U.S.-PHILIPPINES COOPERATION ON TERRORISM: THE FIGHT AGAINST THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP SINCE 9/11

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The September 11, 2001 attacks marked a pivotal point in the U.S.-Philippine relationship in that it reinvigorated the bilateral relationship, which had become distant after the closing of the U.S. bases in the Philippines in 1992. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo immediately pledged the Philippines’ support for President George W. Bush’s global war on terror, and offered the U.S. the use of military bases in the Philippines. In turn, President Bush supported Arroyo’s struggle with terrorism in the Philippines by providing military training, equipment, and financial assistance. With this help from the U.S., the Philippines was able to more effectively combat the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), an organization that has been terrorizing the Philippines since 1991 with its kidnapping of hostages, ransom demands, and some beheadings of its prisoners.

The aim of this thesis is to trace the United States-Philippine response to the threat posed by the ASG. The scope of this thesis spans the period from 2001 to 2012, which covers both terms of the Bush Administration and the first three years of the Barack H. Obama Administration. In the Philippines, this period overlaps with the ten years in office of President Arroyo and the first two years of the Benigno S. Aquino Administration.

The organization of this thesis is in six parts. Chapter I provides necessary information on the Philippines and on the U.S.-Philippine relationship to set the stage for
the whole thesis. Chapter II gives an overview of the ASG, including its origins, ideology, and activities, as well as pre-2001 U.S.-Philippine efforts in dealing with the ASG. Chapter III discusses the U.S.-Philippine collaboration during the first term of the Bush Administration from 2001-2004 while Chapter IV traces their joint response to the ASG during Bush’s second term from 2005-2008. Chapter V gives background information on Obama, and examines the present U.S.-Philippine policy against the ASG under Obama from 2009 to 2012, which coincides with the last year of Arroyo’s presidency and the early years of the Aquino presidency. Chapter VI gives recommendations for more effective U.S.-Philippine operations against the ASG, and an assessment of bilateral efforts since 2001.
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I dedicate this work to my son, Charles. You are the reason for everything I do.
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ABBREVIATIONS

AFP Armed Forces of the Philippines

APEC Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

ARMM Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASG Abu Sayyaf Group

FMF Foreign Military Financing

HUKs Hukbalahap

IIRO Islamic International Relief Organization

IRIC International Relations and Information Center

IMF International Monetary Fund

IMET International Military Education and Training

JI Jemaah Islamiyah

MILF Moro Islamic Liberation Front

MLSA Mutual Logistics Support Agreement

MNLF Moro National Liberation Front

OIC Organization of the Islamic Conference

PA Philippine Army

PN Philippine Navy

RFJ Rewards for Justice

USAID United States Agency for International Development

VFA Visiting Forces Agreement
GLOSSARY

Balikatan “Shoulder-to-shoulder”

Barangay Neighborhood and smallest political unit

Datus Native chiefs of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago

Hawala Informal remittance system

Jihad Religious struggle

Sultan A secular and religious leader in Islamic society

Wahhabism An extremely conservative form of Islam
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND ON THE PHILIPPINES AND ON U.S.-PHILIPPINE RELATIONS UNTIL 1991

The aim of Chapter I is to provide necessary background information on the Philippines, on U.S.-Philippine relations, and on the Moros in order to set the stage for the rest of this thesis. The scope is a very long period, from early times to 1991, when the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was founded. The organization is divided into four parts. It will begin with an overview of the Philippines before Spanish colonization followed by a second part, which will examine conditions under Spanish rule. The third part will discuss American rule until Philippine independence in 1946, while the fourth part will examine U.S.-Philippine relations since independence to 1991.

For a better understanding of the Moros and of U.S.-Philippine relations, it is important to provide basic facts about the Philippines. The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago of about 7,107 islands located in the Western Pacific and separated from mainland Asia by the South China Sea. The Philippines is composed of several major regions: Luzon, the largest island in the north; the Visayas, a group of islands in the center; and Mindanao, the biggest island in the south; and the Sulu Archipelago, especially the islands of Basilan, Jolo, and Tawitawi.¹ Manila, located in Luzon, is the capital and the largest city. Other important cities are Cebu in the Visayas; Davao,

Cotabato, and Zamboanga in Mindanao; and Jolo in Sulu. The Philippines is part of Southeast Asia, which encompasses Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor Leste, Singapore, and Vietnam. It is also a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Philippines has a presidential form of government. The president and vice president are elected separately by popular vote and are each limited to one six-year term. The bicameral legislature is composed of a Senate, whose twenty-four members serve six-year terms, and a House of Representatives with 206 congressmen elected to three-year terms. The Philippines is divided into 17 regions, 79 provinces, 115 cities, 1,499 municipalities and 41,969 barangays, or neighborhoods, which represent the smallest political unit.

