U.S. POLICY AGAINST THE ABU SAYYAF TERRORIST GROUP
IN THE POST 9/11 WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Since 1991, the Philippines has been plagued by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a terrorist organization linked to al-Qaeda. After September 11, 2001, President Gloria Arroyo fervently supported the U.S. global war on terror by linking it with the Philippines’ struggle against terrorism. With Philippine cooperation, came considerable U.S. military assistance, training, and intelligence support for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to combat the war on terror’s “second-front” in Southeast Asia.

The aim of this five part thesis is to examine the development and effectiveness of U.S. policy in combating the ASG while covering the scope of the George W. Bush Administration from 2001 to 2008. To provide the necessary background for understanding the Abu Sayyaf problem, Chapter I will outline the plight of the Moros in the Philippines under Spanish and American colonial rule from 1521 to 1946. Chapter II will examine the deteriorating conditions of the Moros under Christian Filipino rule from independence to 2001, when they were further marginalized. Chapter III will analyze the developments in U.S. policy towards the Moro problem during the concurrent administrations of President George W. Bush and President Gloria Arroyo. Chapter IV will explore military, economic, and political recommendations for more effective U.S.-Philippine bilateral operations against the ASG.
Chapter V will conclude by examining the future prospects of U.S.-Philippine collaboration against terrorism and its global implications. The anti-ASG effort can be used as a model for other joint counterterrorist operations. Since 2001, U.S. military support in counter-Abu Sayyaf operations has been largely successful despite ASG resistance. Annual U.S. military exercises should not cease until the Philippine government becomes stable enough to finance its own military sufficiently to deal with the counterinsurgency efforts, which may take decades. This thesis asserts that U.S. military support, especially civic action projects, must continue because the Philippines lacks the required resources to effectively address the terrorist insurgencies. Furthermore, the Moro problem can be handled better through post-conflict stabilization efforts, such as economic development and political accommodation in the southern Philippines.
To my parents, Larry and Sally Aniel
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................ii

DEDICATION PAGE .....................................................................................................iv

ABBREVIATIONS .........................................................................................................vii

GLOSSARY ..................................................................................................................viii

CHAPTER

I: THE PLIGHT OF THE MOROS IN THE PHILIPPINES UNDER SPANISH AND
AMERICAN COLONIAL RULE, 1521-1946...........................................................................1
  Background Information on the Moros before Spanish Rule in 1521......................2
  The Moros under Spanish Rule, 1521-1898 ...............................................................4
  The Moros under U.S. Rule, 1899-1946.................................................................8
  Repercussions of Colonial Rule as Root Causes of the Moro Problem.................15

II: THE MOROS IN THE PHILIPPINES: DETERIORATING CONDITIONS AFTER
INDEPENDENCE, JULY 4, 1946-SEPTEMBER 11, 2001......................................................18
  Conditions of the Moros under Early Philippine Presidents, 1946-1965............18
  Conditions of the Moros under the Ferdinand Marcos Regime, 1965-1986 ......22
  Conditions of the Moros in the Post-Marcos Period, 1986-2001.......................26
  Repercussions of Philippine Self-Rule as Root Causes of the Moro Problem ......32

III: U.S. POLICY AND THE MORO PROBLEM DURING THE ADMINISTRATION
OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, 2001-2008.................................................................35
  U.S.-Philippine Relations and Security Concerns ..................................................36
  ASG Policy in Bush’s First Term, 2001-2004 ...........................................................38
  Strains in Bilateral Relations ...................................................................................46
  New Developments in ASG Policy in Bush’s Second Term, 2005-2008 ..........48
  An Evaluation of ASG Policy under the Bush Administration .........................51

IV: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE U.S.-R.P. COLLABORATION
AGAINST THE ASG.......................................................................................................55
  Military Recommendations to Improve Tactics Against the ASG .......................55
  Economic Recommendations to Address the Roots of the Moro Problem .......59
  Political Recommendations for Local and International Support .................63
  An Analysis of the ASG Problem and U.S. Efforts ..............................................71
V: FUTURE PROSPECTS OF U.S.-R.P. COLLABORATION AGAINST THE ASG

Appendix

1. Map of the Philippines

2. Map of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

3. Detailed Map of Abu Sayyaf Strongholds in the Sulu Archipelago:
   The Islands of Basilan, Jolo, and Tawitawi

BIBLIOGRAPHY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFP</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARMM</td>
<td>Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASG</td>
<td>Abu Sayyaf Group</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Philippines</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>HUKs</td>
<td>Hukbalahap or “People's Army Against the Japanese”</td>
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<td>IIRO</td>
<td>Islamic International Relief Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRIC</td>
<td>International Relations and Information Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI</td>
<td>Jemaah Islamiya</td>
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<tr>
<td>MILF</td>
<td>Moro Islamic Liberation Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNLF</td>
<td>Moro National Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>New People’s Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>OEF-P</td>
<td>Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIC</td>
<td>Organization of the Islamic Conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Republic of the Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAFFE</td>
<td>U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East</td>
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<td>VFA</td>
<td>Visiting Forces Agreement</td>
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GLOSSARY

Balikatan “Shoulder-to-shoulder”

Bangsa Moro Moro Nation

Datus Native chiefs of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago

Hawala Unregulated remittance system

Sharia Islamic law

Sultan A secular and religious leader in Islamic societies whose authority is sanctioned by the Koran

Wahhabism An extremely conservative form of Islam that dates back to the 18th century
CHAPTER I

THE PLIGHT OF THE MOROS IN THE PHILIPPINES UNDER SPANISH AND AMERICAN COLONIAL RULE, 1521-1946

Terrorism is not uncommon in the predominantly Christian Philippines—the nation has had a long history of insurgent movements, including Muslim ones. For the Muslims, their “jihad” or holy war has persisted for over four centuries. The Filipino Muslims, called Moros, revolted against three main groups: the Spanish colonizers from 1521, the American rulers from 1899, and the Philippine governments since independence in 1946. ¹ Since the 1950s, the country has been beleaguered by the Hukbalahaps, the Communists, the Moro National Liberation Front, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the Abu Sayyaf Group.

The aim of Chapter I is to trace how Spanish and American rule in the Philippines adversely affected the Muslims for over 400 years. In order to provide the proper historical context for the Christian-Muslim conflict, the chapter is organized in four parts: background information on the Moros; the Moros under Spanish rule from 1521 to 1898; the Moros under U.S. rule from 1898 to 1946; and the repercussions of Spanish and American colonial rule as root causes of the Moro problem.

SECTION 1: Background Information on the Moros before Spanish Rule in 1521

The Philippine Archipelago is diverse with over 7,100 islands inhabited by populations that speak approximately 100 dialects.² Although Muslim trading had existed in the region before the thirteenth century, Islam was not introduced until 1210 by Arab merchants and missionaries.³ One of the first sultanates to develop in the Philippines was on the Sulu island chain, off the coast of Borneo.⁴ By 1450, Sulu became a prominent center of Muslim trade and culture when the Sumatran sultan, Sayyid Abu Bakhr, married a Sulu princess.

By the end of the fifteenth century, strong Muslim states were well established in Maguindanao located in southern Mindanao and in the Sulu Archipelago.⁵ Rulers in Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines realized that they could benefit by participating in the rising Muslim trade networks. They could also gain wealth and power by maintaining large armies to collect tribute and build new alliances. Thus, Muslim rulers captured and enslaved non-Muslims. However, rulers freed slaves upon

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² Ibid., xi.
⁵ Ibid., 16.
their conversion to Islam, creating a new dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁶

Traditionally, Filipino Muslims are not a close-knit or allied group. They are extremely proud of their separate identities and ten subgroups can be identified by their language.⁷ Three of these groups, namely the Maguindanaos of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Maguindanao provinces; the Maranaos of the two Lanao provinces; and the Tausugs from Jolo Island comprise the majority of the Moros.⁸ In addition to being divided by different languages and political structures, the separate groups differ in their degree of adherence to Islamic orthodoxy. For example, the Tausugs, to which the Abu Sayyaf belongs, was the first group to adopt Islam. The Tausugs have criticized the more recently converted Yakan and Bajau peoples for being less pious in observing Islamic tenets and practices.⁹

The Moros view Islam as an integral part of their society and the traditional structure of Moro society has focused on a sultan who is both a secular and religious leader with authority sanctioned by the Koran. The “datus” serve as communal leaders, their power being measured by the number of their followers, and not by their land holdings. Separation of church and state was a peculiarity of the West that was

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⁶ Ibid., 7.


⁸ Ibid.

unknown to Muslims. In contrast, Islam was incorporated in their everyday way of life.\textsuperscript{10} The Moros believed that their laws and customs were consistent with the precepts of the holy Koran. Any efforts to change their society or to enforce obedience to the laws of foreigners were seen as a “fundamental challenge to their religion and to their very existence as human beings.”\textsuperscript{11} The Spanish and American colonial occupations would constitute as severe threats to the ideology of the Moros and many of them resisted to the death.\textsuperscript{12}

SECTION 2: The Moros under Spanish Rule, 1521-1898

The Spanish colonization of the Philippines changed the lives of the Muslims. The Spanish churchmen-soldiers, like their European contemporaries in Africa, found that the local population practiced polytheism and Islam. Thriving and faithful Muslim communities lived as far north as Manila in Luzon when Ferdinand Magellan first landed in the Philippines at Cebu and introduced Catholicism to the islands in 1521.\textsuperscript{13} Because of its close proximity to Mindanao, Cebu, the first Philippine capital in the Visayan Islands, was often pillaged by the Moros in search of slaves and treasure.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Nadeau, \textit{The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations: The History of the Philippines}, 27.

\textsuperscript{14} Barreveld, \textit{Terrorism in the Philippines}, 69.
Thus, fifty years later in 1571, Miguel Lopez de Legazpi moved the capital north when he defeated the Muslim ruler in Manila.\footnote{Dolan, \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 5.}

The Spaniards were motivated by their desire for wealth and wanted to dominate and control the spice trade that stretched from Asia to the European markets. As overland trade routes shifted through Muslim controlled lands like Cairo, local merchants demanded exorbitant taxes and tributes that caused Portugal and Spain to search for an all-water route to gain direct access to goods in India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Spain’s second motivation was achieving glory and fame in their colonial expeditions as they competed against rival nations.

The third motivation for Spanish imperialism was to convert Filipino Muslims to Catholicism. The Spanish called them Moros or Moors, after their longtime Muslim enemies in Spain. Spain’s “crusading spirit” cultivated fear and hatred of Muslims because Spain had been ruled by the Moors from North Africa since the eighth century.\footnote{Florangel Rosario-Braid, “The Lessons of the Philippine Peace Process,” \textit{Asian Peace: Security and Governance in the Asia Pacific Region}, ed. Majid Tehranian (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1999), 154.} For opposing Spanish rule and Christianity, King Philip II issued a royal decree in 1570 that condemned captured Moros in war to slavery.\footnote{Barreveld, \textit{Terrorism in the Philippines}, 66.} The Spanish rapidly Christianized the non-Muslims of Luzon and Cebu. Eventually they succeeded in converting roughly eighty percent of Filipinos to Catholicism, but they failed to convert the Moros in Mindanao.
With the Spanish conquest of the islands in the northern and central regions, local autonomy was lost because the datu system of mutual indebtedness and exchange was replaced by divine patronage to the bureaucracy of colonial Spain. Priests localized Christianity for economic and political gain by seizing land holdings. Furthermore, priests abused their role as father confessors and debt collectors by forcing their parishioners to buy indulgences and go into debt. Thus, Filipinos became more dependent on the priests and were led to obey their generally abusive Spanish overlords. The loss of land to Christian colonizers would become the crux of the Muslim rebellion.  

Although the Spanish invaded parts of Mindanao from 1578-1595, 1630-1650, 1718-1762, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they were unable to convert the Muslims to Christianity. The refusal of Moros to accept religious conversion became a symbol of resistance to colonial rule. Thus, the various peoples in the south retained a large degree of political, cultural, and economic autonomy during the Spanish period. The Moros were confined almost entirely to the southern part of the country in Mindanao, Palawan, and the Sulu Archipelago.

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20 Ibid.
After failing to conquer two primary Moro centers in central Mindanao and the island of Jolo in the Sulu Archipelago, the Spanish built a military base located between the two areas at Zamboanga, on the tip of the southwestern peninsula of Mindanao.\footnote{Charles O. Frake, “Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities among Philippine Muslims,” \textit{American Anthropological Association Journal} 100, no. 1 (Mar. 1998): 43.}

The Jesuits began to Christianize the people each time the Spaniards succeeded in building a fort, like in Zamboanga and Caraga. The bases were protected by Christian Filipino soldiers who intermarried with immigrant and local women. Rather than acting as lookout points that could intercept the raiders or send advanced warning to the Visayas and Luzon, the bases triggered conflict.

