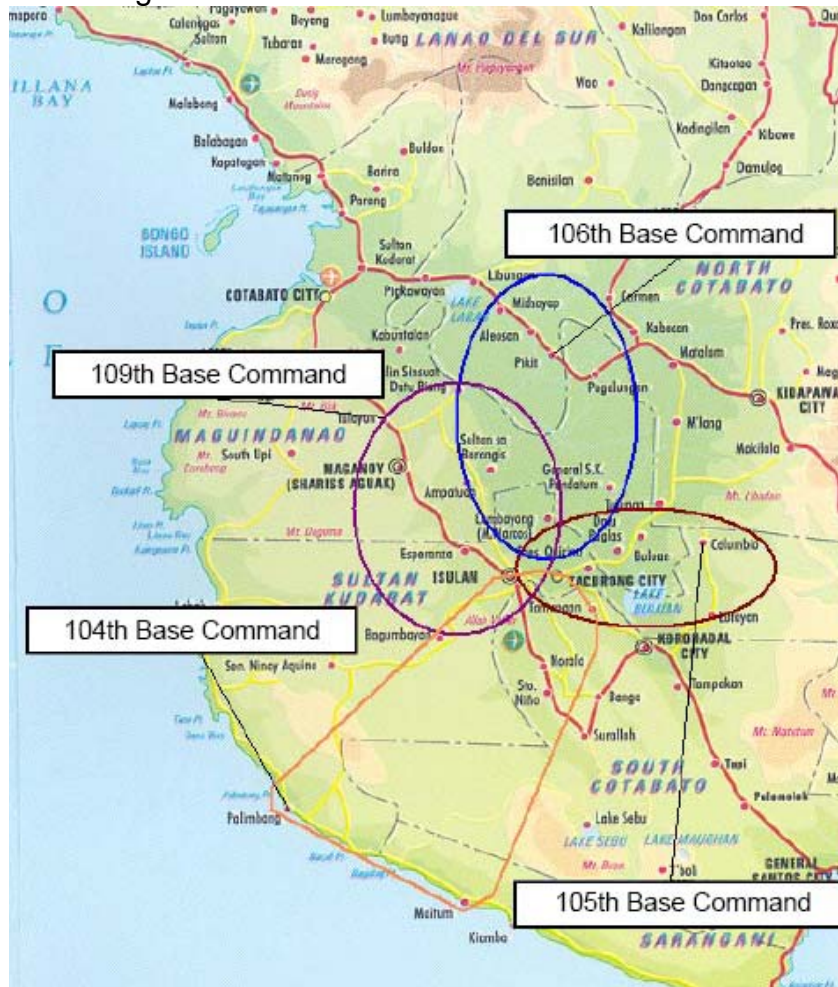
Regarding funding, the ASG still maintains large amounts of revenue left over from its earlier hostage taking operations. According to Philippine sources, ASG earned \$20 million USD from ransoms in 2000 and 2001. The group also extorts money from businesses and individuals and has also engaged in marijuana-growing operations. The ASG is also known to levy "revolutionary taxes" on the populations in some of their operating areas. Lastly, the ASG gains approximately 4,000 to 10,000 pesos per month from protection money charged against both individuals and businesses.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> A JI operative in charge of liaison work and training of the ASG, Rohmat (aka Zaki), was arrested at a military checkpoint while exiting the MILF's 109th Base Command. He provided that both JI and ASG training was being conducted at the MILF's 103rd and 109th Base Commands. He also stated that the ASG leadership had given members of the MILF USD\$1,850 to launch terrorist attacks during Easter week, 2005. MILF leaders later denied these allegations.

<sup>73</sup> Janes World Insurgency and Terrorism Database.  
[http://www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/subscribe/jwit/doc\\_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0093.htm@current&Prod\\_Name=JWIT&QueryText=%3CAND%3E%28%3COR%3E%28%28%5B80%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%2C+%28%5B100%5D+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+title%29+%3CAND%3E+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%29%29](http://www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/subscribe/jwit/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0093.htm@current&Prod_Name=JWIT&QueryText=%3CAND%3E%28%3COR%3E%28%28%5B80%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%2C+%28%5B100%5D+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+title%29+%3CAND%3E+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%29%29). Accessed 5 Feb 2007.

Figure 4. MILF Base Commands<sup>74</sup>



#### D. CONCLUSION

As detailed in the previous sections, the MILF and the ASG are in a mutually beneficial relationship. The MILF gains in three ways: first, the ASG keeps AFP forces occupied; second, the leadership of the MILF gains plausible deniability whenever a terrorist attack does occur as it can simply blame the event on the ASG; and lastly, it is able to tap into another ethnic base in order to bolster its regional agenda. The ASG gains are more obvious: shelter, weapons, and funding.

Despite the possibility of the successful implementation of the Malaysian-sponsored peace agreement between the MILF leaders and the Philippine

<sup>74</sup> Abuza, 20.

government, this will not completely diminish the MILF-ASG relationship. Some key MILF commanders may rebel against the MILF leadership as they might reject any plan which does not guarantee outright independence for the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. If this were the case, the MILF hardliners could possibly transfer their allegiance to JI and the ASG. This shift would certainly lead to an increase in terrorist attacks.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Abuza, 39.



## IV. U.S. AND PHILIPPINE RESPONSE

As detailed in the previous chapters, it was the ASG's choice of sensational terrorist actions, like bombings and kidnappings of foreigners that placed the ASG on the international agenda. By 2000, the ASG had become quite successful in their endeavors, as they had gained nearly \$20 million USD in ransom from the governments of Malaysia, Libya, Germany and France.<sup>76</sup> It was these events as well as the group's ties to Al Qaeda that would soon draw increased scrutiny from both the U.S. and Philippine governments.

### A. OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES

Following the 9/11 terror attacks, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo quickly offered up the use of the former U.S. bases, Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air base to the United States, stating that the Philippines was "ready to pay a price" to support the GWOT. Concurrently, she issued a 14-stage counterterrorism campaign to enhance intelligence sharing with the U.S. and other coalition members.<sup>77</sup> President Bush, in response to the offer of unequivocal Philippine support, offered the possibility of U.S. military involvement in the AFP campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Southern Philippines.<sup>78</sup> Prior to 9/11, Philippine government policy had been to apply military pressure to the Abu Sayyaf Group who, on May 27, 2001, had kidnapped three U.S. citizens and 17 Filipinos from a tourist resort in Palawan, Philippines. Several of the hostages, including one U.S. citizen, were murdered. However, AFP attempts to rescue the hostages had been ineffective due to several factors: difficult terrain, inadequate Philippine equipment, avoiding clashes with the MNLF and the MILF, as well as relatively high instances of corruption in the AFP.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> United States Department of State. "Country Reports on Terrorism," 94.