Filipino, which is based on Tagalog, and English are the two official languages of the Philippines, and are both widely used in government, education, media, and commerce. There are also eleven other languages and 87 dialects spoken in the Philippines. Of the eleven languages, eight – Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon,

\[2\] Ibid.
\[3\] Ibid.
\[6\] Ibid., 11.
\[7\] Ibid.
Bicolano, Waray-Waray, Pampangan, and Pangasinan – are native tongues for about 90 percent of the population. As of February 2012, the population of the Philippines was approximately 104 million people making the country the twelfth most populated in the world.

As for the climate, the Philippines is always warm and tropical due to its location five to twenty degrees north of the equator. The two main seasons are the dry and the monsoon seasons, with the dry from March to June and the monsoon from July to October. The months of November to February are pleasantly warm with a calming sea breeze. The Philippines is also located on the edge of the Ring of Fire, a chain of active volcanoes marking the intersection of two tectonic plates. The June 1991 volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in central Luzon caused massive devastation.

Until 2002, when East Timor gained its independence from Indonesia, the Philippines was the only predominately Christian nation in Asia. Roman Catholicism is the largest religion with 82.9 percent of the population practicing this faith. Other religions include various Protestant denominations (5.4 percent), Islam (4.6 percent), Philippine Independent Church (2.6 percent), Iglesia ni Kristo (2.3 percent), and animism

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8 Ibid.


11 Ibid.

12 Abinales and Amoroso, State and Society in the Philippines, 11.
Prior to colonization, the Filipinos were animists who believed that the world was ruled by powerful spirits that could bring either happiness and good fortune or disease and death.

There are many tribal groups in the Philippines, including several Moro (Muslim) tribes that live mostly in the southern part of the region. The Spanish named them Moros after the hated Moors who had once ruled Spain. The Moros can be classified linguistically into ten sub-groups. However, the three largest Moro tribes are the Maguidanaos of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Maguindanao provinces; the Marano of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur provinces; and the Tausug, mostly of Jolo island. The Moros have remained outside the mainstream of Philippine society due to their Islamic faith and have often been subjected to prejudice and national neglect. Moro conflict with the ruling power began in the 16th century with the arrival of Roman Catholic Spanish colonialists and continued in the 20th century with the Protestant Americans who replaced the Spanish. The conflict has since continued with Filipino Catholic leaders after Philippine independence in 1946. As a people, the Moros themselves are not a traditionally close-knit group and are fiercely proud of their separate identities.

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
degree of Islamic orthodoxy. For example, the Tausugs, to which many members of the ASG belong, were the first to adopt Islam and have criticized the more recently Islamicized Yakan and Bajau groups.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Overview of the Philippines before Spanish Rule in 1521}

Centuries before Spanish colonizers came to the Philippines, people with distinct cultures had already begun to migrate to the islands. The earliest inhabitants of the Philippines are believed to be the Negritos who traveled more than 30,000 years ago via then-existing land bridges.\textsuperscript{19} The second group, the proto-Malays, arrived by sea from Indonesia in two waves about 5,000 to 6,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{20} The last migration wave before the colonial era involved the Malays between 500 BC and 1,500 AD.\textsuperscript{21}

Before colonization, the custom of cognatic kinship, in which families traced descent through both the male and female lines, was widely practiced.\textsuperscript{22} This meant that both sons and daughters could inherit property and they also continued to be part of the natal family after marriage. People who were not biologically related could form fictive kinships to create ritual brothers, godmothers, and godfathers.\textsuperscript{23} Political alliances were usually established through marriage, which produced grand family networks.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{20} Maria Halili, \textit{Philippines History} (Manila: Rex Book Store, Inc., 2004), 34.

\textsuperscript{21} Samuel K. Tan, \textit{A History of the Philippines} (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1987), 30.