One notable example of this occurrence was when Spanish troops were called back to defend the capital city of Manila when the British attacked in 1762 during the Seven Year’s War. The forces of the British East India Company captured Manila after intense fighting. In May 1764, Manila was returned to the Spanish with the signing of the Treaty of Paris that ended the war.\footnote{Dolan, \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 8.} Significantly, the British occupation marked the end of the old order. While the Spanish were tied down by fighting with the British, they were unable to control the Moro raids from the south on the Christian communities located in the Visayas and Luzon. Thousands of Christian Filipinos were captured as slaves and Moro raids continued to be a serious problem through the remainder of the
eighteenth century and onward. Spain was unable to maintain a strong foothold over Mindanao and when the troops left, the Christian converts reverted to their former Muslim faith and practices.

In summary, before Spain arrived, the southern regions had their own sultanates and datus and were proud of their Muslim religion. Then Spain attempted to convert them to Christianity by force, but was unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the intermittent fighting ruined the local economy and destabilized the Muslim region. Their situation deteriorated under the subsequent occupation of the United States. This U.S. occupation took place after protest movements and rebellions against Spain culminated in the Philippine Revolution from 1896-1898. The end of the old Catholic order gave way to a new Protestant order under U.S. rule in the Philippines.

SECTION 3: The Moros under U.S. Rule, 1899-1946

The United States was interested in acquiring the Philippines due to several reasons. First, it had increased its ambitions as a global power and wished to challenge its British and European rivals. Second, America desired new markets for its manufactured goods and access to natural resources following the closure of its continental borders. The Philippines represented the extension into the Pacific of a new frontier and the U.S. viewed the island nation as a strategic stepping-stone to the

24 Ibid., 9.
Chinese markets. Third, the U.S. sought to civilize the local populations and carry out America’s “Manifest Destiny” by spreading the Protestant faith. However, this was not limited to a moral agenda, such as the elimination of slavery and head hunting. The Philippines represented a new laboratory for an “American triumphalist science” that included the provision of education for the benefit of future generations.

In the closing days of the Philippine Revolution in April 1898, war broke out between Spain and the United States after the sinking of the *Maine* in Havana Harbor. The U.S. accused Spain of the sinking and sent the American fleet in Hong Kong, under Commodore George Dewey, to attack the Spanish in Manila. Under General Aguinaldo, the Filipino army ousted Spain with Commodore Dewey’s help. Together, they captured 8,000 Spaniards that were trapped in a garrison in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. By that time, the Filipino army had surrounded and effectively closed off Manila and had taken control of the whole country.

However, the Americans prevented the Filipinos from entering Manila to participate in the surrender ceremonies. Soon after the nationalist victory over Spain, the archipelago was recolonized by the U.S., which sought to legitimize its claim by purchasing the islands from Spain for $20 million under the Treaty of Paris.

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26 Perttierra and Ugarte, “American Rule in the Muslim South and the Philippine Hinterlands,” 192.


28 Ibid.
American relations began to deteriorate when the Filipinos realized that the Americans had betrayed them.

The Filipino struggle persisted and most Filipinos resented the American occupation. After the Filipinos essentially won their independence from Spain, Washington dispatched 70,000 troops to pacify the Filipinos—four times more than the number of troops sent to Cuba in 1899. General Aguinaldo, who later became the first president of the new Philippine Republic, and his troops refused to surrender and in November 1899 engaged in full-fledged guerilla warfare. This was the Philippines’ second war of independence, but the United States referred to it as the “Philippine Insurrection.”

During the Philippine-American War, from 1899 to 1902, the U.S. military killed more Filipinos in three years than the Spanish did in 300 years. According to the Philippine-American War Centennial Initiative, some 22,000 Philippine soldiers and 500,000 civilians were killed in Luzon and the Visayas, while 100,000 Muslims were killed in Mindanao. Similarly, the cost for the U.S. was high with 4,234 soldiers killed in action and 2,818 wounded from battle. Additionally, thousands contracted life-

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 52.
threatening diseases. It cost the U.S. about $600 million or the equivalent of about $4 billion in 1989, and additional millions for benefits and pensions.³³

William Howard Taft, the first civil governor of the Philippines, declared the end of the war in 1902. After 1902, the war in the south that followed the “official end” was one of the bloodiest colonial invasions in history.³⁴ In one campaign, General Jacob Smith ordered his troops to “kill and burn” everything and to shoot anyone over ten years old, since there was no time to take prisoners—he wanted to make Samar into a “howling wilderness.”³⁵

In 1903, American authorities established a Moro province in Mindanao and a new legal system replaced the “sharia” or Islamic law. Hence, “slavery was outlawed, schools that taught a non-Muslim curriculum were established, and local governments that challenged the authority of traditional community leaders were organized.”³⁶ U.S. rule, even more so than Spanish rule, was seen as a challenge to Islam.³⁷ Armed resistance grew and the Moro province remained under U.S. military rule until 1914. Fighting continued intermittently during these years, with the American military

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ San Juan, U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines, 114.

³⁵ Ibid., 113.


³⁷ Ibid.
inflicting scorched-earth tactics and devastating local villages.\textsuperscript{38} Beyond that, widespread famine, poverty, and epidemics added to the tragedies of war. As many as 200,000 civilians died by the end of the war.\textsuperscript{39}

As U.S. colonizers collaborated with “mestizaje” or “Hispanicized” Filipino elites, both groups articulated a widening gap between the islands’ “civilized” peoples and its Moros or “non-Christians.”\textsuperscript{40} Under U.S. colonial rule, this distinction was implemented in multiple levels of government. Politically, the bifurcation of Christian and non-Christian areas persuaded U.S. audiences that the war was over by rhetorically reducing Philippine “savagery” to only the non-Christian population.\textsuperscript{41}

Furthermore, the United States carried out a strategy of liberalization by eliminating the economic resources of the Moro sultanates, datus, and other local leaders, especially after the introduction of popular education in 1916. There was no prohibition to the entry of Christian missionaries, especially Protestants into Sulu to undertake the educational, economic, social, or cultural tasks for colonial interests. This direct means of social change, including the encouragement of immigration of Christians, Chinese, and other nationalities helped American colonial rule to change the

\textsuperscript{38} Niksch, “Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,” 50.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 6.
social, economic, and political relations and power structure in the Moro provinces over time. 42

Meanwhile, anti-Philippine sentiment grew in the U.S. and, as early as 1929, the Filipino movement for independence gained support from U.S. dairy farmers, farm organizations, domestic sugar producers, tobacco producers, and other labor unions. They strongly feared the competition of Filipino immigrant workers to the United States. A bill supporting these interests and independence for the Philippines was passed in both houses of Congress. The Tydings-McDuffie Act was enacted into law in 1934, and established a Philippine commonwealth with national elections scheduled for 1944. 43

But, the south did not want independence from the United States and saw this as a serious threat. From the Moro perspective, an independent Philippines would be dominated by Christians, their traditional enemies. 44 Since 1903, U.S. policy was to break down the historical autonomy of the Muslim territories. 45 The migration of Christian settlers from Luzon and the Visayas to the sparsely settled areas of Mindanao was encouraged and the new arrivals began to displace the Moros in their own homeland. Moreover, large areas of the south were subject to economic exploitation, especially with the rise of fruit industries. In March 1935, Muslim datus wrote a letter

42 Ibid.


45 Ibid.
to U.S. president, Franklin D. Roosevelt petitioning him to reconsider Philippine independence. The letter read:

The American people should not release us until we are educated and become powerful because we are like a calf who, once abandoned by its mother, would be devoured by a merciless lion.46

No reply is recorded, but Christian Filipino leaders were extremely opposed to any suggestion of continued U.S. rule over the Moro provinces. Once the Commonwealth of the Philippines was established, Christian Filipino leaders would gain almost complete control over the government.

In any case, the road to independence was halted when the Japanese began to invade the Philippines on December 8, 1941. General Douglas MacArthur, the son of the last military general in the Philippines, was called into active duty by the U.S. government to fend off enemy forces. He failed and was forced to flee the Philippines, but vowed, “I shall return.” More than 76,000 U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE) and 66,000 Filipino soldiers surrendered at Bataan.47 The Japanese occupation lasted from January 1942 to February 1945.

Although the war was over for the captured American forces, the Filipinos continued to organize themselves into guerilla units and resistance movements against the Japanese throughout the remainder of World War II. This bleak situation forged a special relationship between the American and Philippine militaries that has continued

46 Ibid., 34.

until today. On October 20, 1944, General MacArthur fulfilled his promise to return when he landed with 174,000 troops in Leyte Gulf. By February 23, 1945, the Allied Forces retook Manila and the Americans transferred the powers of government to President Sergio Osmeña. The civilian government was fully reestablished in 1946.⁴⁸

SECTION 4: Repercussions of Colonial Rule as Root Causes of the Moro Problem

Along with East Timor, the Philippines is the only other predominantly Christian country in Asia, having been a Spanish colony for over 300 years. Approximately, ninety-three percent of the 88 million people practice Roman Catholicism and various denominations of the Christian faith while Filipino Muslims account for five percent of the population.⁴⁹ However, Muslim scholars contend that Moros make up almost ten percent of the population. They also contend that the underreporting of the Moro population is a subtle attempt by the government to undermine Moro power and influence.⁵⁰

Although Moros are ethnically similar to other Filipinos, they are set apart by their religion and have remained outside the mainstream of national life. The religious, cultural, and historical distinctiveness of the Moros in the Philippines partly explains why they were the “last group of people to bow down to colonialism and the first to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 62.


⁵⁰ Amina Rasul, “Pluralism and Democracy in Southeast Asian Islam: Muslim Voices from the Region” (lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, March 19, 2009).
rebel against the post-colonial state.”51 Resistance to colonization was especially strong among the Muslim population of southwestern Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. With pride in their cultural heritage and a deep desire for independence, Moros fought Christians and foreign domination.

The Spaniards desired to establish theocratic rule over the islands by conquering and converting the indigenous communities and establishing the line between the “infidels” (Muslims) and the “civilized” (Christians). Tensions over the structure of authority, funding priorities, and racial/cultural perceptions often caused rifts between the colonial government and native population. The migration of Christian Filipinos to the Morolands commenced toward the end of the Spanish period where there was substantial resettlement of Christians from the Visayas and Luzon to Mindanao.52 Spanish control over the Moros was never complete, and the Muslim struggle carried over into the U.S. colonial period. The Moros earned a reputation as intense combat fighters against U.S. troops.

Moreover, the demographic changes that began in the U.S. colonial period from 1898-1946 contributed to the current Muslim insurgency. In 1900, Christians were

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51 Buendia, Ethnicity and Sub-nationalist Independence Movements in the Philippines and Indonesia: Implications for Regional Security, 43.

52 Pertierra and Ugarte, “American Rule in the Muslim South and the Philippine Hinterlands,” 201.
fifteen percent of the local population in Mindanao.\textsuperscript{53} Currently, however, Christians
comprise eighty-five percent of the population of Mindanao due to past government
relocation projects of settlers to cultivate the land. Between 1903 and 1939, 1.4 million
Christians settled in northeastern Mindanao.\textsuperscript{54} By 1946, when U.S. rule ended, as a
minority ethnic group that was once the majority for centuries, the Moros deeply
resented having their political, economic, and social rights infringed upon when they
were displaced from their ancestral lands. Thus, Spanish and American colonial rule
resulted in the plight of the Moros. As the next chapter will show, this plight was to
grow worse after independence under Christian Filipino rule.

\textsuperscript{53} Ronald D. Palmer, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and
2004), 131.

\textsuperscript{54} Perttierra and Ugarte, “American Rule in the Muslim South and the Philippine Hinterlands,”
201.
CHAPTER II


The aim of this chapter is to outline the deteriorating conditions of the Moros from Philippine independence in July 4, 1946, to the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States. During these five-and-a-half decades, they suffered from declining political, economic, and social conditions. The chapter is organized in four sections: conditions under early Philippine presidents, 1946 to 1965; conditions under the Ferdinand Marcos regime, 1965 to 1986; conditions in the post-Marcos period, 1986 to 2001; and the repercussions of Philippine self-rule as root causes of the Moro problem.

SECTION 1: Conditions of the Moros under Early Philippine Presidents, 1946-1965

Immediately following Philippine independence, the Moros were ignored by the national government who instituted policies to appease the communist “Hukbalahap” (HUKs) movement. The HUKs had fought against the Japanese occupation in World War II and now wanted land reform. This problem later involved the Moros as the same HUKs moved south. Meanwhile, the Elpidio Quirino Administration encouraged the migration of Filipinos, including former HUKs, from densely settled areas in central Luzon to the “open frontier” of Mindanao.¹ The HUKs were largely comprised of rural

peasants and farmers and the government promoted HUK resettlement as an economic initiative to cultivate the southern lands.