<sup>77</sup> Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 24, Num. 2 (August, 2002): 303.

<sup>78</sup> De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations." 980.

<sup>79</sup> Nicksch, 1.

In November 2001, the two nations signed an interim arrangement that gave the United States access to storing military weapons and supplies in the Philippines, the right to permanent over-flight, and approval to build temporary camps for U.S. troops in support of the GWOT.<sup>80</sup> These moves were seen by the United States as key to upgrading American military links in Southeast Asia in order to prevent the region from becoming a new safe haven for international terrorists, thereby denying Al Qaeda a new home base and access to human and material resources.

The United States and the Philippines also approved a cohesive training plan for the AFP, delivery of new equipment to enhance AFP mobility, as well as the creation of a new bilateral consultative mechanism. After 9/11, the Philippines received a ten-fold increase in U.S. military assistance, from \$1.9 million USD in 2001, to \$19 million in 2002. The large list of new equipment provided by the Foreign Military Funding program included a C-130B Hercules transport aircraft, eight UH-1H Iroquois helicopters, 30,000 M-16s, grenade launchers, mortars, sniper rifles, night vision and thermal imaging devices, as well as a 360-ton Cyclone class coastal patrol craft.<sup>81</sup> New U.S. security assistance also included the training of anti-terrorism Light Reaction Companies of the AFP, as well as other programs designed to enhance overall AFP capabilities.<sup>82</sup>

The United States and the Philippines also authorized the participation of over 4000 U.S. troops on Luzon in the annual bilateral exercise Balikatan (translated "Shoulder to Shoulder"). Under the framework of Balikatan an additional deployment of almost 1,300 troops, including 160 U.S. Special Forces personnel (SOF), were deployed to the Southern Philippine island of Basilan to aid the AFP in its operations against the Abu Sayyaf. The U.S. Special Forces personnel were given the mission of advising, training and assisting the AFP on

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<sup>80</sup> De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations," 980.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 981.

<sup>82</sup> PBS interview with ADM Blair. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/terrorism/july-dec01/blair\\_12-19.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/terrorism/july-dec01/blair_12-19.html). Accessed 12 April 2006.

counterterrorism operations, with the other troops in a support role: building infrastructure to support the operation, including road projects, digging wells, and providing economic and humanitarian assistance to the local population. This deployment was to be known as Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P).<sup>83</sup>

In keeping with the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, the U.S. goal of OEF-P was to promote the development of professional armed forces in the area, while holding firm to the notion that the U.S. would only maintain temporary bases instead of a permanent forward deployed force.<sup>84</sup> Unlike previous Cold War strategy, where the United States maintained a forward deployed force to ensure security of major Asian air and sea lanes, this deployment was to encourage and assist governments in neutralizing terrorist organizations that threatened their own countries and global security. A secondary goal was to better prepare the AFP for providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as aiding in future United Nations Peacekeeping missions. During OEF-P, the U.S. troops deployed to the Southern Philippines were relegated to a purely supporting role: they were allowed to patrol with the AFP but they could not engage in combat, as they were instructed to merely observe and assess the performance of their Filipino counterparts.<sup>85</sup> To complement the U.S. ground force presence, the United States also made some of its national signals intelligence (SIGINT) assets available to the operation.

One of the best examples of U.S. intelligence and operational support to the AFP came in late June, 2002, when a Philippine Marine patrol boat, equipped with night-vision goggles and guided by U.S. intelligence assets, was able to ambush one of the senior ASG leaders. Abu Sabaya, spokesman for the ASG, had been under surveillance for weeks prior to the operation as U.S. Special Forces had surreptitiously installed a transponder in the foam padding of his backpack. The United States also provided airborne terminal guidance during

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<sup>83</sup> Nicksch, 9.

<sup>84</sup> De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations," 974.

<sup>85</sup> Maxwell, 21.

the ambush by directing a laser designator at the rebel boat, thereby allowing the Philippine Navy to track it with their night-vision goggles. After the Philippine Navy intercepted the boat in the open ocean, a brief firefight erupted which resulted in the death of Sabaya and the capture of several other ASG members.<sup>86</sup>

U.S. intelligence assets did suffer limitations in their employment during the unconventional aspects of the operation. In fact, the rules of engagement led directly to an over-reliance on U.S. technical reconnaissance assets. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and a P3 Orion reconnaissance aircraft were provided by the United States to locate the ASG and the hostages on Basilan. The rationale for technical reconnaissance assets was force protection as their employment would minimize risks to U.S. personnel who were precluded from patrolling with their AFP counterparts. According to the U.S. SOF commander, the use of these platforms did reduce patrolling in remote areas, but the UAV surveillance was extremely conventional as it only serviced specific named areas of interest (NAI). The NAIs supported the higher headquarters' (the joint task force level) priority intelligence requirements, but due to long lag times in the dissemination of this information the AFP and SOF forces on the ground were unable to exploit the available reconnaissance assets.<sup>87</sup> Gracia Burnham, the surviving American hostage, described the ineffectiveness of the airborne intelligence assets in her memoir: "[We] heard a spy plane circling overhead, [but our captors] ignored them because they had been circling for months and nothing ever happened."<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, mostly due to AFP over-reliance on conventional search and destroy missions in the jungles of Basilan, the operation was a mixed success. During a botched AFP hostage recovery operation on June 7, 2002, U.S. hostage Gracia Burnham was rescued, but her husband Martin Burnham and a

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<sup>86</sup> Bonner and Schmitt, "Philippine Officials Detail the Trap, Set With U.S. Help, that snared a Rebel Leader," *New York Times* (September 22, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Maxwell, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Gracia Burnham, *In the Presence of My Enemies* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003): 237.

Filipina nurse, Deborah Yap, were killed by AFP bullets.<sup>89</sup> The ASG, although it suffered large losses of manpower and material, was not eliminated as it shifted its base of operations to both Mindanao and Jolo.<sup>90</sup> However, the operation was successful in that United States was able to increase the AFP's overall combat capabilities.

Arguably, the biggest gains of OEF-P in 2002 appear to be political rather than military. OEF-P successfully strengthened domestic political support for a revitalized U.S.-Philippine alliance as it enhanced the Philippine government's programs of social reform and poverty alleviation in some of the poorest parts of the nation. The infrastructure left behind, in the form of new roads, bridges, and water projects, indicated lasting proof that the Philippine government was indeed committed to improving the lives of its citizens in the Muslim South. Prior to 2002, the ASG had successfully put a strangle-hold on Basilan Island until the U.S.-Philippine bilateral response was able to break it. Non-governmental organizations had left stockpiles of medicine, building materials and bridges on the island that could not be delivered to the population due to fear.