\textsuperscript{22} Abinales and Amoroso, \textit{State and Society of the Philippines}, 20.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Gradually, the social and political organization of the population evolved into a common pattern. The basic unit of settlement was the barangay, headed by a datu or chief.\textsuperscript{24} The broad social groups within the barangay consisted of nobles, which included the datu; freemen; and a group described as dependents. The dependents comprised the following: landless agricultural workers; those who lost freeman status due to debt or punishment for crime; and slaves.\textsuperscript{25}

Islam arrived in the Philippines through Arab merchants and missionaries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The first sultanate was established in Sulu in 1450 when the Sumatran sultan Sayyid Abu Bakr married a local princess.\textsuperscript{26} Sulu soon became a prominent center of Muslim trade and culture. Sayyid Abu Bakr introduced Islam as a form of state religion with "its attendant political and social institutions."\textsuperscript{27} He spread the religion and his authority from Sulu to neighboring islands, claiming ownership of land and rights over all people.\textsuperscript{28}

Sayyid Abu Bakr established his authority through missionary activity and the creation of political districts. He used panglimas, "officials one rank lower than a datu, to collect taxes, adjudicate disputes, organize conscripted labor, and announce royal


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
decrees."\(^{29}\) Most rulers converted to Islam, and those who did not were proselytized, but not forcibly converted as long as they accepted the Sultan's authority. However, they were set apart from the community and were labeled "non-believers."\(^{30}\) The Sulu sultanate came to be known as the "first centralized political bureaucracy in the Philippine islands."\(^{31}\) By the end of the fifteenth century, other Muslim states, such as the sultanate of Maguindanao, had emerged in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

The arrival of Islam in the southern Philippines transformed the lives of the people. Islam introduced new laws, new ethical standards, and a different outlook on life. Converts learned to write in Arabic script and used the Arabic language for rituals and formal events. The religion spread quickly in the southern islands because converting was easy and Islam's teachings were simple.\(^{32}\)

Islam created a network for trade and commerce throughout the southern Philippines. It continued to spread northward to Manila where a Muslim kingdom surfaced in 1565. However, the spread of Islam was then stopped by the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521. The Spanish would spend over 300 years attempting to assimilate the Moros into mainstream society and trying to convert them to Catholicism.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


Spanish colonization of the Philippines was driven by the promise of "gold, God, and glory." The Spaniards wanted to monopolize the highly profitable spice trade that stretched from Maluku in eastern Indonesia to Europe. In 1520, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese sailor who had defected to the Spanish king, left Spain and sailed across the Atlantic to chart the western route to Maluku. On March 16, 1521, he arrived in Cebu in the Visayas and claimed the land in the name of King Charles I of Spain. Magellan wasted no time establishing a trading relationship with the Visayans. He offered to trade hats, knives, mirrors, combs, bells, and ivory for fish, poultry, palm wine, bananas and coconuts, ginger, and gold.

Magellan also tried to spread Catholicism by inviting two datus to Easter Mass, which was held at the Spanish camp. The datus participated in the worship but did not take communion nor convert. There was one local leader, however, who did convert to Catholicism -- Rajah Humabon, the king of Cebu, who decided to become a Catholic after listening to Magellan explain the greatness of Christianity. On April 14, 1521, Humabon was baptized by a Catholic priest. But not all of the local leaders wished to follow Humabon's footsteps. One of them, Chief Lapulapu from the neighboring island of Mactan, and his people refused to convert. Magellan decided to punish Lapulapu,

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33 Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 47.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

which resulted in the Battle of Mactan. Magellan and his men were greatly outnumbered, and, as a result, Lapulapu easily defeated and killed Magellan, whose body was never found.

Spain would send several expeditions to the Philippines over the next decades until 1565 when Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, who became the first royal governor of Cebu, was finally able to create a permanent Spanish settlement. Legazpi named the islands, "Felipinas" in honor of King Philip II of Spain. Three years after his arrival in Cebu, Legazpi converted the remaining native rulers to Christianity. Despite this success, Legazpi faced other problems in Cebu, such as food shortages and attacks from other Portuguese explorers. In 1571, he mounted a military expedition to the North in search of an alternate location for the Spanish base. He decided on Maynilad (Manila) for several reasons: its strategic location offered a port in Manila Bay, it had a large population, and an ample food supply from the central Luzon rice lands. Legazpi defeated the Muslim ruler of Maynilad and renamed it Manila.

Like the Muslims, the Spaniards sought to convert the Filipinos from their pagan beliefs to an organized religion. They were successful, at least in the north, in converting Filipinos to Christianity, but they failed in their efforts among the Muslims. Conversion in the north was facilitated by the lack of an organized religion as most people were animists and nature worshippers and the Spaniards found it relatively easy to convert

39 Ibid.
Moreover, the Spaniards offered incentives, such as land, to Filipinos who helped them in their religious efforts. The southern part of the Philippines, however, had already been won over by the Islamic faith.

The Moros were fiercely resistant to their colonizers especially in the Mindanao and Sulu regions. It was this ideology of resistance that resulted in a jihad, or religious struggle, against the Spanish colonialists. On the other hand, Spanish communities feared Muslim raids. The Moro Wars, as they were called, refer to the three centuries of Muslim resistance to religious conversion.