In 1950, these efforts did not completely alleviate the problem of the HUKs. So the U.S. sent C.I.A. advisors to help the Philippine military take the lead in the counterinsurgency campaign against the HUKs. To better fight the HUKs, under the advice of Colonel Edward Lansdale, Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay introduced far-reaching changes in the organizational structure of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Magsaysay transformed the AFP into a more effective counterinsurgency fighting force and oversaw the organization of paramilitary groups or civilian guards who were ordered to conduct psychological warfare tactics against the HUKs. Civilian guards, under the command of military officers, massacred HUK members and civilians believed to be associated with the HUKs. The HUKs were defeated in October 1950, when the AFP captured the top leadership of the Communist Party in Manila. By 1951, a formal Mutual Defense Treaty was signed between the U.S. and R.P as a means to combat the growing communist influence in Asia. The training of the AFP by U.S. military forces against the HUKs became the forerunner to later training of the AFP by U.S. military forces against the Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization in the post-September 11, 2001 world.2

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With his success against the HUKs, Magsaysay’s power and influence increased and he was elected president of the Philippines in 1953.\(^3\) Magsaysay instituted the Economic Development Corps, which was largely a propaganda tool used to resettle surrendered HUKs, Christians, Chinese, and other settlers in areas far from Luzon. The program included the use of military surveillance operations and equipment to clear large tracts of land in Mindanao for their resettlement. Since the beginning, the resettlement program was largely successful and the media propaganda attracted 950 poor families who voluntarily migrated without financial aid to establish their homesteads in Mindanao.\(^4\)

Throughout the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Ilongos, Ilocanos, Tagalogs, and other northern peoples were relocating to the Cotabato and Lanao provinces of Mindanao. The influx of Christian settlers inflamed Moro hostility and the root of the conflict lay in land disputes. For example, Christian migrants to Cotabato complained that they bought land from one Muslim only to have his relatives refuse to recognize the sale and demand more money.\(^5\) On the other hand, Moros claimed that Christians would title land through government agencies unknown to the Muslim residents, for whom land titling or “land grabbing” was a new institution. Moreover, distrust and

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\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Ibid.
resentment spread to the public school system, which most Muslims regarded as a medium for the propagation of Christian teachings.⁶

In 1957, the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities replaced the Commission for National Integration to establish a specialized agency to deal with the Muslim minority. Filipino nationalists envisioned a united country in which Christians and Muslims would be offered economic advantages and the Muslims would be assimilated into the dominant culture. The Moros would simply be Filipinos who had their own form of worship and refused to eat pork. This vision was less than ideal to several Christians, and was generally rejected by Muslims, who feared that it was a “euphemistic equivalent of assimilation.”⁷ Thus, concessions were made to accommodate the Muslim religion and customs. For instance, Moros were exempted from Philippine laws prohibiting polygamy and divorce.

By 1960, during the Carlos Garcia presidency, more than a million people had resettled to Mindanao without government support to earn their livelihoods from farming.⁸ The infiltration of Christian settlers to Mindanao became a battle cry for Muslim insurgents in the coming decades. The resettlement exacerbated land disputes

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 84.

raging throughout the entire period of U.S. colonial rule.⁹ Open Muslim rebellion would ensue in the subsequent Ferdinand Marcos regime.

SECTION 2: Conditions of the Moros under the Ferdinand Marcos Regime, 1965-1986

When Ferdinand Marcos was elected president in 1965, the Philippines was considered as a model for democratic development in Southeast Asia. The nation had regular elections, a functioning Congress, and a highly effective Supreme Court. Furthermore, the Philippines had a burgeoning middle class and one of the highest literacy rates in the region. However, under his two-decade rule, Marcos unraveled this democracy and implemented an authoritarian government.

Marcos significantly increased the size of the military and expanded its role of governance. But the U.S. did not oppose Marcos as long as his policies were in line with U.S. foreign policy. His economic, political, and militaristic restructuring program supported U.S. foreign policy that favored export-driven and top-down development and the strengthening of the military to fight the spreading communist threat throughout the region. With the increasing buildup of U.S. military forces against communism in Vietnam, the U.S. government highly valued its strategically located military bases in the Philippines, especially Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base, which at the time were the largest U.S. bases in the world.¹⁰ These bases served as important staging grounds


for the Vietnam War, while nearby Filipino communities served as rest and recreation zones for American troops. Similarly, after September 11, 2001, these military bases in the Philippines would become staging grounds for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Marcos also utilized martial law to expropriate sugar and coconut industries, tobacco and beer, and other private enterprises that were nationalized and appropriated by his government cronies.\(^{11}\) Marcos and his network benefited the most from this expansion in export agriculture. Documents indicate that Marcos used martial law to acquire the La Carlota sugar headquarters of Negros Occidental, 30,000 hectares in the Cagayan and Isabela provinces, and several hundred hectares in Davao and other parts of Mindanao and Panay.\(^ {12}\) This agricultural monopoly by the government created civil unrest with the Moros.

More immediate causes of the Muslim insurgency rose out of the increasing lawlessness in the southern Philippines during the late 1960s, when violence associated with political disputes, personal feuds, and armed gangs thrived.\(^ {13}\) Already in competition over land, economic resources, and political power, the Moros became increasingly alarmed by the continued immigration of Christians from the north. By 1970, a terrorist organization of Christians called the “Ilagas” or “Rats” began operating in the Cotabato region and armed Muslims called “Blackshirts” showed up in response. Similarly, the Muslim “Barracudas” began fighting the “Rats” in Lanao region.

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\(^{11}\) Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 213.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

Philippine Army troops were sent in to restore order and were accused by the Muslims
of siding with the Christians.\textsuperscript{14}

When Marcos declared martial law in 1972, Muslim Mindanao was in turmoil
and it was no surprise that Marcos met strong resistance from this population.\textsuperscript{15}
Partisan groups, divided along religious lines, seized all of Mindanao and the Sulu
Archipelago. With martial law in place, all civilians were ordered to surrender their
guns. The Moros were suspicious of the government’s intentions towards them and
spontaneous rebellions arose among the Moros who traditionally equated the right to
carry arms with their religious custom.\textsuperscript{16} Initially, uprisings were isolated, but rapidly
spread in scope and size.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a separatist movement founded by
Nur Misuari in 1968, enlarged its revolutionary war against the Marcos regime.
Thousands of civilians died when Marcos dispatched his military forces to Mindanao.
The full-scale war was a “symptom of the failure of a liberal-capitalist policy of
integration” when Marcos monopolized the agricultural industries in Mindanao.\textsuperscript{17} The
MNLF was fighting for an independent Moro nation and received support from Muslims
in Libya and Malaysia. When the conflict reached its peak in 1973-1975, the “Bangsa

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 291.
\textsuperscript{17} San Juan, \textit{U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines}, 97.
Moro” or Moro Nation Army of the MNLF was able to recruit almost 30,000 fighters.\textsuperscript{18} The Armed Forces of the Philippines responded by deploying seventy-to-eighty percent of its combat forces against the Moros. Military and civilian casualties were heavy and an estimated 50,000 people were killed.\textsuperscript{19}

The Philippine government also employed a variety of nonmilitary tactics, announced economic aid programs and political concessions, and encouraged factionalism and defections in the Muslim ranks by offering incentives, such as amnesty and land.\textsuperscript{20} These government programs and a sharp decrease in the flow of arms from Malaysia hindered the Moro separatist movements. In late 1976, the conflict began to decline and talks between the government and the Moros began. The talks were facilitated under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a union of Muslim nations to which the Moros looked for support. In 1977, the talks led to an agreement signed in Tripoli between the Philippine government and the MNLF that called for autonomy and a cease-fire in the southern Philippines.\textsuperscript{21} Another concession was that the government attempted to codify Muslim law on personal relationships and to harmonize Muslim customary law with Philippine law.

However, the truce broke down in late 1977 amid Moro claims that the government’s autonomy plan allowed only token self-rule. That same year, the Moro


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) split from the MNLF under the leadership of Hashim Salamat. He was supported by ethnic Maguindanaos from Mindanao and they advocated for a more moderate and conciliatory approach toward the government. By 1983, the Moro fighting strength declined to about 15,000 men. Thereafter, Muslim and government forces only occasionally clashed during Marco’s last years in office. When he was overthrown in 1986, Corazon Aquino became president of the Philippines and had to deal with the Moro problem.


In keeping with her campaign pledge of national reconciliation, President Aquino initiated talks with the MNLF, the largest Moro faction, to resolve the conflict with the Muslim separatists. These talks, facilitated under the OIC resulted in a cease-fire. In January 1987, the MNLF signed an agreement relinquishing its goal of independence for Muslim regions and accepting the government’s offer of autonomy. The MILF, the second largest faction, refused to accept the accord and initiated a brief offensive that ended in a truce a few weeks later. But later that year, talks between the government and the MNLF deadlocked.

Meanwhile, the government pressed forward with plans for Muslim autonomy without the MNLF’s cooperation. Article 10 of the 1987 constitution mandated that the new Congress establish an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). In the November 1989 elections, only two Mindanao provinces (Maguinadanao and Lanao del

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22 Ibid., 292.
Sur) and two in the Sulu Archipelago (Sulu and Tawitawi) opted to accept the government’s autonomy measure. In November 1990, these four provinces of the ARMM were inaugurated with their own governor and unicameral legislature. Muslims in the ARMM have control over some aspects of government, but not in national security and foreign affairs.

In 1991, after breaking with the larger MILF, the Abu Sayyaf Group was formed. The Abu Sayyaf, which means “father of the sword” in Arabic, seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in Mindanao and in neighboring areas, including parts of southern Thailand, the island of Borneo, and the Sulu Archipelago. Basilan, roughly a twenty-by-thirty mile island in the Mindanao region, is the stronghold of the ASG. Historically, Basilan is not far from the sites of ancient battles between the Moros and Christian invaders. The ASG has been blamed for high-profile bombings, armed attacks, assassinations, kidnappings, and beheadings of sectarian targets, such as Filipino and Western Christians. They also seized and raided Christian plantations by abducting wealthy landowners and Catholic priests.

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25 “Abu Sayyaf Group Profile,” MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database.

The founder of the ASG was Abdurajak Janjalani, a veteran of the Afghan Mujahidin training camps and a colleague of Osama bin Laden. He was not from the traditional elite, like the leaders of the MILF, nor a university student like the founders of the MNLF. Janjalani was a follower of “Wahhabism,” an extremely conservative form of Islam that is commonly practiced in Saudi Arabia and dates back to the eighteenth century. Unlike the other Moro groups, the ASG recruited young, unemployed, and disaffected Muslims who were torn from their ethnic roots in the preceding decades.

At the beginning, the ASG’s links to the al-Qaeda terrorist organization were strong, but there are varying accounts of how strong the current ties are today. The ASG grew quickly with initial funds from Saudi charities administered by bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khalifa. Khalifa operated a number of Islamic charities, such as the Saudi-based International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) in the southern Philippines until 2001. The IIRO has built schools, mosques, and hospitals in the Philippines and was suspected of sending young Muslim Filipino rebels to join bin Laden’s terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, under the guise of scholarship programs in the late 1980s. According to Zachary Abuza of the Strategic Studies Institute:


Institute in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the ASG was “a ‘magnet for dissatisfaction,’ attracting hundreds of young Muslims,” who studied in the Middle East.”

The ASG remains a credible threat because its members are capable of creating a breeding ground for terrorist recruitment, training, and operations in the southern Philippines. After 1992, the ASG was able to grow in strength and numbers with the absence of the U.S. presence in the Philippines. Under the 1947 Military Bases Agreement, twenty-three military bases were established in the Philippines. But, when the Philippine-American Bases Agreement expired in 1992, the Philippine Senate under Aquino rejected the renewal of the agreement. The closure of Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base in the Philippines proved to be detrimental to national security. Without U.S. military aid and resources, the AFP was unable to effectively address the Moro and communist insurgency movements that grew in the 1990s. At its height in the early-to-mid 1990s, the ASG had over 1,000 active members and 2,000 supporters.

Although the Military Bases Agreement was not renewed, the next president, Fidel Ramos considered renewing the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) as the Philippines sought U.S. support in addressing the Mischief Reef incident with China. In early 1995, the Philippines discovered a primitive Chinese military structure in the supposedly oil rich Spratly Island chain on Mischief Reef, one hundred and thirty-five

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nautical miles off the coast of Palawan. The Philippine government issued a formal protest over the Chinese occupation of the reef and President Ramos strengthened the military forces in that region. These small incidents could have caused conflicts or even war in the South China Sea.

President Ramos also sought U.S. support and aid in combating the armed struggles by the ASG. Ramzi Yousef, the 1993 World Trade Center mastermind and al-Qaeda operative, arrived in the Philippines in 1994 and established a cell in Manila. He and other al-Qaeda members reportedly trained Abu Sayyaf fighters in activities like bomb-making. Khalifa’s and the ASG’s roles were uncovered in 1995, following the unsuccessful “Bojingka” plots led by Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to simultaneously destroy twelve U.S. jetliners in trans-Pacific flights and the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II on a visit to the Philippines. Filipino police uncovered the cell in 1995, and provided information on a plot to crash a plane into the Central Intelligence Agency’s headquarters in Langley, Virginia. These plots were the prototypes to the deadly September 11 attacks.

