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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**Isolating the Terrorists: The Abu Sayyaf Case Study**


SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTERS OF MILITARY STUDIES

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JIMMY D LARIDA PHILIPPINE NAVY (MARINES)

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## *Executive Summary*

**Title:** Isolating the Terrorists: The Abu Sayyaf Group Case Study.

**Author:** Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy D Larida Philippine Navy (Marines)

**Thesis:** The Philippine Marine Corps generally achieved tactical success and neutralized top ASG leaders. To achieve the National strategic goal of defeating the ASG, the AFP should seize the initiative by shifting from combat operations to enhanced civil-military economic development to address the root causes of insurgency and terrorism.

**Discussion:** The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is currently addressing the three major threats to national security. Insurgent threats are the New People's Army, which is the armed instrument of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Southern Philippines secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) that has links to the Jemaah Islamiya and Al Qaeda. The campaign plan of the Department of National Defense through the AFP to address the threats is Internal Security Operation (ISO) Plan *Bantay Laya* that was established in 2001 and was modified in 2006. The strategic goal of the plan is "to defeat all groups posing a threat to national security, enhance the security situation and peace and order condition in the country in order to establish a physically and psychologically secured environment conducive to national development." ISO plan *Bantay Laya* is nested in the government's National Internal Security Plan (NISP). The AFP is taking the lead role in sustaining peace and order in the region to secure the citizenry and their properties. Sustaining peace and order requires the active involvement of the local government, civil society, and other sector groups. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines' NISP is a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach that allows the government to use all instruments of national power to address all threats to national security. The Philippine Marine Corps was deployed in smaller islands of the archipelago under Western Mindanao Command to implement *Bantay Laya*. With the outbreak of terrorism in the Southern Philippines, all infantry brigades of the Corps were tasked to confront the terrorists. Marines with the support from Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines have been generally successful in conducting combat operations that neutralized key ASG leaders and cleared communities from ASG influence and infiltration. Marines also conduct Civil Military Operations in order to win the hearts and minds of the populace to isolate the terrorists. Realizing the failure of ISO Plan *Bantay Laya* in its campaign against the ASG, the new AFP Chief of Staff directed the AFP to shift the military operation to peace and development as a new strategy in addressing the remnants of the militants and the root causes of terrorism in the region. With the gained success, the AFP should take advantage of the leadership support in the conduct of enhanced civil-military economic development. The AFP needs to institutionalize the paradigm shift and come up with operational doctrine that would guide commanders at all levels of command in defeating the ASG and other insurgents.

**Conclusion:** The AFP should lead in instituting a paradigm shift in its effort to defeat the ASG. The strategy would serve the best interest of the people in Mindanao and the Filipino people in general. With the guidance of the AFP Chief of Staff, the AFP should immediately perform its role and help the government pursue the implementation of the NISP by enhanced civil-military economic development through interagency programs.

***DISCLAIMER***

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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### *List of Acronyms and Abbreviations*

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AFPNDCP	AFP National Development Support Command
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
CMO	Civil Military Operations
CMOG	Civil Military Operations Group
CPP/NPA	Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army
DND	Department of National Defense
KLE	Key Leaders Engagement
GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
ISO	Internal Security Operations
Jl	Jemaah Islamiya
LGU	Local Government Unit
MBLT	Marine Battalion Landing Team
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NISP	National Internal Security Plan
OEF-P	Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines
OPLAN	Operations Plan
PMC	Philippine Marine Corps
USSOCPAC	United States Special Operations Command Pacific
WestMinCom	Western Mindanao Command

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## *Preface*

The Armed Forces of the Philippines is gaining headway in its campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group. The neutralization of key leaders of the group gave the AFP the upper hand to seize the initiative. However, conduct of military combat operations proved to be inadequate to address the root causes of insurgency and terrorism. This application of direct action against the insurgents proved to be counterproductive because it led to large scale collateral damage and displacement of the people.

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines' NISP of 2001 is a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach that allows the government to use all instruments of national power to address all threats to national security. The government failed to implement the NISP in Mindanao especially in interagency operations considering that the Armed Forces of the Philippines singlehandedly conducted counterinsurgency operations. This paper recommends that the AFP should lead in the implementation of the NISP by enhanced civil-military economic development through interagency operations.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my mentor Dr. Eric Y. Shibuya who patiently guided me in completing this study. Knowledge I learned from the subjects offered by the Command and Staff College supplemented my experience to better understand insurgency and terrorism, which helped me in developing my thoughts and ideas in writing this paper. I am also grateful to the Marine Corps Library for the references I used and the LCSC for the assistance in organizing the thoughts and contents of my paper.