In the end, the combined military and humanitarian assistance to Basilan Island successfully freed the inhabitants of the ASG's reign of terror, forcing the group to go elsewhere. On a grander scale the operation led to further U.S. commitments to the Philippines in the form of \$4.6 billion worth of continued economic and military assistance. The GRP used these funds to continue the implementation of its modernization programs for the AFP so that it would be more capable of handling the country's myriad of internal security problems.<sup>91</sup>

## **B. EXERCISES AND OPERATIONS FROM 2002-2003**

Following the successful 2002 U.S.-Philippine operations against the ASG on Basilan, Balikatan and other annual exercises were allowed to continue- with

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<sup>89</sup> SarDesai, 225.

<sup>90</sup> De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations," 985.

<sup>91</sup> Nicksch, 11.

counter-terrorism training remaining the objective of each successive exercise.<sup>92</sup> During President Arroyo's state visit to Washington in 2003, President Bush designated the Philippines a Major Non-NATO ally and also promised increased U.S. military assistance.<sup>93</sup> In early 2003, the United States and the Philippines attempted to launch a similar operation against the remaining Abu Sayyaf members in the Sulu Archipelago. However, due to difficulties resolving the rules of engagement for U.S. forces as well as the question whether or not the Philippine Constitution allowed foreign troops to be exposed to combat, this operation was postponed.<sup>94</sup>

Despite this setback, the large change in annual U.S. assistance had substantially increased the combat capabilities of the AFP. Bolstered by this, hardliners in the Philippine defense establishment decided to seize the initiative on Mindanao in 2003. Publicly stating their intentions were against the Pentagon Gang and other criminal elements that were reportedly hiding in MILF camps, in early February the AFP attacked a MILF outpost in Pikit, North Cotabato.<sup>95</sup> They followed this with an offensive supported by artillery on the MILF controlled village of Buliok, which was also the hometown of the Chairman of the MILF, Salamat Hashim. This attack was quickly protested by the MILF, as they felt it was an assassination attempt against Hashim, who, along with town residents were gathered in prayer marking Eid-ul-Adha, a Muslim holy day celebrating the end of the Hajj. AFP intelligence responded to these charges by publicly displaying evidence from Hashim's home that included boxes of documents that included manuals on assassination, ambush and bombing techniques.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Global Security website, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/carat.htm>. Accessed 10 March 2007.

<sup>93</sup> C. Atharin Dalphino, "Separatism and Terrorism in the Philippines: Distinctions and Options for U.S. Policy." Testimony before the Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific, House International Relations Committee. June 10, 2003.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> In 2002 the U.S. added the Pentagon Gang to its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The Pentagon Gang was officially recognized as a terrorist organization by the Philippine government in 2001. The Gang is made up of former members of both the MNLF and MILF and primarily conducts kidnap-for-ransom and extortion operations on Mindanao.

<sup>96</sup> Ressa, 141.

In a strange twist of events, the Philippine government first ordered a halt to the attack and then reversed itself 24 hours later. This was partially explained when President Arroyo, weary of the constant battles between the AFP and MILF, released a statement that specified that the attack was not aimed at the MILF, claiming that "... the GRP was duty-bound to uphold the rule of law and to neutralize all armed criminal elements in Mindanao, wherever they may be."<sup>97</sup> She did this in an attempt to salvage her administration's attempts at brokering a peace agreement with the MILF.<sup>98</sup>

However, within days of this particular speech, AFP Chief of Staff Dionisio Santiago came on record that the recent campaign was not merely aimed at lawless elements and that it was directly in response to the massing of MILF forces in the area. With that, the offensive continued. By the end of March, 2003 several hundred had been killed with more than 50,000 people displaced from their homes. This campaign outraged the MILF and other Muslims in the region and subsequently created the impetus for an increase in anti-Christian violence on Mindanao. The AFP soon accused the MILF of being behind a pair of bombings in predominately Christian Davao City which killed a combined total of 38 people in March and April 2003. The AFP also postulated that the MILF may have been planning on extending its bombing campaign to Metro Manila. In response, the MILF denied all allegations stating that they did not target civilians, and that their operations were a merely a form of active self-defense.<sup>99</sup>

By mid-2003 the AFP shifted its heightened military posture to what they called "punitive action." AFP vice chief of staff Rodolfo Garcia, announced that the military would begin to actively pursue MILF units accused of crimes against civilian populations. Following the two Davao bombings, the Philippine

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<sup>97</sup> Ressa, 141.

<sup>98</sup> Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's assumption of the presidency after Estrada was forced from office in early 2001 paved the way for the resumption of the MILF peace talks. Shortly after taking office she declared a unilateral cease-fire and initiated exploratory talks with the MILF. This time, Manila responded favorably to the three conditions proposed by the MILF: 1) that the talks be mediated by the OIC or by an OIC member country, 2) that the parties comply with the terms of past agreements, and 3) that the talks be held in a foreign venue. Malaysia would take the role as a third-party facilitator in the exploratory phases held in Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>99</sup> Janes World Insurgency and Terrorism Database. Accessed 5 Feb 2007.

government posted arrest warrants and bounties for the top leaders of the MILF, including Chairman Hashim and spokesman Kabula.<sup>100</sup> The AFP continued this approach until late June with little to no progress on a ceasefire agreement nor on identifying the culprits of the Davao bombings.

The MILF maintained that they would only return to the negotiating table if the AFP completely withdrew from Buliok. The GRP countered that the MILF must denounce terrorism and sever all ties with terrorist organizations. Soon after, MILF chairman Salamat issued a public statement rejecting terrorism and denying his group's ties to terrorist organizations. In July 2003, Salamat died of natural causes, and Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, the group's vice chairman for military affairs, was named the MILF's new leader.

In a show of good faith, the GRP lifted the arrest warrants issued against the MILF leaders for the series of bombings in the Philippines and withdrew its forces out of the MILF headquarters in Buliok. With these developments, the stage was set for the resumption of the formal talks on substantive issues in the secessionist conflict.

### **C. MALAYSIAN SPONSORED CEASEFIRE**

Tiring of the constant impasses with negotiating directly with the MILF, the Philippine Government accepted the assistance of Malaysia. With the assistance of the Malaysian government, a new cease-fire agreement was signed. With it, the Arroyo administration began preparing for the resumption of negotiations with the MILF in October 2003. The first round of exploratory talks was held between the GRP and MILF in Kuala Lumpur which began to discuss the specifics of the ceasefire. By late 2004, both Malaysia and Brunei would send teams to Mindanao to assist in monitoring the ceasefire agreement.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> CNN Website, "Key Philippines Rebel Leader Dead," 5 Aug 2003. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/08/04/philippines.milf/index.html>. Accessed 10 Feb 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Bahrain and Libya also volunteered to send representatives to the monitoring team.