As a wanted criminal, Khalifa was unable to return to the Philippines. While his charities remained open, they were unable to support the ASG and the larger MILF organization, as they had in the past. The ASG was further weakened by a number of arrests and by the death of Janjalani, their founder, who was killed by Philippine


33 “Abu Sayyaf Group Profile,” MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database.

security forces in December 1998. After the founder’s death, the group degenerated into
violent kidnappers. But the group reverted back to its ideological roots of jihad under
Khadafi Janjalani, the founder’s younger brother and the Abu Sayyaf’s spiritual leader.

Ramos’ successor, Joseph Estrada completed what the Ramos Administration
began—the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). In May 1999, Estrada signed the VFA
with the U.S. that arranged for the U.S. military to pay calls to the Philippines.\(^{35}\) The
basis of the VFA was the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty. Both countries
had agreed that they would defend each other if one was faced with imminent danger.
China’s construction of a fort on a reef near the oil-rich Spratly Islands was one of the
main reasons Estrada sought U.S. military support. In the face of Chinese aggression,
the Philippines was powerless in defending itself. But with a Visiting Forces
Agreement in place, the Philippines could seek U.S. support as a buffer in case of a
Chinese attack on the islands.

Additionally, Estrada sought U.S. support as the ASG gained international
notoriety in 2000, with high-profile raids on resorts in Sipidan, Malaysia, and in
Palawan, Philippines, that led to the deaths of several tourists, including Americans.\(^{36}\)
The kidnapped tourists in Malaysia were eventually released after mediation by a
Libyan envoy and the reported payment of $20 million in ransom.\(^{37}\) According to the

\(^{35}\) Damon L. Woods, *The Philippines: A Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO,
Inc., 2006), 83.

\(^{36}\) Zachary Abuza, *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies
Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2005), vii.
AFP, the ASG utilized the large funds to purchase weaponry to embolden their terrorist capabilities. By summer 2000, the ASG was undoing the peace efforts of the Philippine government in Manila with the larger Muslim separatist groups by burning and pillaging the southern islands.\(^\text{38}\) The ASG had made a significant contribution in driving the southern Philippines into virtual civil war and causing unrest in neighboring regions of Southeast Asia.

By January 2001, Estrada also experienced turmoil within his own administration. Amid numerous corruption charges, Estrada was ousted and Vice President Gloria M. Arroyo took over as president.\(^\text{39}\) The ASG problem would be left to President Arroyo to address in the coming decade. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the ASG kidnappings of the Burnhams, an American missionary couple from Kansas, and the ASG’s ties with al-Qaeda led to the renewal of the U.S.-R.P. military relationship in addressing the Moro problem in the Philippines.

SECTION 4: Repercussions of Philippine Self-Rule as Root Causes of the Moro Problem

From 1946 to the present, the economic, political, and social conditions of the Moros have deteriorated, with their land, labor-power, and natural resources lost to self-


\(^{38}\) Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, 181.

interested settlers, bureaucrats, military occupiers, and foreign corporations.40 The government-sponsored migration was accelerated by President Magsaysay’s resettlement of former HUK rebels in the 1950s. Violent land disputes between the Moros, Christian settlers, and the government became commonplace. Currently, only fifteen percent of the traditional lands in Mindanao and Sulu belong to the Moros.41 Since the 1970s, over half-a-million refugees, mostly Moro women, children, and elderly have been displaced during the continuous fighting between Moro guerillas and government forces and approximately 120,000 have died in these clashes.42

Due to the influx of Christian settlers, the Moro provinces have remained deeply impoverished. According to the 2002 Human Development Index of the seventy-seven Philippine provinces, the last five lagging provinces are all in Mindanao.43 Basilan is the province with the lowest per capita income while the average income of about ten million Moros in Mindanao is only a fifth of the national average.44 Moreover, the southern provinces have the highest unemployment figures, the highest incidence of poverty, the lowest literacy rate, and the highest mortality rate.45


41 Ibid., 97.


44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.
These “longstanding economic grievances stemming from years of governmental neglect and from resentment of prejudice” have contributed to the Muslim insurgency.\textsuperscript{46} Young Moro men are enticed to join the ASG and other Moro insurgent movements through attractive inducements like monetary rewards and armaments. Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim, the MILF Chairman, has explained that if young Moros can see some hope of a better future, then “they will think twice before joining groups that advocate suicide bombings and so on. But when they believe there is no future, then they will go with these groups.”\textsuperscript{47}

The Moro insurgencies in the Philippines gained more national and international attention when the U.S. was attacked by Muslim terrorists on September 11, 2001. These attacks showed strong links between terrorists and Moro groups. As links between the ASG and al-Qaeda were uncovered, the George W. Bush Administration became more concerned over the war on terror in the Philippines as the next chapter will show.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Elegant, “The Return of Abu Sayyaf,” \textit{Time Asia}. 
CHAPTER III


The decline of the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ (AFP) counterinsurgency capabilities began with the withdrawal of U.S. bases in 1992. The AFP’s decline was seen in its mobility, firepower, and communications. For example, the AFP possessed ninety helicopters in 1992, but only seventeen on September 11, 2001.¹ The 2007 inventory of AFP military equipment showed decades of decay. After September 11, 2001, the global war on terror became a blessing for the AFP as the U.S. provided it with millions of dollars worth of equipment to fight the ASG.

The U.S. military used the ASG as the impetus to restore ties damaged by the Philippine government’s closure of the U.S. military bases.² Currently, there is active collaboration between the AFP and the U.S. military, even more so than during the pre-1992 days. Efforts against the ASG would further revive the U.S.-R.P. security alliance, a U.S. policy goal since the signing of a Philippine-U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999.³ Under this agreement, transnational relationships are vital and there is a significant improvement in military-to-military relations as the U.S. provides

¹ Renato Cruz De Castro, “The Philippine Experience in Counterinsurgency” (lecture, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, February 24, 2009).

² Zachary Abuza, Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2005), 9.

helicopters, training, intelligence, and economic resources to the AFP. Greater U.S.-
Philippine military cooperation can be expected if there are attempts by al-Qaeda to
implement terrorist cells in other Philippine metropolitan areas.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the growing ASG problem in the
Philippines after September 11. The scope is the first and second terms of the George
W. Bush Administration from 2001-2008. The organization is in five parts: U.S.-
Philippine relations and security concerns; ASG policy in Bush’s first term from 2001-
2004; strains in bilateral relations; new developments in ASG policy in Bush’s second
term from 2005-2008; and an evaluation of ASG policy under the Bush Administration.

SECTION 1: U.S.-Philippine Relations and Security Concerns

The 2000 kidnapping of the Burnhams and the ASG’s connections with al-Qaeda
were justifications for the U.S. military to reengage in the Philippines following the
attacks on September 11, 2001.4 On September 24, 2001, the U.S. government placed
the ASG on the first list of twenty-seven individuals and organizations whose assets
were frozen by the United States because of links to the al-Qaeda network.5 Philippine
President Gloria Arroyo was the first global leader to voice strong support for
“Operation Enduring Freedom.” She said that the Philippines was prepared to “go every
step of the way” with the United States. President Arroyo granted over-flight rights for American military aircraft and offered Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base for the use of the International Coalition against terrorism as transit points or staging areas for troops fighting in Afghanistan. President Arroyo cited moral repugnance of terrorism, shared values, and Philippine national interests as reasons for her pro-U.S. stance.

With Philippine support for the U.S. global war on terror, came U.S. support to combat terrorism in the island nation. The U.S. military began working with the AFP in its struggle against the ASG in late 2001. But as a former U.S. colony, this arrangement was complicated for the Philippines. Even after Philippine independence in 1946, the U.S. leased massive military bases in the island nation, a presence that made the Philippine government highly protective of its sovereignty and, which imposed constraints on the level of American assistance. The 1986 Freedom Constitution of the Philippines prohibits combat operations by foreign forces on homeland soil. As a result, the U.S. has only been able to combat the Abu Sayyaf indirectly by supporting and training Philippine forces.

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SECTION 2: ASG Policy in Bush’s First Term, 2001-2004

Originally labeled a training exercise, the joint mission with 3,800 Filipino troops was a five-year plan that included the training of the elite Light Reaction units and the provision of hundreds of millions of dollars in equipment and sales. The sixteen Light Reaction units were drawn from the ranks of the Philippine Army’s Special Forces and scout ranger organizations. Beginning in October 2001, the United States sent groups of military observers to Mindanao to provide advice, evaluate AFP operations against the ASG, and determine AFP equipment needs. President George W. Bush extended $93 million in military aid to the Philippines when President Arroyo visited Washington, D.C., in November 2001. He also offered a direct U.S. military role in combating the ASG. But, President Arroyo insisted that the U.S. military role should be advisory and that AFP must maintain full operational and combat responsibilities.

By December 2001, the AFP began receiving U.S. military equipment in Mindanao. In February 2002, the U.S. deployed 650 troops to Mindanao and Basilan. In addition, 500 support and maintenance personnel and 160 U.S. Special Forces personnel were sent to train and advise the AFP. Some of the Special Forces also accompanied AFP units on Basilan. Although U.S. military personnel were barred from


11 Ibid.
direct combat operations, they would be armed and authorized to defend themselves in conflict areas, such as Basilan. Other key tasks of the U.S. Special Forces included denying the ASG sanctuary; surveying, controlling, and denying ASG routes; surveying supporting villages and key personnel; and conducting local training to overcome AFP weaknesses and sustain AFP strengths.

This cooperation, entitled “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines” (OEF-P) consists of annual U.S. operational cross training for the AFP, such as conducting amphibious landings, airborne and jungle warfare, and search and rescue operations. The U.S. military has provided the AFP necessary support materials such as fuel, ammunition, and civic action equipment. In addition, U.S. naval engineers engage in popular civic action campaigns to improve the infrastructure of Basilan.

From January to July 2002, 1,300 U.S. troops were in the Philippines to engage in the annual Balikatan or “shoulder-to-shoulder” Exercises. From 1981 Balikatan was held almost annually until it was suspended in 1996 when legality issues regarding

\[12\] Ibid.
\[16\] Ibid., 9.
U.S. forces visiting in the country were questioned. However, the exercises resumed with the signing of the VFA in 1999. Former Philippine Ambassador to the United States, Albert Del Rosario, has described the four specific objectives of the Balikatan Exercises as follows:

1) To improve the interoperability of Philippine and U.S. forces against terrorism
2) To enhance the combat capabilities of the Southern Command battalions based in Mindanao
3) To ensure quality in intelligence processing
4) And to upgrade Philippine-U.S. capability to wage effective civil, military, and psychological operations.

Upon their arrival on Basilan in 2002, the U.S. forces found the Philippine units in disarray and unwilling to pursue the ASG aggressively. The first U.S. measure was to deploy its Special Forces to gather intelligence on ASG assets and personnel and extensive demographic and economic information on Basilan’s numerous villages. The second measure was to aid Philippine soldiers and marines in making their bases more defensive and to train them in advanced combat lifesaving skills when operating aircraft. The training boosted Philippine morale and helped pave the way in securing local support by separating the civilians from the insurgents.

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Additionally, the U.S. established an intelligence fusion center on Basilan and installed satellite equipment to track down the terrorists. By April 2002, the U.S. effort became focused on providing intelligence acquired by U.S. surveillance aircraft to Philippine authorities on Abu Sayyaf movements in Basilan. This led to the fleeing of the terrorists to Mindanao. Supported by U.S. intelligence and planning, Philippine military forces then launched an attack on an Abu Sayyaf patrol that was guarding the hostages from a Palawan resort in the dense jungles of the Zamboanga peninsula on Mindanao. As noted in Chapter II, the hostages included two Americans, Martin and Gracia Burnham. The other American, Guillermo Sobero of California, had been beheaded by the bandits in late 2001. In the gunfight that ensued between the AFP and the ASG, Martin Burnham was killed while his wife, Gracia Burnham, escaped with a leg wound. Deborah Yap, a Filipina nurse, was another hostage killed.

In July 2002, U.S. Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson announced that the U.S. had filed federal charges against five ASG leaders for the murders of Martin Burnham and Guillermo Sobero: Khadafi Abubakar Janjalani, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon, Aldam Tilao, Jainal Antel Sali Jr., and Hamsiraji Marusi Sali. The indictments came a month after Abu Sabaya, the mastermind of the kidnappings, was killed during a gun battle at sea by U.S. trained AFP forces. To Thompson, the United States sent a signal

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20 Palmer, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia,” 136.


22 Ibid.
that “we will work to track down and prosecute all those who commit barbaric acts of terrorism here at home and abroad.” He noted that the United States, along with the Philippines, possesses an extremely low tolerance level for terror on the island nation. President Arroyo also declared:

Terrorists will be hunted down relentlessly wherever they are, in the vastness of the jungle or in the high seas. They will be given no room to maneuver, to hide, or to rest. We will not stop until they are all accounted for.