## **Isolating the Terrorists: The Abu Sayyaf Group Case Study**

### **Introduction**

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is currently addressing three major armed threats to national security.<sup>1</sup> Insurgent threats are the New People's Army (NPA), which is the armed instrument of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Southern Philippines secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The latest threat that started in 1990 is the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) that has links to the Jemaah Islamiya (JI) and Al Qaeda. These threats have claimed many lives, not only soldiers but civilians as well. From 1970 to 2003, between 50,000 -100,000 persons were killed in the conflict in Mindanao.<sup>2</sup> Government casualties account 30 percent, 50 percent rebels, and 20 percent civilians.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the casualties, the conflict displaced 3.5 million people from their houses.<sup>4</sup> The AFP treats the ASG movement as an insurgency problem. Other scholars also brand the group as terrorists because of the nature and characteristics of their actions. Audrey Kronin argued that terrorism contains the following elements: a political nature, the surprise use of violence against seemingly random targets, and attacks on innocent persons. These attributes are illustrated by numerous incidents perpetrated by Al Qaeda including the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the September 11 attacks to the kidnapping of tourists by the ASG in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> Kilcullen asserts that Al Qaeda and its associated movements like the ASG is not a global network of terrorists; rather these groups have aggregated to become a global insurgency or jihad.<sup>6</sup> The ASG movement can be treated both as an insurgency and terrorism problem considering the indiscriminate violence involved and the effort to win the hearts and minds of the populace. Omar Al-Faruq, a key Al Qaeda operative, was dispatched in the region in 1995 to form a union between the ASG and the MILF to create a stronger jihad force.<sup>7</sup> The MILF and the

ASG entered into several rounds of negotiations about joining forces but a formal alliance never occurred.<sup>8</sup> At present, the secessionist Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is on peace accord with the Philippine government.

The campaign plan of the Department of National Defense (DND) through the AFP to address the threats is Internal Security Operation (ISO) Plan *Bantay Laya* that was established in 2001 and was modified in 2006. The strategic goal of *Bantay Laya* is “to defeat all groups posing a threat to national security, enhance the security situation and peace and order condition in the country in order to establish a physically and psychologically secured environment conducive to national development.”<sup>9</sup> ISO plan *Bantay Laya* is nested in the government’s National Internal Security Plan (NISP). During the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the AFP set the objective of destroying the ASG by year 2010.<sup>10</sup>

The AFP is taking the lead role in sustaining peace and order in the region to secure the citizenry and their properties. Sustaining peace and order requires the active involvement of the local government, civil society, and other sector groups. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines’ (GRP) NISP of 2001 is a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach that allows the government to use all instruments of national power to address all threats to national security. The government failed to implement the NISP in Mindanao especially in interagency operations considering that the Armed Forces of the Philippines singlehandedly conducted counter terrorism operations.<sup>11</sup>

The Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) was deployed in smaller islands of the archipelago under Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) to implement *Bantay Laya* (see Threat Map in Annex A and B). With the outbreak of terrorism in the Southern Philippines, all infantry

brigades of the Corps were tasked to confront the terrorists. Marines with the support from Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) have been generally successful in conducting combat operations that neutralized key ASG leaders and cleared Barangays<sup>12</sup> and Municipalities from ASG influence and infiltration. Marines also conducted Civil Military Operations (CMO) in order to win the hearts and minds of the populace to isolate the terrorists.

With the tactical success of 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade in Basilan and the rise of kidnapping incidents in Central Mindanao, the Brigade was transferred back to Cotabato City in January 2011.<sup>13</sup> The Marines were stationed in Cotabato City in 2002, but moved to Basilan in order to conduct an offensive against the ASG. National Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin maintains that the transfer is a response to requests for more security from local people and that the move has support from religious and government leaders.<sup>14</sup> The transfer of forces was made possible by the success of the relentless, intelligence-driven military operations that significantly reduced the threat from the ASG in Basilan.<sup>15</sup> According to Lieutenant General Dolorfino, the outgoing commander of Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom), the Abu Sayyaf “has been on the run and many of their leaders have been neutralized.”<sup>16</sup> The realignment of forces left the Philippine Army as a preponderant force in Basilan to maintain the initiative against the ASG remnants.

This study will discuss the Moro struggle and the government responses to the Muslim insurgents. It will focus on the ASG in Western Mindanao. It will also investigate the impact of community development presently undertaken by the AFP and the JSOTF-P and the new strategy of integrating community development with combat operations to deal with the ASG. This study concludes that combat operation alone is not the solution to the ASG problem in

Western Mindanao. The AFP should secure peace and development through interagency programs to gain local support.

### **The Origin of Moro Struggle**

Southern Philippines had a long history of Moro insurgent struggle dating back to Spanish rule. The name Moro was given by the Spanish colonizers to the Muslims in Mindanao whom they found to have the same religion and way of life with the Moors of North Africa.<sup>17</sup> With pride in their cultural heritage and a strong desire for independence, the Moros fought for their right to secede from the Philippine archipelago to exercise control over their own institutions, way of life, and economic development, and to maintain and develop their identities, languages, and religions.<sup>18</sup> Before the Spanish colonialists arrived in the Philippines, the Mindanao Muslims already had their political institutions, administrative system, and trade and international relations with other countries. Because of these, colonial intrusion in their territories was met with resistance. For centuries, the Spaniards attempted to conquer the Muslim states to be added to the Philippines islands, but they never succeeded.

The Bangsamoro resistance continued even when American forces occupied some areas in Mindanao and Sulu. The Americans also met resistance but not as fierce as the Moro-Spanish war. Individuals showed defiance against American occupation by attacking American forces in operations called Sabil (martyrdom).<sup>19</sup> In 1946 the Bangsamoro became a part of the Republic of the Philippines, which was not welcomed by the Muslims for they still consider themselves a separate nation.<sup>20</sup> From 1977 to the present, the Moro struggle in the Southern Philippines divides leaders along political, regional, and ethnic lines. These led to the rise of factions like

MILF, Bangsamoro Liberation Organization, MNLF-Misuari Breakaway Group, the 15 council, and the ASG.