To facilitate negotiations on ancestral domain, government and MILF panels formed working groups in December 2004 to try to arrive at common understandings of the four sub-issues of ancestral domain: concept, territory, governance, and resources. The next stage of peace talks were held in Kuala Lumpur in February 2005, and discussed the most contentious issue between the GRP and MILF- ancestral domain. To date, the GRP refuted the MILF's draft proposal on ancestral domain as it was too broad. In it, the MILF defines ancestral domain as "all lands and areas, including the environment and natural resources therein of the Bangsamoro people, established through occupation, possession, and dominion since time immemorial by cultural bond, customary law, historic rights, and legal titles".<sup>102</sup>

Thus far the talks have yet to demonstrate substantial progress as time appears to be on the side of the GRP, as the MILF continues to bargain from a position of relative weakness due to a lack of military strength and other resources. The MILF is also wary of the sincerity of the GRP as they feel the GRP is using the peace process as a tool to fragment and sow dissension within the MILF. Another potential problem facing the talks is the fact that some U.S policy makers would like to include the MILF on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. If this happens, it would de-legitimize the negotiations, as it would show to the international community that the GRP was openly negotiating with a known terrorist group.<sup>103</sup>

#### **D. EXERCISES AND OPERATIONS FROM 2005-2006**

By 2005, the United States and the Philippines had come to a mutual agreement on how U.S. forces could legally assist the AFP in its hunt against the ASG. Thus, the U.S. once again committed forces to the region with the task of direct support missions for the Philippine military in western Mindanao against Abu Sayyaf, as well as non-combat missions on the Abu Sayyaf sanctuary of

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<sup>102</sup> United States Institute for Peace, "The Mindanao..." 5.

<sup>103</sup> Zachary Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Security in Southeast Asia." *Fellow Project Report*. [http://www.usip.org/fellows/reports/2005/0609\\_abuza.html](http://www.usip.org/fellows/reports/2005/0609_abuza.html). Accessed 14 Feb 2007.

Jolo Island. U.S. officials had expressed growing concern over the presence of JI on Mindanao as well as the presence of alleged links between JI and the MILF. The Bush Administration hoped that if it supported the ongoing peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF, it might be finally able to break the MILF-JI ties.<sup>104</sup> The U.S. also understood that coordination among Abu Sayyaf, JI, and elements of the MILF presented the possibility of a wider terrorist war in the Philippines. For this reason the United States opted not for combat operations but instead for continuing its support role of providing advice, training and assistance to the AFP.<sup>105</sup>

From 2001 to 2005, over 30 annual joint U.S.-Philippine military exercises occurred throughout the Philippines (for a comprehensive list of annual exercises see Appendix II). These exercises were all planned under the auspices of the Mutual Defense Board and Visiting Forces Agreement, and agreed upon by both governments. These exercises continued to provide training, humanitarian assistance projects, information-sharing and other activities that would increase the counter-terror capabilities of the AFP. Exercise Balikatan 2006, held from 20 Feb - 5 Mar 06, would be the most robust operation held since 2002 with approximately 5,500 U.S. personnel and 2,800 Armed Forces of the Philippines personnel participating. However, due to the rules of engagement and constitutional problems that arose in 2003, plans were made to keep U.S. forces away from any areas where combat with the ASG was likely.

During Balikatan 2006, under the Project Bayanihan – an initiative provided for in Mutual Defense Treaty, seven Medical Civic Action Programs (MEDCAPs), four Engineering Civic Action Projects (ENCAPs), a staff exercise, and military training were conducted jointly between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and U.S. Military simultaneously on the Islands of Cebu, Luzon and Sulu. Assisted by U.S. Military, the AFP was responsible for security throughout the exercise. Successes of the exercise included free medical and

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<sup>104</sup> Thomas Lum, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations." *Congressional Research Service* (10 Jan 2006): 14.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

dental care to over 11,000 Filipinos, veterinary care for animals, as well as the construction of four new school buildings. As is the case of previous Balikatan exercises, all infrastructures built to support the operations would remain after the withdrawal of the U.S. forces. Perhaps most memorable was the immediate response by the U.S. to a devastating landslide which destroyed the town of Guinsaugon, in Southern Leyte.<sup>106</sup>

Upon the closure of the Exercise and in accordance with agreements made between the United States and the Philippine governments, Project Bayanihan and other humanitarian and civic action programs were scheduled to continue in Mindanao.<sup>107</sup>

#### **E. OP PLAN ULTIMATUM**

In August 2006, the Philippine government ordered the AFP to begin an intense campaign against the Abu Sayyaf in the Sulu archipelago. Named Op Plan Ultimatum, over 7,000 AFP were ordered into the area with the sole mission of eradication of the ASG. Once again supported by U.S.-supplied training, intelligence and money, the AFP began to achieve unprecedented operational successes against the ASG on the islands of Jolo and Tawi Tawi. The offensive resulted in the death of Khaddafy Janjalani in Pakitul, Jolo on Sep 4, 2006 as well as his second-in-command, Abu Solaiman, on January 16, 2007. Armed with U.S. signals intelligence, the AFP was also able to ascertain that the JI explosives expert Dulmatin, possible engineer of the 2002 Bali night club bombings, was wounded in a firefight on January 16, 2007.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Just prior to the start of Balikatan 2006, a devastating mudslide destroyed the city of Guinsaugon, on the Southern Philippine island of Leyte. Fortunately, as Balikatan was about to commence, a large U.S. force presence was in the area who was ready to provide support to the Philippine government. Within hours, more than 2,500 U.S. forces were diverted to assist in the search and rescue operation on Leyte. The U.S. military role was to provide immediate, life-sustaining support, in order to mitigate any additional loss of life or human suffering in the areas affected by the landslide. The venue of Exercise Balikatan enabled the U.S. and Philippine governments to work closely together to coordinate an immediate humanitarian assistance/disaster relief response to this emergency.

<sup>107</sup> Tim Meyer, "Balikatan 2006 improves Filipino lives, RP-U.S. ties," U.S. Pacific Command Public Affairs. (March 6, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> Richard Weitz, "Death of a Terrorist: Abu Sayyaf's Abu Sulaiman," World Politics Watch. 05 Feb 2007. <http://www.worldpoliticswatch.com/article.aspx?id=521#>. Accessed 17 Feb 2007.

In a late January 2007 interview Armed Forces Joint Task Force Comet commander Ruben Rafael commented that the AFP would now focus on neutralizing the two remaining leaders of the Abu Sayyaf, Radullan Sahiron and Isnilon Hapilon as well as JI leaders Omar Patek and the wounded Dulmatin.<sup>109</sup> Despite the attrition of the ASG forces, Rafael also concluded that Op Plan Ultimatum is unlikely to completely wipe out the remaining ASG, as the group is deeply entrenched in the jungles of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. However, constant military pressure and continued elimination of the group's leadership will continue to have a negative impact on the ASG's ability to both recruit new members and operate outside of its current base of operations.