With U.S. help, the Philippines was able to capture and kill four ASG leaders. U.S.-backed Philippine troops killed Aldam Tilao in 2002, Hamsiraji Marusi Sali in 2004, Abubakar Janjalani in 2006, and Jainal Antel Sali Jr, in 2007. Of the five ASG leaders charged with Martin Burnham’s murder, only Isnilon Totoni Hapilon remains at large. The capture and death of key ASG leaders shows some effective cooperation between U.S. and Philippine forces.

Since 2002, the U.S. forces were successfully integrated with the Philippine task force groups and battalions. Philippine forces began to patrol more aggressively, to provide better security in the villages, and to clear ASG safe havens. This clear-and-hold phase was followed by reconstruction efforts. Using the previously gathered village demographic and economic intelligence, U.S. Special Forces and civil affairs

23 Ibid.


soldiers from both countries conducted small-scale humanitarian and civic action programs that yielded immediate improvements in the quality of life in targeted villages.

As the security situation improved, U.S. commanders deployed a U.S. Naval Construction Task Force to execute larger-scale projects, such as the construction of roads, wells, and bridges. Similarly, these larger projects bridged cooperation between the national government and the local populace. The U.S. forces made great efforts to help establish legitimacy and to increase confidence in the Philippine forces and government in order to drive a wedge between the Abu Sayyaf and the general population. The ASG’s strength dwindled from approximately 1,200 members at the beginning of 2002 to only 200-400 by the end of the year. The terrorist organization was forced to abandon Basilan, formerly its major stronghold, and to relocate to Mindanao. Thus, the success of U.S.-Philippine operations on Basilan in 2002 inadvertently forced the ASG to relocate to the territory controlled by the MILF on Mindanao. Since then, Philippine forces continue to attack ASG members on the run. However, these forces lack the capacity to launch a comprehensive clearing campaign against the ASG’s sanctuary on Mindanao or have yet to replicate the successful Basilan campaign.

Meanwhile, in early 2003, there were some tensions in U.S.-Philippine military relations as Pentagon officials described a new plan with U.S. troops in a combat role that targeted the Abu Sayyaf strongholds on Jolo Island and the Sulu chain. Under this plan, the U.S. would commit 350 Special Operations Forces to Jolo to operate with

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Filipino Army and Marine Units down to the platoon level of twenty-to-thirty troops.27 About 1,000 U.S. Marines and 1,300 Navy personnel, equipped with Cobra attack helicopters and Harrier jets, would be positioned off the shore of Jolo. Moreover, the Special Operation forces would not be limited to using their weapons for self-defense. The Cobra helicopters and Harrier jets would give the AFP commanders the option of requesting U.S. air strikes in supporting or transporting of Filipino troops.

President Arroyo and AFP commanders allegedly agreed to the combat plan in a meeting on February 4, 2003. The announcement of the plan caused immediate controversy, with Philippine politicians and media outlets pointing out the constitutional prohibition against foreign combat troops on Philippine soil. Additionally, Moro leaders warned of a Muslim backlash in Mindanao. Therefore, by the end of February 2003, U.S. military officials cancelled the counterterrorism combat operation in Jolo.28

Yet, Exercise Balikatan or military training exercises went on as scheduled in May 2003. This exercise marked the nineteenth training series and took place in Luzon at Clark Air Base, Fort Magsaysay, and in the Ternate vicinity.29 In contrast to combat operations, these exercises were designed to better train Philippine and U.S. air, ground, and naval forces to handle any contingencies, emergencies, or disasters in the region.


28 Ibid.

Despite tensions, President Bush elevated the Philippines to the status of a “major non-NATO ally” when President Arroyo visited the White House in May 2003. With this designation, Bush promised an unprecedented increase in military aid to fund anti-terrorism programs and to modernize the Philippine armed forces. In fiscal years 2002-2004, the U.S. government provided the Philippine military with $284.86 million in aid. In return, President Arroyo announced Manila’s support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Additionally, Arroyo allowed longer-term visits by American troops on Philippine soil. Despite previous fears, the measure was well received by most Filipinos, including those in Mindanao as long as U.S. soldiers only maintained an advisory role. In general, both Christian and Muslim residents, local government officials, and traders in Mindanao, are supportive of the Balikatan exercises. Evidently, they are tired of the violence perpetuated by Islamic terrorist groups and the inefficiency of the Philippine military in pursuing the relatively small ASG.


31 Abuza, Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf, 9.


SECTION 3: Strains in Bilateral Relations

After the 2004 debacle when President Arroyo pulled out fifty-one AFP troops from Iraq, a few weeks ahead of schedule, the Philippines and the U.S. had to work together to improve their relations. She withdrew Filipino troops because a Filipino truck driver was kidnapped by Iraqi militants. The militants vowed to behead the hostage if the Philippines failed to withdraw its troops from Iraq. After a few days of unsuccessful negotiations, the Philippine government gave in to the demands. However, Arroyo’s decision to give in was not based on saving the life of a single Filipino worker. Instead, she did not want to endanger the safety of two million Filipino workers in the Middle East. The Philippines’ economy also relies heavily on the remittances sent home by these overseas workers.

Although the number of AFP troops was small, the Philippines’ efforts in Iraq were a symbolic token of great support for America’s war on terror. Moreover, among the nations surveyed in 2004, the Philippines was the least opposed to U.S. foreign policy. However, the Philippine withdrawal of troops from Iraq was seen as a concession to terror tactics and was severely criticized by the U.S. and its allies. Great Britain and Australia claimed that Manila had emboldened the terrorists. The U.S. showed its “quieter disapproval” by a symbolic reduction of monetary aid to the AFP.

34 Abinales and Amoroso, State and Society in the Philippines, 299.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
President Arroyo’s state visit to Beijing in September 2003 added to the apparent chill in R.P.-U.S. relations.37

The immoral behavior of a few U.S. servicemen has also strained bilateral relations. In November 2005, U.S. Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, a participant in the Balikatan exercises, was accused of raping a Filipina, Suzette Nicola on the Subic Naval Base in Olongapo.38 In December 2006, he was tried under the Regional Trial Court in Makati City, convicted of rape, and sentenced up to forty years in jail. When Smith was incarcerated at the Makati City Jail under Philippine custody, the U.S. announced the cancellation of Balikatan in 2007. After the Philippine government surrendered Smith to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the U.S. announced the resumption of the yearly training exercise. The question of who should have custody over Smith triggered public outcry in the Philippines for the cancellation of the VFA, which governs the conduct of U.S. soldiers in the Philippines. Bilateral tensions subsided in March 2009 when Suzette Nicola recanted her accusation against Smith. She cleared Smith and accepted money and residency in the United States.39


39 Ibid.
Since 2005, the primary focus of the annual Balikatan Exercises has moved from military training to nation-building. With the ASG’s stronghold on Basilan Island cleared, U.S.-R.P. efforts were able to concentrate on post-conflict stabilization. Hence, a top priority for Balikatan 2005 was joint cooperation in training to conduct humanitarian and civic service projects. U.S. military personnel from the Army, Navy, and Air Force worked side-by-side with their AFP counterparts. Approximately 300 U.S. service members and 550 AFP personnel participated. Besides training in Mindanao and dealing with the ASG, medical civic action projects included distributing medical supplies, attending to patients, and checking on animal health in the typhoon damaged areas in the Quezon and Laguna provinces. Engineering civic action projects included the construction of an economically important 1.2-kilometer farm-to-market road connecting the towns of Alima and San Buenaventura. Five classrooms were also constructed for the San Buenaventura High School.

In 2006, the Balikatan Exercise was conducted in three phases: humanitarian and civic assistance on the island of Jolo; a combined task force staff exercise in Cebu; and cross training and field training exercises in Luzon. About 5,500 U.S. personnel and 2,800 AFP servicemen participated throughout the islands. In the first phase, around

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42 Ibid.
400 joint-task force participants were in Jolo for eleven engineering and medical civic action projects. They worked with local volunteers to construct new school buildings in Sulu and to provide medical, dental, and veterinarian services to the local residents. Furthermore, “Operation Ultimatum” began in 2006, with 250 U.S. troops stationed on the island of Jolo where they were involved in annual counter-terrorism training for Philippine forces. The AFP has maintained an offensive on Jolo with eight battalions and Marine units. A small number of U.S. advisors continue to train and provide field intelligence to their Philippine counterparts.

In 2007, Exercise Balikatan commenced with a ceremony commemorating fifty years of U.S.-Philippines military cooperation. Approximately 390 U.S. service members and 1,200 Philippine service men participated in this exercise that included medical, engineering, and staff exercises. The two militaries worked with local governments and partners to hold twelve free medical clinics in Mindanao that treated 6,000 residents. Both sides provided free dental and veterinary care. Engineering projects included the paving of a four-kilometer road on Jolo that allowed local residents to travel from their village to the island’s largest municipality. Schools, a day care center, a health clinic, and a boat pier were also renovated. In the staff exercise, the U.S. and R.P. forces created a scenario for crisis action planning in maritime operations against the ASG. In the past, ASG speed boats outran outdated Philippine vessels and

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43 Ibid.


senior ASG members were able to escape to neighboring countries, like Malaysia. The goal of the training exercise was to combine knowledge and create regulations for maritime protection that will help the U.S. and the R.P. in working together in addressing terrorist transit routes, piracy, drug trafficking, and critical infrastructure protection.\textsuperscript{46}

In the following year, the Balikatan Exercises took place from February 18 to March 3, 2008. The goal of the exercise was to develop the AFP’s crisis action planning, enhance its ability to effectively conduct counterterrorism operations, and promote interoperability between the U.S and Philippines. Combined U.S. and Philippine medical, dental, and veterinary teams provided care in Central and Western Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago, and Palawan.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, four schools were renovated. Balikatan 2008 focused on training both armed forces in working together to provide assistance in natural disasters and in other crises that endanger public health and safety. Military service members of both countries conducted combined staff exercises and field training in Luzon and Palawan to improve contingency planning and strengthen maritime security to prevent the ASG from escaping and seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

SECTION 5: An Evaluation of ASG Policy under the Bush Administration

From 2000 to 2008, Balikatan exercises were successful and led to the degrading of the ASG. By September 2002, the ASG was estimated to have only 200-400 fighters. The exercise boosted Philippine national security, resulting in some internal and external confidence with regards to economic investments and business ventures.48 However, the 2002 Balikatan Exercise only cleared Basilan of ASG activity until 2007 when in July, that year, ten Philippine marines were beheaded and another fourteen were killed. Thirty insurgents were killed in the clash.49 This skirmish showed a resurgence of ASG power on Basilan.

Some clashes with the ASG resulted in Philippine and American casualties. For example, in October 2002, the ASG had a role in the bombing near a Philippine military base in Zamboanga that killed three Filipinos and one U.S. serviceman while twenty others were wounded.50 So far, this soldier has been the only American military casualty. In February 2006, a blast occurred at a temporary karaoke bar near the vicinity of the Philippine army base on Jolo where U.S. soldiers were stationed.51 U.S. military officials announced that no American servicemen were among those injured. In recent years, with the U.S. presence in Jolo, the island has been attacked regularly by the ASG.

After several years of U.S. training and assistance, real gains were visible against the ASG. For example, the ASG has suffered casualties in their senior leadership, leaving them without strong central leadership. AFP forces successfully killed Khadafi Abubakar Janjalani in 2006 and Jainal Antel Sali Jr. in 2007. Thus, the U.S. military assistance to the AFP has shown effective results and the ASG has continued to decline. Additional clashes between the ASG and AFP/U.S. have also been reported, due to the greater number of sightings with sophisticated U.S. equipment and improved AFP intelligence operations.52

Although the ASG’s armed strength has weakened, the group has increased its campaign of terror bombing on sectarian and civilian targets.53 The U.S. military support for the AFP has strengthened the ASG’s resolve to revert to their ideological roots in waging a jihad war on sectarian targets. Catholic priests, Bible translators, and American missionaries are among those targeted in ASG kidnappings, especially after the September 11 attacks. The ASG is also responsible for the worst terrorist attack in the Philippines with its 2004 Superferry 14 bombing that killed 116 people.54

The ASG is successful in its attacks on civilians because its bomb making and operational techniques have improved with training from the Indonesia based Jemaah Islamiya (JI) terrorist organization. Furthermore, the ASG has been resilient in quickly

52 Del Rosario, “A Progress Report on the Philippines: The Balikatan Exercises, the Abu Sayyaf, and al-Qaeda.”


replacing its poorly trained and low-level operatives. Since the Philippine government has failed to provide for basic economic needs, young recruits are enticed to join the ASG terrorist organization to meet these needs, by illegal means if necessary.