Many concerned citizens of Sulu, Basilan, and Tawitawi do not just blame the ASG. They also blame the authorities for their inability to restore or perform their responsibilities efficiently. It can be stressed further that the secessionist movement is fueled by the seeming non concern of the national government to upgrade the economic and social life of the people. The number of firearms circulating in Sulu remains high and increasing.<sup>21</sup> It cannot be denied that the provincial government considered peace and order as the top priority to promote economic development, social order, and political stability.

Other underlying issues that fuel the Muslim insurgency are the grievances ingrained from under representation, corruption, and socio-economic disparities. One of the major grievances is the lack of proportional Muslim representation in the predominantly Catholic national government institutions. Since 1916, there were only seven Muslim senators and as of January 2011, there is no Muslim senator in the Philippine Congress. This political inequality aggravates the distance between the two cultures, does very little to build trust, and pushes much of the disgruntled Muslim populace to sympathize with the ASG. The lack of trust between the two cultures is further amplified by a justifiable public perception of corruption in the three branches of the Manila based government and the AFP.

Corruption in the AFP was highlighted in the series of coup attempts against President Arroyo. The mutineers were led by junior officers who aired their grievances of corruption in the AFP: aging equipment, low wages, and poor housing. The most disturbing issue is the allegations that senior military officers had sold weapons and ammunitions to the Muslim

guerillas and politicians in Mindanao.<sup>22</sup> These allegations were proven by the incident in Maguindanao on November 23, 2009 when family members of a mayoral candidate with 30 journalists were massacred by mercenaries allegedly hired by their political opponent. After the massacre, martial law was declared in the area. Military clearing operations in the house of the Ampatuans<sup>23</sup> resulted in the seizure of military vehicles, armaments, and loaded ammunition boxes marked with Philippine government arsenal.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, the Christian majority of the Philippines marginalized the Muslims. In addition, Filipino culture puts emphasis on clan, tribal, and regional loyalties. This culture created informal barriers whereby access to jobs or resources is provided first to those of one's own family or group network. Moreover the Muslim majority in Mindanao have historically lagged far behind the rest of the country in most aspects of socioeconomic development. Poverty levels in Mindanao are twice as high as the national average. Poverty incidence in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was 60% in the year 2000, 52.8% in 2003, and 61.8% in 2006 while the national figures were 33%, 30%, and 32.9% respectively.<sup>25</sup>

The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created on August 1, 1989 by virtue of Republic Act No. 6734.<sup>26</sup> The autonomy gave the region the authority to set up its own court, schools, legislative and administrative system, financial and economic system, regional security forces, and representation in all organs of the state.<sup>27</sup> In 1996, to get the Moro National Liberation Front to lay down its arms, the former MNLF chief Nur Misuari was given the chief executive post.<sup>28</sup> A plebiscite on August 14, 2001 in 14 provinces and cities of Mindanao and Palawan, asking them whether they wanted to join the ARMM, was a big failure.<sup>29</sup> Only Marawi city and the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Basilan, and Tawitawi opted to join ARMM. Dissatisfied with the result, some MNLF members

organized themselves to continue their resistance against the government. Their goal is to obtain an independent Bangsa Moro Republic. This breakaway group is the terrorist ASG.

### **The Abu Sayyaf Group**

The late Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani organized the ASG in the early 1990s as an underground group to propagate Muslim fundamentalism. Its main thrust is to establish an Islamic state in the Southern Philippines following the end of MNLF secessionist movement and the continued inadequacy of development in Muslim areas under MNLF chairman Nur Misuari. When Misuari was elected as the regional governor of the ARMM, there was a sentiment that he exploited social grievances to instigate conflicts for his personal gain. Like the other two Filipino Muslim insurgent movements, a separate Islamic state is the ASG's goal. However, ASG's links with Al Qaeda made them a part of the global terrorist movement.<sup>30</sup>

The ASG originated as Mujahideen Commando Freedom Fighters. Janjalani is a veteran of the Afghan War as one of the Filipino volunteers who fought with the International Islamic Brigade against the Soviet forces in the 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Janjalani's fundamentalist group was later renamed Al Harakat-ul Al Islamiyya, meaning Islamic Movement or the Abu Sayyaf Group in 1992. The ASG is named after Afghan leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaf who led the Saudi and UAE funded Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan. Until Janjalani's death on December 18, 1998 in a clash with the Philippine National Police in Lamitan Village, Basilan Province, the ASG became increasingly notorious with a series of bombings in Zamboanga City. This was followed by the treacherous attack on the town of Ipil, Zamboanga Del Sur in 1995 where 68 innocent civilians, military personnel, and policemen were mercilessly gunned down during the siege and 114 more were wounded.<sup>32</sup>

Khadaffy Janjalani took over leadership after his brother's death to keep the ASG from disintegrating. In contrast with his elder brother, Khadaffy is not a preacher and ideologically committed. Therefore, the ASG lost its ideological direction and subsequently deteriorated into a band of brigands who were content with the ransom money from their kidnap victims. Security force records of ASG perpetrated kidnap for ransom incidents in Sulu and Basilan from 2007 to 2009 are placed at 34.<sup>33</sup> This figure is very high compared to the kidnapping activities during the leadership of Abdurajak Janjalani, where high profile victims were American missionaries Charles Watson and Greg Williams.<sup>34</sup> The ASG became less discriminate with their targets during Khadaffy Janjalani's leadership. Indiscriminate victims were businessmen, teachers, NGO volunteers, students, priests, missionaries, workers, merchants, and journalists.<sup>35</sup> These victims were brought and released either in Sulu or Basilan. Those who could not meet the ASG's ransom demand were executed.