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<sup>109</sup> Associated Press. "Final Battles v. Sayyaf going to be tough:soldier." Philippine Sun Star website.  
<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/static/net/2007/01/27/final.battles.v..sayyaf.going.to.be.tough.soldier.html>. Accessed 17 Feb 2007.

## V. CONCLUSION

As outlined in the previous chapters, the Philippine government has been struggling to find a lasting solution to the lingering threat posed by the Abu Sayyaf Group. Year by year, the GRP has consistently relied on mainly conventional warfare type approaches. In fact, due to the remaining ASG threat, all bilateral exercises between the United States and the Philippines since 2002 have been focused on increasing AFP counter-terrorism capabilities.<sup>110</sup> It cannot be refuted that the AFP's counter-terror capabilities have indeed been increased, as demonstrated by the successes during Balikatan 2002 on Basilan Island and the more recent Op Plan Ultimatum in Sulu. However, this thesis contends that this strategy, although still necessary, is not the most effective way of eliminating the remaining Abu Sayyaf threat as it does not solve the problem of how to completely eradicate the group. Instead, I propose that the U.S. assist the GRP in developing the following three-pronged approach as detailed in the following sections.

### A. U.S. ASSISTANCE TO THE RP/MILF PEACE PROCESS

First, that the United States should focus more on aiding the Philippine-MILF peace process that is currently being brokered by Malaysia. If the current cease fire holds, and a lasting peace can be maintained, it is plausible that the MILF support to the ASG will cease. A lasting peace agreement will also enable the AFP- whose counter-terror capabilities have been increased via U.S. assistance- to pursue the ASG in MILF controlled areas that had previously been both politically and operationally untenable.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States brought new prominence to the Islamic militancy in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao. As the U.S. began its investigations into the Al Qaeda problem, it became apparent that there were links to the MILF in the southern Philippines. When the U.S. made its

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<sup>110</sup> Nicksch, 10-11.

reports available to the GRP, it provided a rude wake-up call that the GRP must urgently search for a solution to its Muslim problem.

The strategic importance of a peace accord between the government and the MILF cannot be overemphasized. This is the last major step remaining for the GRP to effectively implement a lasting peace in the southern Philippines. In 1996, Manila forged a peace agreement with the MNLF, which allowed for the establishment of autonomy in provinces and cities that voted to be part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Upon the creation of the ARMM, the MNLF's 25 years of armed struggle for independence ended.

The Malaysian-sponsored peace talks have the potential to do the same for the MILF conflict. The U.S. Institute for Peace, who has been assisting the negotiations, contends that there are four reasons to be optimistic about the ongoing discussions. First, the government-MILF cease-fire is holding as monitors from member countries of the OIC- Malaysia, Brunei, and Libya- are present in the southern Philippines helping to implement the provisions of the ceasefire agreement.<sup>111</sup> Second, the talks are led by a third-party facilitator, Malaysia (playing a supporting role in facilitation is the United States Institute of Peace). Third, the organization of the talks has vastly improved since 1997 as the GRP and MILF have agreed to discuss their broad interests instead of becoming mired into discussions on mutually agreeable political structures.

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<sup>111</sup> In early 2007, Australia began to take steps which would allow them to also assist in the monitoring of the cease-fire. Canberra is now in the final stages of a landmark Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the GRP which would provide certain legal protections for Australian troops in the Philippines. If ratified by the Philippine Senate, the Australians would be allowed to begin bilateral military exercises with the AFP that are designed to aid in the monitoring of suspected al-Qa'ida-linked terror cells and training camps on Mindanao as well as the MILF ceasefire agreement as a whole. Australia has already promised 30 river boats to aid local forces in their search for armed rebel groups linked to JI and the ASG. Currently, both the AFP and the Australian military would like to conduct large-scale military exercises; however, the number of troops allowed will depend on the political support in the Senate. Source: "Diggers to Target Filipino Terror," *The Australian*, Jan 29, 2007. <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,21133334-601,00.html>. Accessed 31 Mar 2007.

Fourth, civil society and international aid organizations have been allowed to become active participants in the peace process.<sup>112</sup>

As detailed in Chapter III, it is likely that some key MILF commanders will not support any peace agreement between the MILF leadership and the Philippine government that does not include outright independence for the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. If this were the case, the MILF hardliners may transfer their allegiance to JI and the ASG. This shift would certainly lead to an increase in terrorist attacks.<sup>113</sup> This may be unavoidable, but a successful peace agreement will deny the ASG of something it has been able to safely rely on- sanctuary in MILF camps. A successful peace agreement will allow AFP forces, and their U.S. counterparts, to have unrestricted access to areas where the ASG and other terrorist groups had previously been operating freely without threat of AFP attacks. The AFP has already proven that it can conduct decisive military operations against the ASG, as demonstrated during its ongoing Op Plan Ultimatum in the Sulu Archipelago in 2006-2007.

## **B. U.S. ASSISTANCE IN IMPROVING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

Second, the United States must continue to support the Philippine government in the implementation of programs and infrastructure which will improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in the Southern Philippines. This will discourage local support for the ASG. States compete with insurgent groups and terrorists for the support and will of the people. To be deemed legitimate, states must be able to provide basic services as protection and welfare to their people. If not, terrorist groups will be able to exert their will. The Philippine government must continue to invest in infrastructure in the South as it is one of the poorest regions in the country, with approximately 65% of the

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<sup>112</sup> Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the “Bantay Cease-Fire” (Cease-Fire Watch) are mobilizing to help implement the cease-fire agreement. Foreign governments and international aid organizations have pledged to provide funding for rehabilitation and post-conflict development programs once a peace agreement with the MILF is in place.

<sup>113</sup> Abuza, 39.

population below the poverty line. This part of the country has the lowest access to safe drinking water, the least access to electricity, toilet and health facilities of any other region.<sup>114</sup>

Radical Islamists in the Southern Philippines have been able to capitalize on the existence of a constituency that has been neglected. With no adequate government sponsored educational system in place, the radicals have been able to promote ideas which are vehemently anti-Western, producing new radicalized intellectuals and willing young conscripts for insurgent groups to draw from. The United States should urge other Western countries to come to the aid of the Philippines and provide unbiased textbooks and other materials that teach global history through peaceful competition and integration. Through investment in a public education system these materials could be disseminated, thereby providing an alternative explanation for the misinformation provided by the radical Islamists.