Despite the success of Exercise Balikatan in downgrading the ASG’s leadership, external and internal criticisms have risen throughout the past decade. China is critical of the U.S. military presence in the region because it suspects that this presence is aimed at restricting Chinese activities in the region, especially in the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. 55 But General Richard Meyers, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, contends that the target of America’s increased military presence in Southeast Asia is terrorism and not China. China also suspects that the U.S. is positioning itself in the Philippine region to defend Taiwan. For example, China claims that the U.S. has built a small base on Zamboanga to defend Taiwan. China is the aggressor in the region and feels threatened by the U.S. military presence in the Philippines. 56

In summary, U.S. policy in President Bush’s first term focused on joint military training exercises to train and advise the AFP in its efforts to combat the ASG. Accordingly, the Balikatan Exercises from 2002-2004 focused on staff and military training exercises. The U.S. Special Forces advised the AFP in denying the ASG sanctuary; surveying, controlling, and denying ASG routes; surveying supporting


56 Ibid.
villages and key personnel; and conducting local training. These tactics were aimed at overcoming the AFP weaknesses and at sustaining its strengths.

In contrast, once the hold-and-clear phase of ASG strongholds was accomplished in places like Basilan, the joint task force focus shifted from military training to nation-building efforts in President Bush’s second term. Thus, after 2005, medical, engineering, and other civic action projects were implemented in local communities, especially in Mindanao. These humanitarian services have significantly increased trust and cooperation between the U.S., AFP, and the local populace in battling the ASG. The local population is more willing to provide intelligence tips about the ASG and this has led to the capture of senior ASG leaders. But to ultimately defeat the ASG, improvements can be made in the U.S.-R.P. collaboration. Several military, economic, and political recommendations will be explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE U.S.-R.P.
COLLABORATION AGAINST THE ASG

Although the Balikatan Exercises have been successful in training the AFP, eliminating crucial ASG leaders, and forcing the group to retreat to Mindanao, additional measures would enhance the bilateral counterterrorist operations in the Philippines. The aim of this four part chapter is to explore military recommendations to improve tactics against the ASG; economic recommendations to address the roots of the Moro problem; political recommendations for local and international support; and lastly an analysis of the ASG problem and U.S. efforts.

SECTION 1: Military Recommendations to Improve Tactics Against the ASG

Continued U.S. military support is necessary because the Philippine government does not have economic capabilities to fund military efforts against terrorists. The Philippines’ navy vessels reportedly average forty-one years of age while its air force has only two operating twenty-five year old F-5 jet fighters. The AFP does not possess night vision and other surveillance equipment and has had shortages of helicopters, mortars, naval patrol craft, surveillance aircraft, and even basic necessities like military boots.

Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the rebels possessed more superior equipment than the AFP. According to reports, the AFP’s patrol boats could not keep up with the ASG speedboats.2 In November, following the attacks, the Bush administration promised President Arroyo over $90 million for military equipment and aid to enhance the AFP’s ability to fight against terrorism in the Philippines.3 The U.S.-Philippine military relationship serves as a conduit that fills in the technological gap that the AFP is experiencing.4 The AFP lacks modern devices necessary to increase the effectiveness of its operations. Through joint military exercises with the U.S., Filipino soldiers acquire the necessary training, experience, and knowledge in the use of state-of-the-art military equipment. Beyond that, the bilateral AFP-US military training serves as a force multiplier for the Philippines. Through a series of annual training exercises, such as Balikatan, the AFP is provided with a medium to advance their skills and capabilities in the areas that require planning, readiness, and interoperability among the branches of service and with other friendly forces.5

Currently, the AFP has continued operations against the ASG, although not at the feverish pitch as in the first half of 2002. The AFP has taken great pride in their

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5 Ibid.
U.S. training, which has boosted their morale in fighting terrorists. Bilateral confidence building is engendered through these military exercises. Confidence building measures that were established through joint military exercises have become “necessary for the cultivation of cooperative behavior in defense and security between the Philippines and United States.”

Eventually, with their world-class training, the AFP will need to take a more vigorous role in combating the ASG.

However, one weakness in the military alliance is over reliance on technical reconnaissance assets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and the U.S. Navy’s P3 Orion, at the expense of human intelligence. For example, the overconfidence in technology proved to be tragic in the rescue of the Burnhams. The use of surveillance technology reduced patrolling in remote areas, but the unmanned aerial vehicles surveillance was extremely conventional and only surveyed specific areas of interest merely to meet the joint task force’s intelligence requirements. The unmanned reconnaissance assets were used to locate the ASG on Basilan in order to minimize the risks to U.S. personnel. Unfortunately, the constant flying of U.S. spy planes overhead forced the terrorists to flee to the dense jungles of Mindanao. Gracia Burnham’s memoir describes the ineffectiveness of having spy planes incessantly flying overhead. She explained that the

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6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.
captors and hostages ignored the planes, because when they saw planes in the sky, “nothing ever happened.”9 Thus, confusion resulted when Philippine scout rangers engaged the ASG and Martin Burnham was killed in the gunfight. An additional shortcoming was that the Philippine ground forces could not easily exploit the intelligence collected because the U.S. joint task force tightly controlled this information.

Another weakness in the U.S.-R.P. military alliance during the Bush Administration lay in the Pentagon not having clearly defined its military objectives for actively pursuing the ASG in the long-term. If the primary U.S. objective is to rescue hostages, then the U.S. military should limit its role to precise operations targeting the ASG’s kidnappings on Basilan.10 If this is the case, then the restraints on the use of air raids and artillery would continue. But if the focus is on ground rescue operations, then training and advice should focus on prior surveillance and intelligence gathering. However, if the U.S. had a clear objective to destroy the ASG, then U.S. military operations would need to be broader in scope. Military campaigns, including maritime surveillance and patrols, should take place in Jolo and western Mindanao.11

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9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.
SECTION 2: Economic Recommendations to Address the Roots of the Moro Problem

In the local communities, there is century-old resentment of the United States, dating back to the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. From 1899 to 1914, the U.S. military conducted a number of campaigns to suppress Muslim insurgents in the southern islands. The campaigns were controversial because of heavy civilian casualties and the brutal scorched-earth tactics conducted by the U.S. military. A public relations campaign should be implemented so that misconceptions about the U.S. military are cleared up.

In addition, gaining the trust and confidence of the local population is vital for the U.S. in gathering intelligence. Regarding economic rewards, the U.S. had offered $10 million for information and intelligence on the ASG by 2005. Monetary rewards have been effective in engaging the public to participate in counterinsurgency efforts by providing intelligence tips. For example, in September 2006, information provided by several brave Philippine citizens was used by the AFP to locate and kill Khadafi Janjalani, one of the most wanted ASG leaders. For their courage and assistance, the

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12 Ibid., 50.

Filipinos involved were rewarded $5 million by the U.S. government in a public ceremony on Jolo in June 2007.\textsuperscript{14}

The U.S. should reevaluate its aid program in the Philippines because economic depression is at the root of the Moro problem.\textsuperscript{15} If U.S. forces continue to be engaged in Mindanao, then they should increase their civic action programs.\textsuperscript{16} The civic action programs are exceptionally well-received by the local communities, whose information and intelligence are essential to effective counterinsurgency operations. Compared to direct military aid, road construction, well building, rebuilding of mosques and schools, and medical, dental, and veterinary treatments are low-cost and high-yield investments that help neutralize public support for the ASG. Notably, the improved road network on Jolo Island has enhanced communications between villages and has helped farmers transport their products to the local markets.\textsuperscript{17} Far-reaching economic relief undercuts terrorist grievances and boosts security in the region.

The U.S. and the Philippine military were faced with the complex task of improving and enriching the living and social conditions of the people of Mindanao


\textsuperscript{15} Zachary Abuza, \textit{Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf} (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, 2005), 43.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{17} “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: What Would Sun Tzu Say?,” \textit{The U.S. Army Professional Writing Collection}. 

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along with the affirmation of their sovereignty. Economic development was central to President Bush’s *National Security Strategy* because expanding the circle of prosperity throughout the world is critical to U.S. national security. The U.S. military role also has implications for a U.S. political role in Mindanao:

The Bush administration will face sentiment and pressure to influence the political, social, and economic issues underlying Filipino Muslim discontent: the scope and extent of autonomy of the Muslim populated region; the role of Islam in education; and economic development issues. U.S. involvement in these issues was evident in November 2001, when President Bush promised President Arroyo $55 million in development aid for the people of Mindanao.

Beyond that, the Agency for International Development (USAID) has carried out foreign assistance programs that support key U.S. foreign policy interests in Muslim populated countries around the world. USAID’s humanitarian aid programs promote economic growth, agriculture, trade, health, democracy, and conflict prevention in hopes of reducing the risk of developing nations becoming the breeding grounds for terrorism. In 2005, there were six global development alliances in Mindanao to increase the quality of educational opportunities for children. The goals were to

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18 Reyes, “Mindanao as the Next Battlefront,” 48.


improve the capacity of teachers; to raise math, science, and English skills among elementary school students; to increase employment opportunities and train young leaders; and to provide business and skills training to out of school youth. With approximately $12 million in USAID funding, an additional $43 million were raised from private businesses, local NGOs, foundations, and national government agencies.\textsuperscript{22}

For fiscal year 2007, sixty percent of USAID’s $69 million budget for the Philippines was allocated for programs in Mindanao. If the education of young Moros improves, then they are less likely to seek a radical education in the Middle East. Enhanced educational opportunities would also help the employment and economic situation and would prevent young people from becoming dissatisfied and joining the ASG. Moreover, the reeducation of ASG prisoners is recommended to clarify misconceptions about the U.S. involvement in the Philippines.

Notably, the success of Exercise Balikatan has boosted Philippine national security, which should lead to internal and external confidence in local and international economic investments and business ventures.\textsuperscript{23} Peace can be achieved by establishing a stable economy and the “best way to spur economic growth is a free trade deal” between

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

An FTA with the Philippines can help solve some local and economic problems so that peace can be attainable. The Bush Administration asserts that an FTA can help strengthen property rights, competition of goods, the rule of law, the reasonable allocation of resources, and regional integration. This would be especially useful in a developing country like the Philippines.

SECTION 3: Political Recommendations for Local and International Support

The AFP’s operations against the ASG have been hampered by the terrain, dilapidated equipment, and endemic corruption. For example, in June 2001, after the ASG kidnapped sixteen people from a Palawan Philippine resort, senior military officers were accused of aiding the escape of terrorists from a besieged position in Basilan in exchange for a cash payment. The controversy exposes the corruption of the AFP’s procurement system and its inability to counteract the ASG. The AFP has been rife with corruption and may have profited by allowing escapes and narrow misses when

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25 Ibid.

engaging the ASG. The AFP cannot move forward in eradicating the ASG if it continues to engage in fraudulent actions.

Neither military nor development aid will succeed until the problems of collusion and corruption are resolutely addressed. Although the U.S. cannot root out corruption in the ranks of the Philippine military and government, the Philippines’ desperate need for U.S. aid could provide an incentive for government reform. U.S. policymakers can threaten to discontinue aid if Manila does not “take sustained, aggressive action against the abuse of power.” For example, corrupt AFP officials who make deals with the ASG should be disciplined and court martialed. The U.S. should also establish better auditing mechanisms for the equipment provided, to prevent the mishandling of equipment by corrupt AFP personnel.

Furthermore, the inefficiencies of Philippine law enforcement agencies must be addressed. Dana R. Dillon, a Senior Policy Analyst for Southeast Asia in the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation, asserts that the U.S. should focus more on law enforcement development because the “police have arrested more terrorists than

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29 Ibid.

30 Abuza, Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf, 43.
military operations have captured or killed." The Philippine law enforcement has succeeded in capturing some high-profile ASG members, but has encountered problems in keeping the terrorists in prison. This domestic problem can be remedied by imparting more U.S. resources for law enforcement development in training officers and guards to be more vigilant in securing prison facilities. The domestic problems will not be solved if the local law enforcement agencies rely on meager Philippine assets alone.

In 2003, the United States provided $20 million for military assistance to the Philippines and an additional $2 million was allotted for law enforcement development. The disparity in the sums allocated is attributed to Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 that prohibits the use of foreign assistance funds to train police.

To improve the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, Dillon has suggested:

1) Congress should repeal the prohibition on training foreign law enforcement agencies and offer guidelines to address human rights and democracy building concerns.
2) The [United States] President should issue a directive giving one agency the responsibility of coordinating all foreign law enforcement development.
3) Congress should focus aid on law enforcement training and reform.32

Moreover, Dillon has emphasized that effective law enforcement support should focus on training the entire judicial system, including police forces, judges, and prison officers.

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32 Ibid.
personnel. In 2005, the U.S. Congress did grant an exception that allowed funding for the development of law enforcement personnel in the Philippines.

In Philippine prisons, rehabilitation programs of captured Islamic terrorists must also be implemented. Brainwashed terrorists need to be educated with printed pamphlets and media that unravel misconceptions about the United States. Furthermore, detained terrorists must be treated humanely in order to avoid local backlashes from the ASG in the southern Philippines. The U.S. must also overcome global dissatisfaction with its policies through positive public relations campaigns and more carefully thought out policies.

Dillon emphasizes developing local law enforcement facilities to keep terrorists incarcerated so that the strenuous efforts of the AFP and U.S. Special Forces may not be undone. Weak law enforcement in the Philippines has been the source of extremely embarrassing counterterrorism blunders. For example, on July 13, 2003, Farthur Rhaman Ghozi, an Indonesian explosives expert and prominent Jemaah Islamiyah member linked to a series of bombings since December 2000, walked away from his maximum-security prison cell along with two of his inmates. After eluding an intense manhunt for three months, Ghozi was killed by Philippine police on October 12, 2003. 34

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.