In the year 2000, though less organized and contained in the island provinces of Sulu and Basilan, the ASG gained considerable propaganda mileage from both the local and international community. On April 23, the group kidnapped ten Western tourists and eleven resort workers from the Malaysian island resort of Sipadan. It was reported that the victims were released in exchange for ransom payments which ranged from 190 million to 650 million Pesos (US\$4-15 million).<sup>36</sup> In July, thirteen members of the Jesus Miracle Crusade presented themselves at the ASG lair in Jolo, Sulu to pray over the Sipadan hostages. However, the preachers themselves became captives until they were rescued by the military three and a half months later.<sup>37</sup> The same group abducted three members of a French TV crew. One of the three victims was released while the other two escaped during the military assault.<sup>38</sup> On August 28, Jeffrey Schilling, an



American, was taken hostage when he entered the ASG camp in Sulu and was rescued by Marine troops on April 12, 2001.<sup>39</sup>

In May 2001, guests and staff of the dos Palmas island resort in Palawan in the Southwestern part of the Philippines were kidnapped. While the majority of the victims were Filipinos, three Americans were included, the Burnham couple and Guillermo Sobero. Most of the victims were released after the payment of ransom at an approximate amount of 40 million Pesos (US\$ 840,000).<sup>40</sup> The ransom was corroborated by Gracia Burnham when Aldam Tilao, the group spokesman told her that “someone has paid a 15 million Pesos ransom for you, so this is great.”<sup>41</sup> The Burnham couple and a Filipino nurse were retained until a rescue attempt was launched by the AFP on June 7, 2002. The rescue operations freed Gracia Burnham after 377 days of captivity. Martin Burnham and the Filipino nurse were killed in the firefight.<sup>42</sup>

On June 17, 2002, a tugboat named M/T Sintel Marine 88 with Labron Barge 179 containing 7,799 metric tons of coal was captured in Sulu by the ASG on board three speedboats.<sup>43</sup> Four out of ten Indonesian crews were taken by the armed men and brought to Northeastern Sulu camp. Similarly, on August 20, six Jehovah's Witnesses and their Muslim guides were abducted in Sulu. Two of the kidnapped preachers were later beheaded and others managed to escape. The last remaining victims were rescued by government troops in May 2003.<sup>44</sup>

The ASG propagates the idea that it is composed of Muslim Freedom Fighters. Although it claims that its actions are directed towards the political objective of fighting for the Muslims' right to self-determination, recent activities were clearly undertaken for financial gains. An ASG defector said “The group lost its original reason for being, activities were not for Islam but for personal gratification.”<sup>45</sup> The group derives its strength from the people in the areas where it

operates. They also have supporters and sympathizers that protect the core members of the ASG. The group also receives financial support from Islamic foundations. Gracia Burnham revealed that Solaiman and Sabaya admitted that they received \$25 million from Muammar Qadhafi Foundation for the Sipadan hostages.<sup>46</sup> In 1991, the ASG received 12 million Pesos (\$5 million) from foreign sources, mainly from the Al Qaeda and Libya among others. On January 29, 1992, the ASG received 160 million Pesos from Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, the brother-in-law of Osama Bin Laden. The ASG also received a large delivery of Libyan weapons from Victor Blout who is a Tajik arms dealer linked to the Taliban and Al Qaeda.<sup>47</sup>

Cultural factors make the ASG capable of easily mustering support from the local populace. The protection offered by the ASG's layered supporters affected the conduct of the military campaign. The AFP had limited human intelligence report on the enemy's activities and whereabouts, which indicates that the ASG enjoys public support in the area. The ASG's offer of monetary compensation attracted a lot of the local populace to join the group.

### **Responses to Muslim Insurgencies**

The government position in responding to the struggle of the Bangsamoro people has always been on the premise that they are Filipino citizens, including those fighting against the government.<sup>48</sup> Lingga<sup>49</sup> stressed that a solution to resolve the conflict has to be within the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines.<sup>50</sup> The government took three elemental approaches to its conflict with the Bangsamoro people:

1. To deflect the underlying political issues of the conflict, the government first admitted neglect.<sup>51</sup> The government admitted that the problem is the absence of economic development. Within the span of the administration of five presidents from that of Corazon Aquino,

government efforts were focused on the development of Mindanao. On June 22, 1957, the government pursued its national integration program and created the Commission on National Integration.<sup>52</sup> The commission was charged to carry out within ten years a broad range of programs designed to improve the education and economic status of the minorities. The Mindanao Development Authority was also established in 1961 to hasten the economic development in Mindanao.<sup>53</sup> After the armed confrontation between the government and MNLF forces, the government created a Presidential Task Force for the Reconstruction and Development of affected areas in Mindanao. The purpose of this task force was to pool all government resources to assess the damage caused by the conflict, prepare an integrated plan for full reconstruction and rehabilitation, and restore peace and order.<sup>54</sup> In 1977, the Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines was decreed into law. It stipulated the organization of Shariah courts in Muslim communities and judges were appointed to adjudicate cases involving marriage and inheritance.<sup>55</sup>

2. The second phase of Government response was massive combat operations. The military campaign has been very costly, independent estimates came out with 100,000 deaths, 2 million refugees, 200,000 houses burned, 535 mosques and 200 schools demolished, and 35 cities and towns destroyed.<sup>56</sup> In the year 2000 when the government attacked the MILF camps, around 932,000 civilians were displaced from their homes. In addition, 390,000 people were again displaced when the AFP renewed attacks against the MILF in 2003.<sup>57</sup>