Additionally, annual United States and Philippine bilateral exercises should be allowed to continue. Since 2001 all U.S.-RP bilateral exercises have been designed to provide a stabilizing effect to the region, specifically in the southern Philippines- most notably Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (for a comprehensive list of exercises see Appendix II).<sup>115</sup> Due to this stability, both governmental and non-governmental organizations have been able to resume aid to this embattled region. For example, the U.S. was able to deploy the USNS Mercy, a U.S. hospital ship, to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 2006. The Mercy was deployed to provide free medical aid to thousands of Filipinos on the islands of Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Rizal G. Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines: Ethno-religious War or Economic Conflict?" in *The Politics of Death*. Aurel Croissant, Sascha Kneip, and Beate Martin, eds. (forthcoming) 14.

<sup>115</sup> Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command during lecture "Asia Pacific Security: Challenges and Opportunities." 29 April, 2006.

<sup>116</sup> United States Department of State, USAID website. [http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia\\_near\\_east/countries/philippines/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/countries/philippines/). Accessed 10 Apr 2006.



Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. has also been able to institute various projects that promote the ideal that economic opportunities will in turn strengthen peace in Mindanao. Assisting the Philippine government in promoting peace, USAID has helped 28,000 former combatants switch from guerilla fighting to farming seaweed, hybrid corn, rice or higher value crops. USAID has also helped 115 banks and rural cooperatives provide loans and other services which enhance small business ownership.<sup>117</sup>

The United States has remained committed to improving the overall welfare of the Southern Philippines by promoting health and education reform. USAID works with local governments to bolster their ability to deliver better health care, particularly in conflict areas or those with few services. Once considered one of the best in all of Asia, the Philippine education system has deteriorated significantly in recent years. USAID seeks to increased access to quality education and livelihood skills in areas most affected by conflict and poverty. The focus is on improving the teaching of math, science, English and other subjects in Mindanao's public schools.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, through investment in the Philippine public education system, USAID is attempting to provide an alternative explanation for the misinformation provided by radical Islamists in the region.

In April 2006, the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Kristie A. Kenney, visited Zamboanga City, where she unveiled U.S.-funded development projects and pledged more aid, particularly in former conflict areas. She signed documents for the construction of two bridges in the villages of Sinunuc and Taguiti.<sup>119</sup> During her trip she also stated that USAID would provide even more grants for Mindanao (\$30 million USD) once a permanent peace agreement is signed between the GRP and the MILF.

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<sup>117</sup> USAID website, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>119</sup> Manila Times website.

<http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2006/apr/06/yehey/metro/20060406met1.html>. Accessed 10 Apr 2006.

### **C. U.S. ASSISTANCE IN RP FIGHT AGAINST SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION**

Third, the United States should continue to use USAID to assist the government of the Philippines in tracking down and prosecuting cases of systemic governmental and military corruption which have facilitated ASG operations. The Philippines has constantly had a problem of institutionalized corruption that will in all likelihood continue. One blatant example of systemic military corruption and collusion with terrorist groups was in early 2002 when the ASG (and its hostages) were allowed to escape from a hospital in Isabella, Basilan, after being completely surrounded by the AFP. To date, no one in the AFP has been charged with dereliction of duty regarding this operational failure. Successful prosecution of identified cases must be made a priority to discourage further acts.

To date the U.S. government, through USAID, has also worked with the Philippine government to curb rampant corruption, by attempting to make it a high risk, low reward activity. The two governments have instituted programs that target the areas where corruption has been most damaging: taxes, customs administration, government procurement and the judiciary. One notable example came in 2002 when USAID helped the Philippine government strengthen its 2001 Anti-Money Laundering Act.<sup>120</sup> USAID has also helped the Philippine government strengthen its economic systems and infrastructure by improving inter-island shipping and port facilities.<sup>121</sup>

### **D. CONCLUSION**

The Republic of the Philippines has been battling insurgent groups of differing ideologies for over 4 decades. In the past 10 years it has been making some progress, as it signed a peace agreement with the MNLF and has been able to begin negotiations with the MILF. Currently, the Malaysian sponsored peace talks with the MILF appears to be the best hope for a successful

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<sup>120</sup> Philippine Congress Website. <http://www.cld.org/laws.htm>. Accessed 10 Apr 2006.

<sup>121</sup> USAID website. 1.

conclusion. The U.S. must continue to assist the GRP in this endeavor as it will ultimately have a stabilizing effect on the region.

This is crucial for both the GRP and the MILF for several reasons: first, If the peace process fails to proceed not only will the conflict endure but also the MILF will become more radical. Second, this will pose a threat to regional security and make it even more difficult for the GRP to address the problems of the south. Third, the MILF's credibility with its rank and file will be undermined, especially with the new generation's members who are already impatient with the MILF's failure to bring its promise to reality.

On the other hand, if the peace process is successfully implemented, the MILF must be poised to confront potential factions in the organization and effectively police their territory. As history has shown, the ASG, dedicated to the use of terror tactics, can not be negotiated with. Its members must be hunted down and eradicated. As mentioned, if the peace agreement is signed, the AFP will have unimpeded access to areas the ASG has been able to utilize for sanctuary. Additionally, the GRP must also not let itself be blindly fixed solely on military operations nor should it be complacent and believe that results will happen overnight. A dedicated effort must be made by the Philippine government, bolstered by U.S. assistance, to solve the socio-economic and political disparities faced by the Muslims in the Southern Philippines. If not, the likelihood of further acts of terror is certain to increase.

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## APPENDIX I: CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR ASG EVENTS<sup>122</sup>

- 1991 ASG militants attacked a military checkpoint in Sumagadang.
- 1992 ASG member Edwin Angeles abducted a businesswoman in Davao and hid her at a residence in Basilan. She was released after paying ransom.
- 1993 In April, a bus company owner and his five-year-old grandson were kidnapped by the ASG. The grandfather was released but the child was held. The ASG demanded that Catholic symbols be removed from all Muslim communities and that a ban be imposed on all foreign fishing vessels in the Sulu and Basilan seas.
- In November, Abu Sayyaf kidnapped an American from his home on Pangutaran island and held him for just over three weeks; the government denied paying a ransom but admitted to offering food and other supplies.
- 1994 In January, Ramzi Ahmed Yousef visited the Philippines and assisted Abu Sayyaf in a bomb attack on a Philippines Airlines flight to Tokyo in December, during which one person was killed.

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<sup>122</sup> Janes World Insurgency and Terrorism Database, [http://www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/subscribe/jwit/doc\\_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0093.htm@current&Prod\\_Name=JWIT&QueryText=%3CAND%3E%28%3COR%3E%28%28%5B80%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%2C+%28%5B100%5D+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+title%29+%3CAND%3E+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%29%29%29](http://www4.janes.com.libproxy.nps.navy.mil/subscribe/jwit/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/binder/jwit/jwit0093.htm@current&Prod_Name=JWIT&QueryText=%3CAND%3E%28%3COR%3E%28%28%5B80%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%2C+%28%5B100%5D+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+title%29+%3CAND%3E+%28%5B100%5DASG+%3CIN%3E+body%29%29%29%29). Accessed 5 Feb 2007.