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Once terrorists are captured, they must be held at bay and be brought to justice. Their reign of terror needs to end to prevent further plots.

Another political recommendation is that the U.S. should not overstep its presence in the Philippines. When President Arroyo visited Washington, D.C. in 2001, President Bush offered a direct military role in combating the ASG. However, President Arroyo insisted that the U.S. military role should be advisory, with the AFP maintaining full operational responsibility. The U.S. also needs to be more sensitive to the domestic response to its military involvement.35 For instance, in early 2003, there was a debacle when the Pentagon announced plans that U.S. forces would “conduct or support combat patrols” for an open-ended period. There was some public and Congressional concern in the Philippines that the U.S. was simply out to reestablish the permanent bases that closed in 1992.36 Yet, the current training of the AFP by the U.S. military has forged closer relationships between their military personnel than when permanent bases existed.

In addition, the U.S. needs to assist the Philippine government in its ability to monitor and disrupt terrorist financing.37 Much of the ASG’s funding and support comes through the charities established by Mohammad Jamal Khalifa in the early 1990s. Perhaps the most important charity established by Khalifa was the obscure International


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 44.
Relations and Information Center (IRIC).\textsuperscript{38} The IRIC was the main funding mechanism for the 1995 “Bojingka Plan,” a prototype plan for the September 11 attacks. Through his other charities, Khalifa built up goodwill in the community and turned segments of the local population into agents. The Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO) constructed schools, mosques, and other building projects in areas controlled by the ASG. However, only ten-to-thirty percent of the foreign funding goes to legitimate relief projects while the rest goes to terrorist activities.\textsuperscript{39}

It took the Philippine government almost six years to close the IIRO office in September 2001. The IIRO was allowed to stay open for so long because it was a well-connected charity and there was intense diplomatic pressure from Saudi Arabia on the Philippine government to keep the charity running. The most important source of leverage was the visas and jobs for several hundred thousand Filipino guest workers in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{40} The U.S. government must pressure the Saudi Arabian government to fulfill its pledge to monitor the activities of their supposed “charities” to prevent the funneling of money to the ASG.

Moreover, Southeast Asia has a weak banking sector where there is little oversight and rampant money laundering. The primary conduit for terrorist financial

\textsuperscript{38} Zachary Abuza, “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya,” \textit{Contemporary Southeast Asia} 25, no. 2 (August 2003): 175.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 176.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
transfers is through the unregulated remittance system known as “hawala.” Hawala is the transfer system of choice because the commission is only one-to-two percent compared to the average bank transfer fees of up to fifteen percent.\textsuperscript{41} The hawala system is used extensively in Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, which has significant financial exchanges due to the 1.4 million Filipino guest workers in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{42} The lack of banking oversight can be combated by passing stronger anti-money laundering laws in the Philippines. Businesses engaged in hawala remittances must be licensed and registered to track the flow of monies to suspected terrorist groups.

Another measure is that the U.S. government should continue to discuss religious freedom with the Philippine government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government should actively support the Philippine government’s peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation and tolerance.\textsuperscript{43} Beyond that, interfaith dialogue can be fostered through cooperation vis-à-vis the Bishops-Ulama Forum.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.


The relationship between the Philippine government and Moro community leaders can also be improved through several public relations measures. Philippine civil society leaders can be trained in conflict management.\textsuperscript{45} In addition, history teachers in Mindanao can be trained to teach a historical narrative that is more inclusive of the Moro experience. Thus, the younger generations would learn to be more tolerant of both sides and the young Moros would not feel as marginalized. More dialogue would result between young Moro leaders and the Christian majority in Mindanao. Media coverage of the Moro conflict can also be enhanced if media representatives attend training workshops to learn how to report more objectively.\textsuperscript{46}

Additionally, the Philippine government’s example could influence other governments to cooperate with the U.S. in the global war on terrorism. The U.S. must work closely with other member countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) because they can provide support in combating terrorism in the region. Malaysia has promised to place more patrol boats near Mindanao that would prevent the escape of ASG terrorists. This promise was made after Nur Misuari, the mastermind behind the kidnappings on Jolo Island and the city of Zamboanga, fled to Malaysia where he was arrested by local authorities in November 2001.\textsuperscript{47} Thorough

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Niksch, “Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,” 51.
cooperation with other ASEAN countries would abate the terrorist insurgency from spreading in the region. Another potential U.S. policy decision could come out of the December 2005 agreement among the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei for joint maritime patrols in the waters separating them. The agreement specifically covers the Mindanao-Sulawesi corridor. Any future programs to establish maritime cooperation between the Philippines and its neighbors would likely produce proposals for expanded U.S. military aid and training for the Philippine navy.

SECTION 4: An Analysis of the ASG Problem and U.S. Efforts

According to Renato Cruz De Castro, a U.S. State Department ASEAN research fellow and an adjunct faculty member at Arizona State University, the low intensity conflicts that have plagued the Philippines from the late 1960s with the communist New People’s Army (NPA) to the ASG in the early 1990s, represent a “war of the third kind.” This type of fighting is asymmetric, unlike conventional and guerilla warfare. Low intensity conflict is measured in decades and has lasted in the Philippines for four decades. In this long game of attrition, it is important for the AFP to possess the will to

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49 Ibid.

win. Since 2001, the Philippine government’s policy is a comprehensive approach that consists of clearing, holding, consolidating, and developing an area against the insurgencies.

The AFP was established in 1935 as a conventional military force designed to fight conventional conflicts. During World War II, it fought against the Japanese occupation forces. The long wars in the Philippines consist of full-scale insurgencies by the NPA, MNLF, MILF, and the ASG. The ASG differs from its predecessors with its extreme ideology and has resorted to banditry terrorism.\textsuperscript{51} The Philippine government does not negotiate with the ASG and has placed fiscal restrictions on the organization. The non-negotiation policy may stall efforts in addressing the Moro problem.

The main reason for the Abu Sayyaf’s survival is attributed to its intertwined relationship with the larger MILF and NPA organizations.\textsuperscript{52} The MILF desires to carve out an independent state ruled by Islamic law in the southern Philippines. While the ASG and MILF share the same goal, they differ significantly in their methods. The MILF is a classic rural insurgency that employs guerilla warfare to deny or reduce the government’s influence in areas populated by Muslims while simultaneously bolstering its own legitimacy by operating a shadow government and providing services in those areas. In addition, the MILF’s desire to win the hearts and minds of the local population

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

has led it to disavow terrorism and sectarian violence and profess to fight a “clean” guerilla war against the government. Its local military power is formidable with a force of approximately 12,000 fighters.\textsuperscript{53}

Despite these operational differences, the MILF has provided refuge to Abu Sayyaf’s leaders on Mindanao since 2002, and has allowed the terrorist group to recruit new jihadis on its territory.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, this patronage makes it difficult to eradicate the ASG. Beyond that, the Philippine government is reluctant to strike at the ASG members hiding in remote bases in MILF-controlled territory. Notably, the Philippine government prefers to secure political accommodation with the MILF rather than to pursue a more vigorous anti-ASG campaign.

After decades of conflict that killed tens of thousands, the Philippine government and the MILF entered peace talks in 2001. Neither side wholly abided by the cease-fire, but the level of violence has decreased significantly. President Arroyo is reluctant to undermine those talks by attacking the MILF’s territory. According to her, dealing with the ASG’s few hundred terrorists is not worth a provocation that would hinder the government’s chances of reaching a permanent settlement with the MILF, a much more formidable opponent.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 84.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
After the initial victories against the ASG in Basilan, the challenges have become harder from the Philippine government’s perspective. Like the U.S., the government desires to address the ASG problem, but not when the ASG is in MILF territory in Mindanao. The government does not want to disrupt the MILF peace process, especially while it remains embattled in a struggle against the NPA. Filipinos regard the NPA as more threatening than the Abu Sayyaf. Therefore, to achieve further success against the ASG and to prevent the collaboration of the ASG and the NPA, the U.S. must assist the Philippine government in solving the NPA problem. To be effective, American forces must undertake longer-term efforts not simply to pursue terrorist groups that immediately threaten U.S. interests, but to help Filipinos deal with the insurgencies they believe are most threatening. Thus, the U.S. must continue its military-to-military investment because the AFP simply lacks the resources to address these threats simultaneously.

Ironically, while the peace process initiated by the Philippine government with the MILF has inhibited military operations against the ASG, it is the best hope for the U.S. in dealing with this terrorist organization. In a successful counterinsurgency campaign, political and military efforts must reinforce one another. The ultimate goal is to detach the ASG from the MILF through a political settlement between the Philippine government and the MILF. The purpose of buoying the Philippine Army’s capacity is

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56 Ibid., 86.
not to “conquer” the Moros, which historically has been a failure, but to shape the political negotiations in a manner that better integrates the Moros in the Philippine polity.⁵⁷ However, Christians have continually unraveled the peace talks. They are the majority in Mindanao and have lobbied the Philippine Supreme Court to deem the peace talks between the Philippine government and MILF unconstitutional because the Christians in Mindanao have been excluded from the peace process. Thus, the lack of Christian understanding is a great hindrance to the peace efforts.

The ASG is also shielded by the NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP) that is waging a “Maoist people’s war” against the government in Luzon. Like the MILF, the NPA is a conventional insurgency force that controls territory, operates a shadow government, and has almost 10,000 guerilla fighters. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has not focused on communist insurgencies, but the Philippine government believes that combating the NPA is its most urgent security priority. Since the communist revival in the mid-1990s, the AFP’s goal is to defeat the communists by 2010.⁵⁸ The ongoing struggle with the NPA greatly hinders the ability of the AFP to deal with the ASG and the MILF.

The NPA engages in criminal or mafia activities and charges businesses exorbitant fees for building on NPA controlled territories. Candidates for state and local

⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Ibid.
elections who campaign in NPA controlled areas must also pay speaking fees to the terrorist group. If the NPA is defeated, then the AFP can refocus its goal to defeating the ASG. This long war is a gradual and incremental process of attrition. Strategic victory can be achieved if the military has a balance between counterinsurgency operations and nation-building projects, or in other words, military skills and civil works.

The military, economic, and political recommendations are important for the new Barack Obama Administration to consider. As the next chapter explains, the Obama Administration will have to decide whether to continue George W. Bush’s policies on the war on terror in the Philippines. While President Obama seeks to scale back military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, he and his advisers will have to determine whether or not to implement suggested measures to combat the ASG and the more formidable MILF and NPA insurgencies. The questions of escalating U.S. military support in the Philippines should be carefully examined.
CHAPTER V
FUTURE PROSPECTS OF U.S.-R.P.
COLLABORATION AGAINST THE ASG

The Moros, the Filipino Muslims of Mindanao, Palawan, and the Sulu Archipelago, have resisted assimilation into the Christian national culture since the sixteenth century. The “recent notoriety of the name Abu Sayyaf is not the first time in the long history of Philippine Christian-Muslim conflict that a label of Muslim identity has struck in Christian hearts.”¹ Moro, the first terrorist label imposed by the Spanish conquistadors was meant to convey terror as the Moros constantly raided the central and northern islands. The Spaniards, after suffering eight centuries under Muslim rule, had no affection for the Moros and exploited their ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural differences.² These actions by Spain created divisions among the native population, thwarting the emergence of a unified national revolution by the Moros.

When Spanish rule ended at the turn of the twentieth-century, the U.S. became the next colonizer when it occupied the islands. During the fifty years of U.S. occupation, the land and power struggle continued between the colonizers and the Moros as the U.S. relocated Christian settlers to the south to undercut Muslim power


and influence. Although the Philippine-American War was declared over in 1902, fierce opposition from the Moros lasted as late as 1914. The U.S. military employed brutal scorched-earth tactics to quell the rebellions, leaving a hostile imprint that was not easily forgotten when the U.S. armed forces reengaged in the south after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

After Philippine independence in 1946, the condition of the Moros continued to deteriorate. Although they were once the majority, they became the minority under both U.S. colonial and Philippine self-rule. The Moros have struggled because their political rights have been marginalized; their economic rights, especially their land, was taken away and resettled by Philippine government initiatives; and their social rights have been diminished. In addition, the grim effects of war, poor governance, and lack of justice have exacerbated their problems. High crime rates, internal clan-against-clan conflicts, and corruption and abuse by local leaders have also plagued the Moro communities. A 1997 study by Florangel Rosario-Braid, a Filipino professor, showed that the lack of understanding of Islamic ideology, religion, and culture by the Philippine government and the Christian majority was a principal source of conflict.