3. Negotiation is the third approach adopted by the government. It started in 1975 with the MNLF and ended in 1996. The significant agreements between the government and the MNLF were the 1976 Tripoli agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.<sup>58</sup> The Tripoli agreement provided for the autonomy for the Muslims in Southern Philippines, within the realm

of the sovereignty and integrity of the Philippines.<sup>59</sup> The autonomy gave the region the authority to set up its own court, schools, legislative and administrative system, financial and economic system, regional security forces, and representation and presentation in all organs of the state. The 1996 peace agreement spelled out the details of the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>60</sup> Agreement with the MILF started in 1997 and called for the discussion of three issues: (1) security (ceasefire); (2) rehabilitation and development of conflict-affected areas; and (3) ancestral domain.<sup>61</sup> Agreements were reached on the first two issues. The discussion on the ancestral domain was undertaken for several years until an agreement was reached and the document entitled Memorandum of Agreement on ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was scheduled for signing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on August 5, 2008. The formal signing was aborted when the Supreme Court of the Philippines issued a temporary restraining order and later declared the MOA-AD “contrary to the law and the constitution.”<sup>62</sup>

### **The Philippine Marine Corps in Counterterrorism**

After September 11, 2001, the Philippine government pledged support to the US effort on counterterrorism. This pledge made the Philippine seaports and airfields available for US aircrafts and vessels. Upon request of the Philippine government, the US Special Operations Command Pacific (USSOCPAC) organized the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) for immediate deployment. The JSOTF-P became the core of the US forces in the Philippines for Operations Enduring Freedom – Philippines (OEF-P). With the support of the JSOTF-P, in August 2006, Marines conducted Operations Plan (OPLAN) ULTIMATUM 1, which led to the neutralization of the leader and the second in command of the ASG.<sup>63</sup>

PMC deploy combat units in the provinces of Sulu, Basilan, and Tawitawi where the primary threat is the ASG. The newly organized Civil Military Operations Group (CMOG) deploys its companies to support the CMO activities of the Marine Brigades. CMO activities focused on the conduct of low cost-high impact Engineering Civic Action Projects such as construction of water wells, flea markets, farm to market roads, and repair of school buildings. Marines undertake Medical Civic Action Projects and Dental Civic Action Projects in coordination with JSOTF-P, local government units (LGUs), local government agencies (LGAs), and non-government organizations (NGOs). Funds for these projects mostly come from AFP sources.<sup>64</sup>

In addition, high cost infrastructure projects were also funded by JSOTF-P such as construction of provincial and municipal coordination centers, major roads, school buildings, and major water supply systems. Recommendations of local, tribal, and religious leaders were solicited during the Key Leaders Engagement (KLE). The KLE enable the AFP and the JSOTF-P to come up with decisions on what assistance to provide. Assistance that is actually needed by the populace and not what the AFP thinks the people need.

Since the deployment of US forces in Sulu, the JSOTF-P funded projects amounted to \$16 million. These projects were: area coordinating centers at a total amount of \$1.9 million, school buildings at \$3.9 million, water wells with distribution system at \$2.1 million, 26 kilometers of paved road at \$5.1 million, and minor construction repairs at \$10,000.<sup>65</sup> These projects made the AFP popular to the people and perceived to be better than any other government agencies. For unity of effort, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade in Basilan Province, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Brigades in Sulu province used the “Triad Concept” in their campaign against the ASG.<sup>66</sup> The concept is the application of intelligence, combat operations, and civil military operations.

The concept was to use information operations, interagency coordination, and integration to disrupt the ASG's civilian support.<sup>67</sup>

Subordinate units at the battalion level were more specific in their CMO activities to focus on the low cost immediate needs of the populace in their Area of Operations (AO). Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT) 4 in coordination with the provincial government of Sulu and the OEF-P organized seaweed farming cooperatives. These cooperatives provided income for the people and improved their living conditions. MBLT 3, 6, and 11 assisted with children's education. In coordination with the Department of Education and the JSOTF-P, these units regularly distributed books and other school materials to schoolchildren. They also sponsor student fieldtrips in various cities near their AO to educate the children about the way of life in progressive communities. The local police are also made to understand that Marine units can be redeployed to other areas anytime and that the continuation of projects will be their responsibility. Currently, the Philippine National Police (PNP) have no JSOTF-P counterparts. For interoperability between the AFP and PNP, local police personnel were invited to join the military training for the AFP provided by JSOTF-P.<sup>68</sup>

The neutralization of the ASG's top leaders dropped their morale significantly.<sup>69</sup> PNP intelligence assessed that the terrorist group is now composed of only 400 members concentrated in Sulu-Basilan-Tawitawi areas.<sup>70</sup> The tactical success of the security forces is evident with the drop of ASG strength from 453 in 2006 to the present strength. However, due to the group's income generating activities, the number of firearms increased from 285 in 2006 to the present firearms count of 343.<sup>71</sup>