- 1994 Abu Sayyaf was responsible for a bomb attack on a church in Davao City, during a Christmas service, in which six people were killed and 130 were wounded.
- 1995 In April, the group joined forces with guerrillas from the MILF and the Islamic Command Council to attack the town of Ipil, Mindanao. During the attack 54 people were killed and a dozen Christian villagers taken hostage, then subsequently massacred.
- 1996 In December, there were heavy clashes between Abu Sayyaf and the AFP in Carmen, North Cotabato, and Zamboanga de Norte.
- 1997 In February, the group was accused of complicity in the murder of a Roman Catholic bishop and a bystander in Jolo.
- Armed clashes between Abu Sayyaf and the security forces were reported on the island of Basilan.
- 1998 In August, following the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, Abu Sayyaf warned that it would increase its campaign of violence, potentially to include foreigners as targets.
- 2000 The ASG seized and held 21 people as hostages from the Malaysian coastal resort of Sipadan. Most were foreign tourists and the group demanded the release of several prisoners in the U.S. including Ramzi Yousef. Libya mediated an end to the crisis and several million dollars was paid to the group from European private

- 2000 individuals. In a later incident the same ASG cell seized three Malaysians from a Borneo resort and took them to Sulu.
- In August the ASG kidnapped and accused a U.S. citizen who met with a senior guerrilla leader, Jeffrey Schilling, of being a member of the CIA and demanded USD2 million for his release.
- 2001 In April, Jeffery Schilling was rescued.
- In May the ASG kidnapped 17 tourists, including three Americans and three resort workers from the Dos Palmas beach resort on Palawan island, Philippines. When the government attempted to pursue the kidnappers, the ASG seized 200 more hostages from a hospital and church in Lamitan.
- 2002 In January, 1,200 U.S. troops were sent to the Philippines to support government action against Islamic militants.
- A group of U.S.-trained Philippine troops stormed an Abu Sayyaf jungle camp in June in an effort to rescue two Americans and a Filipino nurse being held hostage. During the rescue attempt, the nurse and one of the Americans were killed but the third hostage - U.S. missionary Gracia Burnham - escaped with only minor injuries.
- In June, Aldam Tilao, better known as Abu Sabaya, was killed in a clash at sea off the northern coast of the Zamboanga peninsula.

2002 In August, six hostages were taken captive by ASG gunmen. Soon afterwards, two of the hostages were executed by beheading.

In November, Abdul Mukhim Edris, the ASG's chief explosives expert, was captured.

Under the pressure of government forces, a number of ASG members were reported to have fled the Philippines by means of fast watercraft in December. These persons were thought to have found refuge in Malaysia. Soldiers in the region were put on alert to be on the lookout for displaced ASG members.

2003 In January, Merang Abante, reportedly a member of the ASG leadership, was captured by the Philippine security forces in the southern Philippines. Subsequently, Maid Sampang, an ASG member wanted for the killing of eight fishermen, was also captured.

In January, an additional 200 U.S. soldiers were sent to support the operation of government forces against terrorist organizations.

In February, Mujib Susukan, effectively the ASG's third-ranking Sulu commander, was mortally wounded in a firefight in Patikul, Jolo.

In June, ASG logistics officer Samir Hakim was arrested in Manila by a joint PNP-military intelligence team.



2003 In July, explosives expert Edris escaped from his cell at PNP Headquarters at Camp Crame, Manila, along with one of Jemaah Islamiyya's leading bombers, Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi, and another ASG convict, Omar Opik Lasal. Edris was recaptured in Lanao del Norte province in Mindanao on 7 August but shot dead several hours later while reportedly attempting to wrest a rifle from his army captors.

In December, Galib Andang, aka Kumander Robot, was captured.

2004 In February the ASG sank Superferry 14 in Manila Bay, killing more than 100 people on board, as part of an extortion campaign.

In March, apparent six ASG members were killed in a clash with the AFP in Sulu.

The ASG kidnapped three people, one Indonesian and two Malaysians, off the coast of Lingkian island in Malaysian waters. The operations involved boarding a small Malaysian vessel and abducting the crew.

In May, two reported ASG members were apparently caught with an improvised explosive device involving an adapted 60 mm mortar round and a mobile telephone detonator. PNP reports claimed that their intention was to bomb the Commission on Elections head office in Manila prior to the presidential elections.

- 2004            In May and June, three minor explosions were detonated in Jolo, with the third killing an army bomb squad member and two other security force personnel. The ASG was blamed.
- In August, 17 ASG members were sentenced to death for kidnapping nurses in Lamitan, Basilan in 2001 following the Dos Palmas kidnapping. The sentence was the first mass conviction of ASG militants.
- In November, the AFP launched an air strike using Huey helicopters, and OV-10 aircraft on a supposed ASG/Jemaah Islamiyya meeting in Mindanao. The AFP claimed 10 ASG/JI militants were killed, but MILF claimed it was their meeting, and that only one MILF member was wounded.
- On 12 December, an explosion in a market in General Santos City (Mindanao) killed 15 people. The ASG were named as possible perpetrators.
- 2005            On 9 February, Philippine military sources claimed at least 40 rebels had died in heavy fighting between government troops and suspected ASG militants on the Philippine island of Jolo. The attacks involved the use of army howitzers and aircraft.
- On 14 February, the ASG claimed credit for three near-simultaneous bomb blasts in Makati City, Davao City, and General Santos City. 11 people were killed and approximately 140 injured.

2005 On 15 March, an attempted jailbreak led to the deaths of 22 alleged ASG members, including three mid-ranking cadres, when security forces stormed the prison. The ASG issued a statement soon after vowing revenge for the deaths. Philippine police also seized ten bags of ammonium nitrate, apparently intended to bomb shopping malls and Christian churches over the Easter period.

On 10 August, two bombs exploded in the southern Philippine city of Zamboanga, wounding eight people. A military spokesman blamed ASG militants for the attack.

On 16 November 2005, ASG militants fired shells at Philippine troops while fleeing hideouts on the island of Jolo. 29 people, including four soldiers, were killed in three preceding days of fighting between the AFP and ASG rebels. A mosque and several houses were also destroyed in the attack.

2006 In August 2006, the Philippine government ordered the AFP to begin an intense campaign (labeled Op Plan Ultimatum) against the Abu Sayyaf in the Sulu archipelago.

On Sep 4, 2006, Khaddafy Janjalani was killed during a firefight with the AFP in Pakitul, Jolo.