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Since the late 1960s, Muslim separatist movements have sought self-determination by rebelling against the Philippine government. The MNLF initially led the rebellion, followed by the MILF. The ASG, an al-Qaeda linked terrorist organization, was originally a splinter group within the MILF that formed in the early 1990s. It has since reemerged as one of the most threatening terrorist groups to confront the Philippines, the United States, and their allies in Southeast Asia.\(^5\) The ASG continues to operate through its growing cooperation with the MILF and the Jemaah Islamiya, an al-Qaeda linked terrorist group from neighboring Indonesia.\(^6\) The Abu Sayyaf has a history of killings, beheadings, and bombings, and is notorious for its hostage-takings for ransom. Since 2003, the group has kidnapped at least 200 victims in over ninety incidents.\(^7\) Most recently, on January 15, 2009, the ASG has kidnapped three international Red Cross workers.\(^8\)

After the September 11 attacks, the U.S. provided non-combat assistance in joint military exercises. In 2002, the ASG became the object of intervention by approximately 5,000 Filipino troops and roughly 1,000 U.S. military forces, 660, of


\(^8\) Ibid.
which were Special Forces. Under the George W. Bush Administration, the annual Balikatan Exercises demonstrated U.S. resolve, consistent with the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement. The U.S. military was committed to train, advise, and assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines in fighting terrorist insurgencies. The U.S. effort, called “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines,” has accomplished U.S. defense goals of combating al-Qaeda linked terrorists in Mindanao and the surrounding islands. AFP commanders view the role of Exercise Balikatan positively and President Arroyo continues to advocate bilateral military operations.

State Department reports indicate that U.S. support enhanced the capabilities and confidence of AFP units on Basilan. After February 2002, there were more encounters with the ASG, more aggressive patrolling on Basilan, and a decline of ASG strength. Therefore, the ASG was forced to flee Basilan with the Burnhams and other hostages who were kidnapped in 2000. Notably, the ASG no longer maintains a stronghold on the island to conduct its terrorist operations as it was forced to move to temporary locations in the dense jungles of Mindanao. Thus, planning terrorist plots and constructing bombs have become more complicated for the ASG.

Meanwhile, security has improved in many parts of Basilan as the AFP has established a permanent presence in several of the areas cleared of the Abu Sayyaf.

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New businesses have emerged in the main towns and people are willing to venture out at night. The incidences of bombings and ambushes have declined. Overall, the U.S. military support for counterterrorist operations has been successful through the capture or death of key ASG leaders, including Khadaфи Janjalani and Abu Solaiman. Furthermore, over the first four years, the operations reduced Abu Sayyyaf’s strength from over 1,000 active fighters to approximately 200-400.11

Despite successes against the ASG, criticisms have arisen regarding U.S. military involvement in the Philippines. The deployment of U.S. forces in Mindanao caused the “reawakening of anti-American sentiments among Filipino nationalist legislators and civil society groups—a kind of reverse déjà vu” that preceded the closing of American military bases in the Philippines during the early 1990s.12 The “return” of the Americans was even more controversial because, for the first time, the annual joint military exercises took place near combat zone areas in Mindanao. Some foreign affairs officials later resigned from the Arroyo Cabinet because of policy differences over the presence of U.S. troops on Philippine soil. These critics were suspicious that the U.S.

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11 Ibid., 9.

was attempting to gain greater access to the “southern back-door” of the Philippines to monitor volatile developments in Southeast Asia’s hot spots. 13

Further anti-U.S. sentiment would erupt over the rape case in 2005 against Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, a U.S. Marine. He was accused of raping a Filipina while in the Philippines during the yearly Balikatan training exercise. When Smith was under Philippine custody, the U.S. threatened to cancel the next Balikatan Exercise. However, when Smith was returned to U.S. custody, public outcry demanded the cancellation of the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement that allows the U.S. government to retain jurisdiction over U.S. military personnel accused of committing crimes in the Philippines. Nonetheless, tensions cooled when the alleged victim cleared Smith in March 2009 by recanting her statement.14 In order to gain public trust and support, the U.S. military must be very careful in ensuring the good behavior of its military forces in the Philippines.

Beyond that, military, economic, and political recommendations can enhance the future of U.S.-R.P. bilateral relations in combating terrorism. The availability of sophisticated military equipment and the assistance of the U.S. military have upgraded the AFP’s communications, mobility, intelligence, and firepower capabilities. The AFP

13 Ibid.

has praised the following aspects of cooperation with the United States: modern equipment provided by the U.S.; intelligence information collected by U.S. aircraft and sophisticated tracking equipment; and American assistance in planning operations.\textsuperscript{15}

Unlike the period before September 11, 2001, the AFP now has superior military capabilities when actively pursuing the ASG. Furthermore, the auditing mechanisms in supplying military equipment, the freezing of terrorist assets, and the rehabilitation of captured terrorists must be thoroughly enforced in order to make significant strides in the campaign against the ASG.

As for economic recommendations, the U.S. should increase their civic action programs in the Philippines because economic depression is at the root of the Moro problem. Through economic reforms, the government can “win the hearts and minds of the people” away from the ASG. Gaining the trust and confidence of the local population is vital for the U.S. in gathering intelligence. Moreover, offering monetary rewards would encourage public participation in providing intelligence tips for counterinsurgency efforts. Compared to direct military investments, public works, such as road and bridge construction, well building, and the rebuilding of mosques and schools are low-cost and high-yield investments that would neutralize public support for the ASG. In addition, medical, dental, and veterinary clinics are well-received practices that would undercut terrorist grievances against the Philippine government, such as the

inability to provide universal healthcare. The general attitude of the people of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago towards the U.S. has been positive.

With regards to political recommendations, the U.S. has an interest in promoting stable and effective governance in the Philippines so that terrorism will not flourish in a state of lawlessness. Corruption must be defeated in the ranks of the AFP and in the country’s law enforcement agencies. Internal corruption only hinders counterterrorism efforts by unraveling the previous efforts of the AFP and U.S. military forces. The U.S. must continue to provide financial aid for the development of local law enforcement agencies.

So far, President Arroyo has dealt with the symptoms and not the root causes of the Moro problem, partly because she is struggling to survive politically. President Arroyo has faced and endured at least three coup attempts and four impeachment bids.\footnote{Lum and Niksch, “The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations,” i.} The unstable political atmosphere is a hindrance and a distraction in the fight against terror. The U.S. cannot necessarily control the political climate, but can endorse parties that are incorrupt.

Meanwhile, the ASG demands about creating a separate Muslim state are not feasible because the Moros are no longer the majority in the south and there are fruit industries there that are profitable for the overall Philippine economy. Instead, the Philippine government will need to rally the political will to address Moro grievances.
more effectively, especially on land claims, control over economic resources, and political self-governance. In August 2008, the Philippine government and the MILF signed a Memorandum of Agreement establishing a framework for expanded autonomy in Mindanao. In spite of this, Christian politicians from Mindanao filed suit with the Philippine Supreme Court, which ruled the accord unconstitutional, causing a period of fighting between the MILF and government forces.

The Muslim-Christian divide must be narrowed through interfaith dialogues and inclusive political accommodation for the Moros, including the MNLF, MILF, and the ASG. Amina Rasul, an ulama or Muslim scholar from Jolo, explains that because Muslims are a minority, it is extremely difficult for them to be nationally elected in the Senate. Rasul’s mother, Santanina Rasul is one of the few Muslim senators to have ever been elected, serving from 1987-1995. The disparity between Christian senators and Muslim senators must be narrowed significantly so that Moro concerns are addressed at the national level.

Arroyo does not want to categorize the MILF as a terrorist organization because the Philippine government has a non-negotiation policy with terrorist groups. Since 2007, the MILF peace talks have stalled and the only promising peace agreement was

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18 Lum and Niksch, “The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations,” i.

19 Amina Rasul, “Pluralism and Democracy in Southeast Asian Islam: Muslim Voices from the Region” (lecture, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, March 19, 2009).
made under the Fidel Ramos Administration in 1996.\textsuperscript{20} However, if a peace agreement is settled with the MILF, the Arroyo administration can focus its efforts to addressing the ASG problem. Presently, Arroyo does not negotiate with the ASG. This prevents dialogue and her non-negotiation policy with terrorist groups is unlikely to change during her remaining year as president. The next presidential election is in 2010 and the new president will face the decision of continuing Arroyo’s policies or changing them. When an agreement is reached in the future, implementation will require long-term monitoring by a committed international body. The increasing complex diplomatic atmosphere requires new tools and techniques of conflict management that includes quasi-government and non-government actors to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals in the global war on terror.\textsuperscript{21}

“Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines” exemplifies the opportunities and challenges of creating new alliances in the long war against terror. A lasting victory may depend on the ability of U.S. land forces to create partnerships with militaries like the Armed Forces of the Philippines.\textsuperscript{22} The international implications of U.S. involvement in the Philippines are important because the bilateral operations engaged in combating the ASG provide an especially useful model for establishing joint military


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

cooperation in other countries. With four low-intensity conflicts since the 1960s, the Philippines is a social and military laboratory and the United States can possibly learn useful techniques that can be applied in other conflicts, like in Iraq and Afghanistan. The heightened degree of military cooperation in combating the ASG was cited as a prime model on how to implement the Bush Administration’s 2006 *National Strategy to Combat Terrorism*.

Successful military operations against the ASG can also reinforce a message to governments around the world that the U.S. is determined to fight terrorism on several fronts.

The renewed vigor of the U.S.-R.P. defense relationship represents a significant reestablishment of the American presence not only in the Philippines, but also in Southeast Asia as a whole. Philippine national security and regional security increased with the establishment of strategic bilateral alliances. These strategic alliances are vital in serving as a counterweight against any aggressor in the region, such as China. Moreover, the U.S., the Philippines, and other countries in ASEAN can cooperate by exchanging intelligence and detaining suspected terrorists.

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In conclusion, the aforementioned military, economic, and political recommendations are important for the new Barack Obama Administration to consider. Under the Obama Administration, ASEAN scholar Renato Cruz De Castro believes that the focus in the Philippines will be on post-conflict stabilization.\textsuperscript{26} In President Bush’s first term, bilateral operations focused on expensive Philippine Army training to address the immediate ASG threat. Future training can be applied to the Philippine Navy if the Philippines develops further maritime cooperation with its neighbors.\textsuperscript{27}

Although military force is a necessary component of its anti-terror campaign in the Philippines, the U.S. regards economic development equally vital since poverty is an “effective incubator for violence and terrorism.”\textsuperscript{28} Since 2005, the Balikatan Exercises have shifted their focus to low-cost, high-yield economic development and nation building projects. The United States and the Philippines have crossed the threshold into a mature security relationship that should be “aimed at attacking the roots of terrorism through economic development and political reform.”\textsuperscript{29} This change in policy during Bush’s second term addresses the long-term solutions in improving and stabilizing Moro conditions and appeasing grievances that foster insurgencies. To improve

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Renato Cruz De Castro, “The Philippine Experience in Counterinsurgency” (lecture, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, February 24, 2009).
\item Lum and Niksch, “The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations,” 18.
\item Renato Cruz De Castro, “Politics in Command: The Case of the U.S. Proposal for an FTA with the Philippines,” \textit{Contemporary Southeast Asia} 27, no. 3 (2005): 467.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Philippine security, the current Obama Administration can consider a Free Trade Agreement with the Philippines to help bolster and stabilize the island nation’s economy.

The Obama Administration will also have to consider the degree of U.S. military involvement in the Philippines. While President Obama has promised to scale back military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, he and his advisers will have to decide whether or not to implement recommendations in combating the ASG and the more formidable MILF and NPA. The question of escalating U.S. military support for the war on terror in the Philippines should be examined. But if the Obama Administration does not choose to escalate U.S. military involvement, then a feasible timetable for troop withdrawals and a complete AFP take-over would have to be developed. Although the Obama administration seeks to instigate troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan within the next few years, the same strategy may not be effective in the Philippines.

The low intensity conflict with the ASG may take decades to resolve because of ongoing struggles and failed negotiation attempts with the MNLF and MILF. Additionally, President Obama has the option to improve relations with the Muslim world. Amina Rasul asserts that the Muslim world is willing to meet President Obama “more-than-halfway” in fostering dialogues that would smooth out U.S. relations with
volatile countries and entities. Instead of refusing negotiations with the ASG, the Obama Administration can influence Arroyo to begin a dialogue with the Group so that progress can be achieved.

The U.S.-R.P. bilateral operations are a work-in-progress and should continue because they are improving the Moro situation that has been neglected for centuries. Although the U.S.-R.P militaries have cleared Basilan of ASG activities, the ASG’s strongholds in Jolo and Mindanao have yet to be cleared. The milestones for future success can be measured by the capture of all ASG leaders; the disbanding of ASG members; and the prevention of new terrorist recruits. A vision of the Philippines as a peaceful and progressive nation can only be realized if the Philippines and United States work closely together to fulfill their military, economic, and political responsibilities to ultimately eradicate the ASG.

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2. Map of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

*Red denotes the ARMM

3. Detailed Map of Abu Sayyaf Strongholds in the Sulu Archipelago:
The Islands of Basilan, Jolo, and Tawitawi

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