With the tactical success, the effort is not enough because of the inflow of new recruits that are joining the ASG. There are also other agencies where key personnel are apprehensive for an all out participation in the interagency effort because of retribution by the ASG against their families. On the other hand, there are available resources from the government that need to be tapped to seize the initiative. The major sources of community development funds that the PMC can coordinate and integrate are from the AFP National Development Support Command (AFPNDSP), LGUs, and JSOTF-P. In 2007, the AFP established the AFPNDSP with the mission to undertake peace and development projects nationwide to support the AFP's ISO objectives and the government's peace and development initiatives.<sup>72</sup> It is a performance based unit with clear and immediate quantitative target outputs. Execution is done through expedited completion of projects through the AFP engineering brigades. The PMC can also coordinate with LGUs in the utilization of 20% of its Internal Revenue Allotment from the national government earmarked for community development. The JSOTF-P in coordination with the AFP is undertaking community development projects. These projects include: Provincial and Municipal Area Coordinating Centers where local government officials held their consultative meetings and constituents assembly. Water wells with distribution system provided potable water to the populace that reduced common illnesses like diarrhea, dysentery, and malaria. Construction of paved roads also played a major role in Sulu's economy allowing farmers and fishermen to transport their products with less transportation cost.<sup>73</sup> Funds for these projects are part of the \$80 million annual US military assistance to the Philippines.<sup>74</sup>

### **Contemporary Counterterrorism Strategies**

Terrorism is usually calibrated. It is intended to illicit certain public reactions, to include shock, horror, submissiveness, a change of opinion, or action on a particular issue. In the same

manner, counterterrorism policy and strategy must be calibrated and integrated.<sup>75</sup> Force manifestly has a proper place, especially given that the immoral use of force is a central characteristic of terrorism.<sup>76</sup> Terrorists commit acts of great atrocity and inhumanity, and many affected by such acts may be tempted to take “an eye for an eye” approach, but it is important that any response or emergency powers follow democratic principles.<sup>77</sup> Those who favor stronger action against terrorism sometimes argue that terrorism is war. The complicated phenomenon of modern terrorism is neither entirely war nor entirely crime. It is its own entity and has elements of both with proportions varying with the given act, the terrorist, his intentions, his target, and the extent of his support.<sup>78</sup>

Steven and Gunaratna’s models for counterterrorism are Criminal Justice Model (CJM) and the War Model (WM).<sup>79</sup> The CJM prioritizes the preservation of democratic principles as being the fundamental premise in the fight against terror, even at the expense of reduced effectiveness of counterterrorist measures. The WM places a stronger emphasis on restraining rather than upholding liberal democratic rights. Viewing terrorism as an act of revolutionary warfare, the onus for response is placed on the military, ranging from using the elite Special Forces, retaliatory strikes, and large troop deployment. The WM raises several civil liberties problems, such as the legality of soldiers taking the police role given that they are trained to kill rather than to use minimum force and to know the law and its application.<sup>80</sup> Many academics think the two models are mutually exclusive. However, most democracies use a hybrid Expanded Criminal Justice Model (ECJM). The hybrid model can be a useful analytical tool, covering the gray areas between the two models and dealing with theoretical, moral, and legal considerations.<sup>81</sup>



Cronin and Ludes argue that the United States must work toward providing an attractive alternative future to persons dissatisfied with the status quo. Otherwise many of the aggrieved are likely to be attracted to radical and anti-American causes. It is equally critical that US counterterrorist efforts be legitimate in the eyes of the international community.<sup>82</sup> They advocate policy instruments in the campaign against international terrorism. These policy instruments include: diplomacy, Intelligence, law enforcement, military force, the laws of war, psychological-political instruments, foreign aid, and homeland security.<sup>83</sup> Political will, more than new laws or new direction in international politics, is the most important component of an enhanced effort against foreign-supported terrorism.<sup>84</sup>

### **AFP Counterterrorism Doctrine**

To isolate the ASG and gain back local support of the Muslim population, the Philippine Government must first conduct a robust Information Operations (IO) campaign. The IO effort would isolate the ASG and win the people's hearts and minds and build the government's legitimate interest to improve stability, peace, and prosperity within the Muslim region. Globally, the US and Philippines must sever ASG ties with the Al Qaeda. Global actors like the Al Qaeda feed on local grievances, integrating them into the larger Islamic jihad, and then link other unrelated conflicts through a globalized system of communications, finance, and technology.<sup>85</sup> US Department of Treasury's action to sever the links of Islamic charities needs to be aggressively employed.<sup>86</sup>

The AFP doctrine is a triad concept built on interagency operation. Counterterrorism doctrine should be the interplay of interagency operation, intelligence, and precise combat operation. The foundation that should carry the maximum load is interagency effort. The effort is

not only for community development but also to gather information from the populace and to isolate the terrorists from their mass base.

Robust intelligence should be undertaken taking advantage of the interagency effort where immersion with civilians is undertaken. Financial reward should be utilized properly to recruit informants who can provide good intelligence. Previous neutralization of top leaders of the ASG were achieved because of informants imbedded in the group, some of them are trusted aides. Because of insufficient and incomplete warfighting equipment and accessories, those imbedded informants were sometimes killed along with the ASG elements.

The solution to this incident is training, equipage, and precise coordination between operating troops and the informants. Operating troops should be trained properly on marksmanship and selective targeting. With insufficient budget of the AFP, training ammunitions are not enough for every soldier to be a sharp shooter or the least a marksman. In 2009, security forces in Sulu focused the training on marksmanship to improve their shooting skills.<sup>87</sup> To avail US training assistance, the AFP should recommend that the annual MAGTAF Tactical Warfighting Simulation Training conducted by Marine Special Operations Command be focused on marksmanship. For operational capability, the AFP should procure more sniper rifles with night scopes and night vision goggles and accessories to improve its night fighting capability.<sup>88</sup> It is only in night fighting where the AFP can have an upper hand against the ASG because night fighting equipments are controlled items which are difficult for the ASG to acquire. Embedded informants should be well informed of the AFP tactics and doctrine in combat and should use night beacons for easy identification during encounters.