Spanish actions created animosity between the Filipino Christians and the Moros. For example, the Spanish orchestrated a large-scale relocation of Christian Filipinos from the overcrowded areas of the north to the sparsely populated regions in the south in order to colonize it by proxy and to convert the Moros. Inspite of their efforts, the Moros managed to retain a large degree of political, cultural, and economic autonomy during the Spanish period.

By the late 1800’s, the Filipino Christians felt restless against their Spanish colonizers. No matter how wealthy or educated, they remained outside the upper

\[\text{\footnotesize 40 W.K. Che Man, \textit{Muslim Separatism} (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 22.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 41 Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 42 Che Man, \textit{Muslim Separatism}, 22.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 43 Ibid.}\]

echelons of the ruling society. Not surprisingly, some of them began to organize against the Spaniards. For instance, Jose Rizal, born in 1861 to a wealthy Filipino family, was a physician, scholar, scientist, and writer, who resented the social, cultural, economic, and political restrictions placed upon his people by the Spanish. He published poems and stories encouraging a peaceful resistance against the Spanish colonizers and later penned the famous saying, “the pen is mightier than the sword.” His greatest impact on the Filipino national consciousness was the publication of his two novels *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) in 1886 and *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed) in 1891. Both books are still widely read today. Rizal drew on his personal experiences and wrote about the dismal conditions under Spanish rule. The Spanish authorities banned his books and labeled him a subversive.

On July 3, 1892, Rizal established *La Liga Filipina*, a political group dedicated to peaceful change. However, urban workers and students joined this organization and formed a militant wing. One of *La Liga Filipina*’s aims was to involve the people directly in the reform movement. Though *La Liga Filipina* had no intention of raising arms against the government, the Spanish still felt threatened and Rizal was consequently arrested on July 6, 1892, and exiled to Dapitan in Northern Mindanao. His expulsion halted *La Liga Filipina*, but the radical arm led by Andres Bonifacio, went on to form *Katipunan* on July 7, 1892.

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46 Ibid.
Katipunan was a secret society committed to fighting for independence from Spain. The group was composed mostly of lower urban, uneducated Filipinos who had no hopes of economic advancement except through revolution. When Spanish authorities learned of Katipunan’s existence, Bonifacio launched a rebellion in Manila in 1896. The uprising spread to nearby provinces and other communities formed their own chapter of Katipunan. On August 26, 1896, the center of the Philippine Revolution broke out in Cavite province. The Spanish accused Rizal of instigating the revolt and used a firing squad to execute him on December 30, 1896. His death elevated him to a martyr-like status and his name became associated with the ideas of freedom and nation.

Meanwhile in Cavite, where he had retreated, Bonifacio's role as commander of Katipunan was challenged. Some local Filipino elite, who had been Rizal supporters, questioned Bonifacio’s ability to lead a revolution and disparaged his lack of education.

Unlike Rizal, Bonifacio was born into a poor, peasant family and had only received a primary school education. Bonifacio was ousted and Emilio Aguinaldo became the new leader of Katipunan. When Bonifacio refused to acknowledge Aguinaldo's leadership, he was summarily arrested then executed by order of Aguinaldo in 1897.

The Filipinos greatly outnumbered the Spaniards though the latter had far superior weapons. Despite their impressive arsenal, the Spanish did not know how to fight against an enemy who attacked when least expected. Additionally, most of Spain's military

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid, 112.
was tied up fighting the revolutionaries in Cuba. The fighting in the Philippines lasted for 52 days. In the end, the Spanish government decided to pursue a truce and the Pact of Biak-na-Bato, was signed on December 14, 1897 between Aguinaldo and Fernando Primo de Rivera, the Spanish Governor.\textsuperscript{51}

The downfall of Spanish control began in 1898 when the Spanish-American War broke out. In April 1898, the U.S. declared war on Spain after the sinking of the \textit{U.S.S. Battleship Maine} in Havana Harbor. The U.S. accused Spain of the attack and sent an American fleet from Hong Kong under Commodore George Dewey to go after the Spanish fleet in Manila. On May 1, 1898, American and Philippine forces easily defeated the Spanish fleet at the Battle of Manila Bay.\textsuperscript{52} However, the Americans prevented the Filipinos from attending the surrender ceremonies in Manila. Though the war was over, neither Spain nor the United States recognized the legitimacy of the Filipino revolutionaries. The U.S. reneged on their promise and the Filipinos found themselves under a colonial power once again.