2007 Janjalani's second-in-command, Abu Solaiman, was killed on January 16, 2007.

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## **APPENDIX II: U.S.-RP EXERCISE DIRECTORY<sup>123</sup>**

### **BAKER PISTON**

A JIATF West-coordinated ground operations law enforcement training in the Philippines. The objective of the Baker exercises ("Piston" designates Philippines) is to improve the effectiveness of Philippine counter-drug agencies by training those agencies in such topics as: Cordon and search techniques, special reconnaissance, medical training, advanced marksmanship, small unit tactics in urban terrain, instructor training, mission planning, training management, trail interdiction, and movement techniques.

### **BALANCE PISTON**

Small unit tactics, unconventional warfare, special recon/direct action, internal defense operation, CMO, low level air/land tactics, airborne operations, live fire exercise, marksmanship, day/night air operations and information operations.

### **BALIKATAN**

Annual JCS directed multi-lateral training exercise with the RP-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty as the basis. This year's exercise will focus on Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). Training events include Command Post Exercise (CPX), Cross-Training Exercise (CTX), Live Fire Exercise (LFX), Humanitarian Civic Action (HCA), and Civil Military Operations (CMO). Main objective of "Balikatan" (Shouldering the Load Together) is to enhance interoperability of AFP and U.S. forces at the operational and tactical level.

### **CARAT**

Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training. A USN 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet annual exercise with the Philippine Navy. Objective of the exercise is to develop interoperability between the two navies. Training events include amphibious landings, humanitarian civic action (HCA), diving and salvage operations.

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<sup>123</sup> Received from Joint United States Military Assistance Group-Philippines, 14 April 2006.

## **Cobra Gold**

This is a U.S.-Thai exercise similar to that of the Philippine Balikatan exercise but involves a division-size troop participation, and is also considered as multi-lateral exercise with the participation of other countries like Singapore, Mongolia and Philippines.

## **FLASH PISTON**

A JCET Exercise between U.S. Navy and Phil Navy Seals on small unit tactics and marksmanship. Training includes maritime close quarter combat and Jungle Environmental Survival Training (JEST).

## **FUSION PISTON**

Lead by the AFP and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA). Training will cover various aspects of maritime law enforcement in support of counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism operations (e.g., first aid, boat maintenance, communications, boat handling, evidence preservation, patrolling, insert/extract methods, reconnaissance, mission planning, and a field training exercise. Members from the DEA, U.S. Navy SEALS and JIATIF-W will conduct training for members of the AFP, PNP, Philippine Coast Guard, and the Anti-Illegal Drugs SPECOPS Task Force.

## **HANDA**

This is a USCINCPAC annual co-hosted game simulation to prepare key RP and U.S. national government agencies, armed forces headquarters, and component force staffs to better coordinate interagency operations. Participants from the RP include: DND, DFA, NEDA, NICA DILG, AFP, and various RP agencies.

## **MARSEAEX - MARITIME SEA EXERCISE**

This is a multi-lateral exercise between the USN, the Republic of the Philippines Navy (PN), and the Royal Thai Navy (RTN). Purpose is to train participants on maritime surveillance procedures and to enhance multi-national interoperability in the conduct of maritime surveillance.

## **MARSURVEX - MARITIME SURVEILLANCE EXERCISE**

7<sup>th</sup> Fleet sponsored USN-PN exercise involving U.S. Navy P3 Orion with Philippine Navy surface assets on maritime surveillance and search and rescue operations.

## **MTWS**

Marine Tactical Warfare Simulation. MTWS is a USMC initiative involving computer driven simulated Command Post Exercise (CPX), which revolves around a Combined Amphibious Task Force (CATF). It is designed to train the commanders and staff of a Marine Regiment consisting of two or more Battalion Landing Teams (BLT).

## **PALAH**

Pangdagat Lupat and Himpapawid. This is a bilateral COMSEVENTH FLT Naval Special Warfare exercise with elements of the AFP. Commander's intent is to maintain and improve combat readiness and interoperability between U.S. Forces and the AFP. PALAH provides U.S. and RP SEALs an exceptional training environment, with an opportunity to improve interoperability between PN/USN in areas of maritime special operations, military operations in urban terrain, and close quarters combat operations. Training to be conducted, but not limited to: Live Fire, marksmanship, Jungle survival (JEST), OTB environment, Patrolling, Military operations in urban terrain, close quarters combat, and mission planning.

## **PHIBLEX/MEUEX**

Amphibious Landing Exercise/Marine Expeditionary Unit Exercise. The MEUEX is an AFP-U.S. Armed Forces Bi-lateral exercise to be conducted in the Republic of the Philippines (RP). The scope of the exercise includes the Combined Task Force Staff Exercise and Command Post Exercise (CTF STAFFEX/CPX) Event, Combined Forces Cross Training and Field Training Events, and Combined Civil-Military Operations (CMO) Event.

## **PIX**

Philippine Interoperability Exercise. U.S. & RP Marines Interoperability training focused on infantry and reconnaissance operations. Marksmanship, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Intelligence planning, and Airborne Operations.

## **RIMPAC**

Rim of the Pacific. Seven Pacific Rim nations, along with the United Kingdom and France, participate in Rim of the Pacific, a major maritime exercise conducted in the waters off Hawaii. RIMPAC brings together maritime forces from Australia, Canada, Chile, Peru, France, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

## **SAGIP**

This is a trilateral seminar/workshop type of exercise on disaster, search and rescue operations with the participation of the U.S., Australia and RP.

## **SEACAT**

Southeast Asia Cooperation Against Terrorism. Multilateral exercise which allows Southeast Asian nations to join together in a spirit of cooperation against worldwide terrorist threat. Exercises will give the Armed Forces the unique opportunity to exchange ideas and prepare the way for future coordinated exercises relevant to regional concerns. SEACAT supported opportunities for the USN and PN to conduct coordinated surveillance and tracking operations against maritime vessels of interest.

## **TALON VISION**

A bilateral Ground-Air Integrated Training (GAIT) exercise with elements of the AFP. CMDR's Intent (III MEF) - To maintain and improve combat readiness and interoperability between U.S. Forces and the AFP. Talon vision provides Marines and sailors an exceptional training environment with the endstate of improving interoperability between PN/USN/PHILMAR/USMC in



areas of amphibious warfare planning, naval surface warfare, helicopter operations aboard ship and amphibious operations.

### **Teak Piston**

An Air Force-to-Air Force exercise focusing on low level flight navigation, infiltration and exfiltration operations, and air drops. It also includes the maintenance of C- 130 aircraft.

### **VECTOR BALANCE PISTON**

A SOCPAC sponsored JCET Exercise specializing in Close Quarter Battle and marksmanship skills. This exercise is conducted by the U.S. Army's 1st Special Forces Group and the Philippine Army Special Operations Command.

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