Combat operations should be surgical and intelligence driven. Precise intelligence is necessary for a selective combat operation. Surgical combat operations can spare unnecessary collateral damages utilizing highly trained special operations personnel. Indirect fire support and close air support should be utilized as an instrument of last resort. As experienced in previous combat operations, reconstruction funds are mainly utilized to repair houses, schools, and other infrastructures damaged by artillery and close air support fires. These damages not only sever government funds, it also made the affected populace turned their backs away from the military. This resentment is vulnerable to the agitation and exploitation of the terrorists.

Interagency Operations will be the focus of the new counterterrorism doctrine to continue the Arroyo-era goal of defeating the ASG. LtGen Ferrer, the new WestMinCom commander, says the “military operation has been shifted to peace and development as a new strategy in addressing the remnants of the militants and the root causes of terrorism in the region.”<sup>89</sup> He further stressed that the AFP is working on the framework of securing peace and development because development will overcome the problem of insurgencies and quell the threat of terrorism. The military will not engage in large scale military operations because such operations are counterproductive as they lead to large displacement of people and cause locals to have negative perceptions of the military.<sup>90</sup>

## **Conclusion**

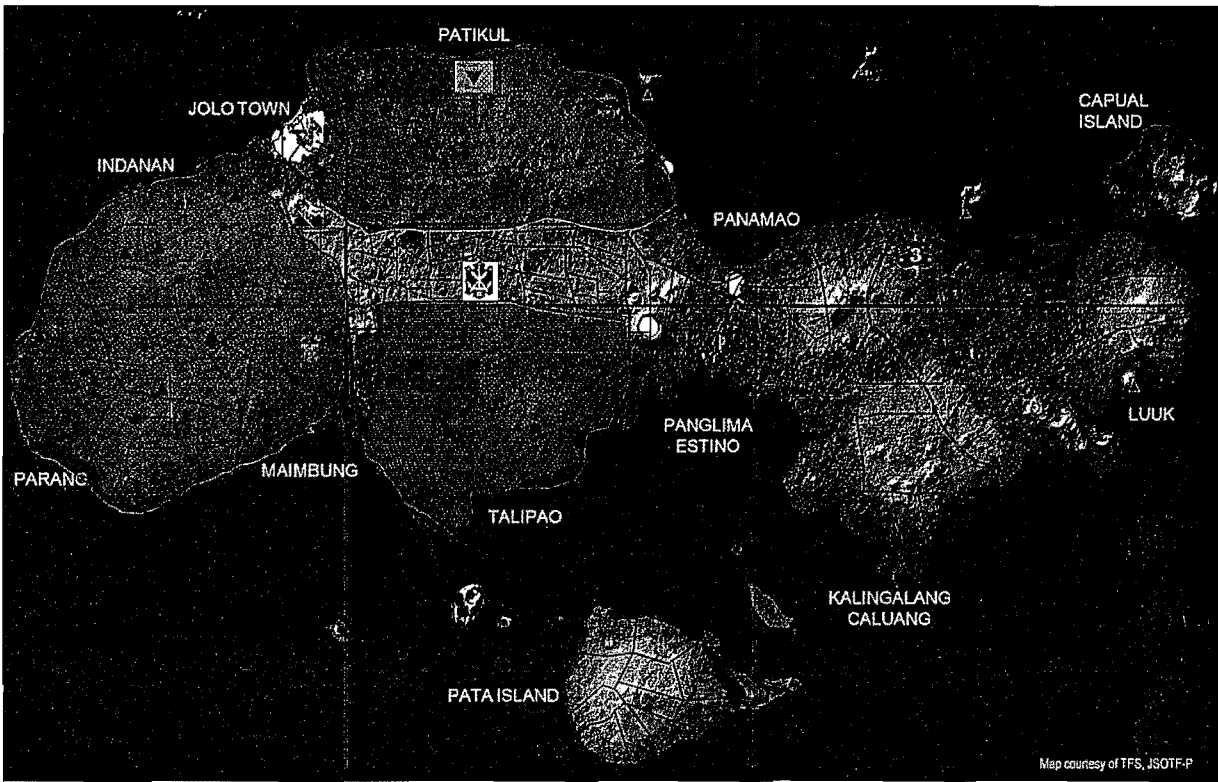
Since the formation of the ASG in the Sulu, Basilan, and Tawitawi regions until 2005, the PMC was involved in large scale military operations. Such a type of counterterrorism doctrine which is embodied in the ISO Plan *Bantay Laya* proved to be counterproductive because it led to

large scale collateral damage and displacement of the people. This diminished the perception of the AFP as the protector of the people.




The deployment of JSOTF-P for OEF-P gave new horizon to the campaign. The effort was shifted from combat operations to CMO designed to isolate the ASG from their civilian supporters and sympathizers. The activities focused on the conduct of low cost high impact Engineering Civic Action Projects and humanitarian assistance. These activities were undertaken in coordination with JSOTF-P, LGUs, LGAs, and NGOs. In addition, high cost infrastructure projects were also funded by JSOTF-P. This type of operations resulted in the neutralization of ASG leaders to include the top leader and the second in command. With the general support of JSOTF-P, the PMC gained tactical success which greatly diminished the strength of the ASG.

Realizing the failure of ISO Plan *Bantay Laya*, the new AFP chief of Staff directed the AFP to shift the military operation to peace and development as a new strategy in addressing the remnants of the militants and the root causes of terrorism in the region. The new framework is securing peace and development to overcome the problem and quell the threat of terrorism. The enhanced civil-military economic development can be attained through interagency programs. The military will not engage in large scale military operations which are counter-productive. Interagency programs will be supported by intelligence driven and selective surgical combat operations. This counterterrorism strategy is expected to meet the strategic goal of the Arroyo administration to defeat the Abu Sayyaf Group to attain the elusive peace and prosperity in Mindanao. As Krulak said "The war could only be won when the people were protected. If the people were for you, you would triumph in the end. If they were against you, the war would bleed you dry and you would be defeated."<sup>91</sup>

Annex A: ASG Areas of Concentration vis a vis AFP/MNLF Disposition in Sulu

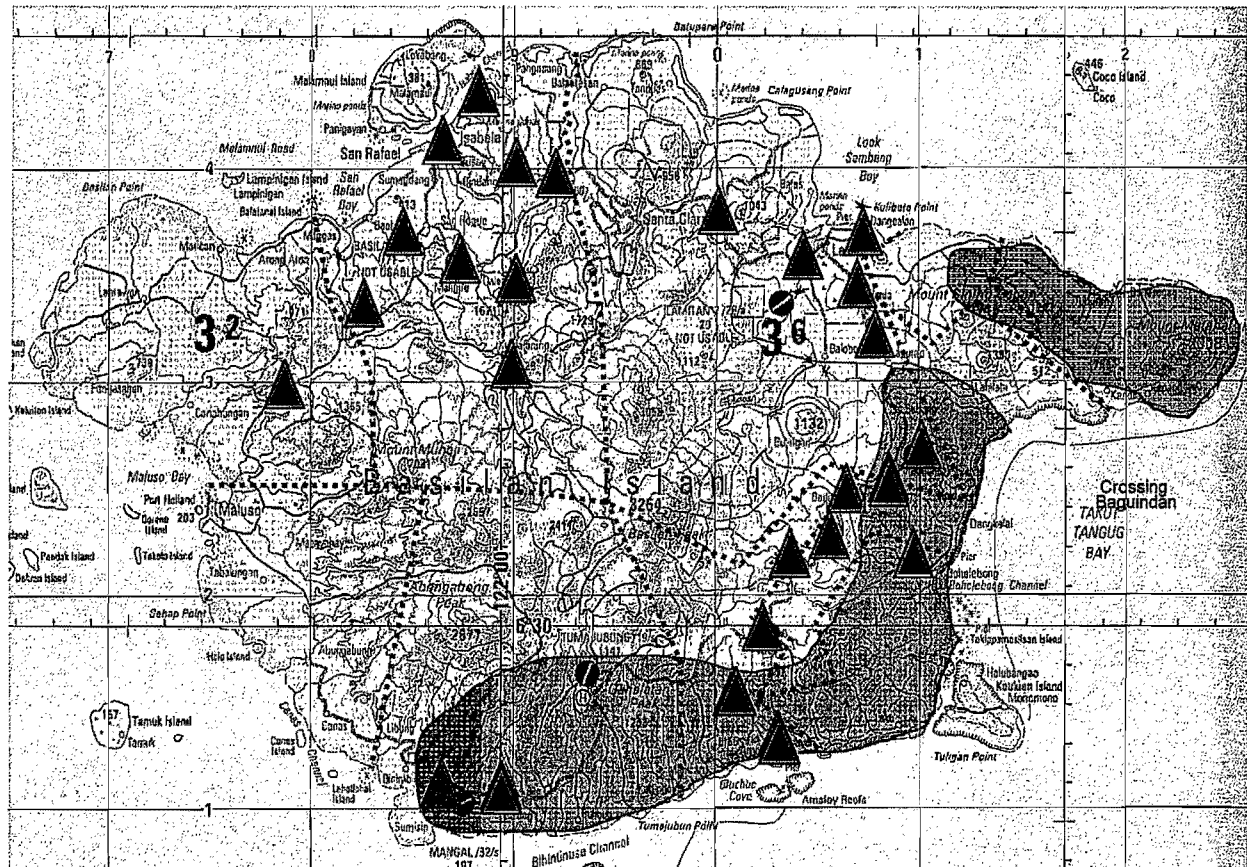


LEGEND

-  - AFP Detachment
-  - MNLF Camp
-  - ASG Stronghold

(Reference: Joint Task Force COMET Unit Brief, 2009)

## Annex B: (ASG Areas of Concentration vis a vis AFP Disposition in Basilan)



### LEGEND



- AFP Detachment



- ASG Stronghold

(Reference: 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade Unit Brief, 2008)

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<sup>12</sup> Barangay is the smallest political unit of the Philippines. It is led by a Barangay Captain which is assisted by Barangay Councilors. The number of councilors is dependent on the number of voters. The councilor also represents a sitio or a village.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>18</sup> International Labor Organization, "Convention No.169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries", ILO seventy sixth session, 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Lingga. p.30.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>21</sup> AFP Order of Battle, Fourth Quarter, 2009.
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