\textbf{American Rule until Independence in 1946}

The Philippines came under American rule in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris, which signaled the end of the Spanish-American War. The U.S. legitimized its claim on the Philippines by purchasing it, along with Guam and Puerto Rico, from Spain for twenty million dollars. Under the Treaty, Spain relinquished its empire in America and

\textsuperscript{50} Nadeau, \textit{The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations: The History of the Philippines}, 41.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 45.
in the Pacific Ocean to the United States.

On December 21, 1898, President McKinley expressed U.S. colonial policy towards the Philippines in his, "Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation." In this declaration, McKinley announced the United States' intentions to establish control over the Philippines by using what he considered a humane policy that would respect Filipino customs and traditions. On January 20, 1899, President McKinley appointed the First Philippine Commission, the Schurman Commission, to investigate conditions on the islands and to make recommendations. The group, led by Cornell University President, Dr. Jacob Schurman, also included Admiral Dewey and General Ewell Otis. The Schurman Commission concluded that the Filipinos had aspirations for independence, but were not yet ready for it. The Filipinos still felt betrayed by the U.S. and rising tensions led to the Philippines' Second War of Independence in 1899. This war, which the U.S. called the Philippine Insurrection, would last for two years and cost several thousand lives.

The second war for independence was markedly different from the earlier one against Spain. This time, the Philippines was no longer a group of scattered, decentralized islands, but had become an emerging nation-state. The war began on March 31, 1899, with the capture of Aguinaldo’s capital, Malolos, though he was able to

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54 Ibid., 27.

escape and set up a new capital in San Isidro. The Filipinos were no match for the Americans in open combat, but they proved to be formidable opponents in guerilla warfare. Fighting continued until March 23, 1901 when Aguinaldo was captured and brought back to Manila. He was convinced that further resistance was a futile effort, and he urged his compatriots to lay down their arms. The Philippine Insurrection was officially over on July 4, 1902, with as many as 200,000 civilian deaths.

Before the war ended, President McKinley appointed the Taft Commission, the Second Philippine Commission, on March 16, 1900. The group, led by then Governor-General of the Philippines, Howard Taft, was granted legislative powers and limited executive powers. The Commission established a judicial system, including a Supreme Court; a municipal board responsible for collecting taxes, maintaining municipal properties, and undertaking necessary construction projects; and a Philippine Constabulary, which was organized as an archipelago-wide police force. This Commission would later become the upper house of the Philippine Bicameral Legislature.

For the Moros, the establishment of a new colonial power brought no real change. The Treaty of Paris included the Spanish cession of Moroland even though it had never

56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
been incorporated into the Spanish colony.\footnote{Che Man, \textit{Muslim Separatism}, 23.} Much like the Spanish, the "American government adopted a policy aimed primarily at incorporating Mindanao into a wider Philippine state."\footnote{Ibid.} The major difference between the Spanish and the Americans was that the U.S. did not view the Moro problem as a religious issue. In fact, the U.S. established secular programs, such as public schools and land surveying services.\footnote{Ibid.} The Moros, however, saw these efforts as infringements against them and resisted the Americans as fiercely as they resisted the Spanish.

To gain Moro recognition of American authority over Mindanao and Sulu and to keep the Moros out of the Philippine Insurrection, General John Bates signed the Bates Agreement with the Moros in August 1899. Under the Bates Agreement, the Moros recognized U.S. sovereignty while the Americans promised to protect the Muslims from foreign intrusions and respect the authority of the sultans.\footnote{Ibid., 47.} The Moros were generally content with the United States' policy of noninterference.

However, after the Philippine Insurrection, the U.S. decided it was necessary to implement direct control over the Moros. Accordingly, in 1903, in an unjustified move, the Americans nullified the Bates agreement and imposed their rule on the Moros. For example, the Americans established schools in Moro provinces that taught a non-Muslim curriculum; outlawed slavery, which was a component of Moro culture; and challenged
the authority of Muslim leaders.\textsuperscript{65} Not surprisingly, Muslim resistance against the U.S. was strong, and it took a decade of warfare to pacify the Moros.\textsuperscript{66}

At the end of the Philippine Insurrection, the Americans implemented their policies for Philippine independence. One of the first U.S. policies, the Philippine Organic Act, was enacted in July 1902. It stipulated that, after certain conditions were met, a Philippine legislature would be established headed by Governor-General William Howard Taft. There would be a lower house, the Philippine Assembly and an upper house, the Philippine Commission.\textsuperscript{67} The conditions to be met included: (1) the cessation of the existing insurrection in the Philippines and general and complete peace; (2) the completion and publication of a census; and (3) two years of peace and recognition of United States authority after the publication of the census.\textsuperscript{68} The two houses would share legislative power. However, the upper house alone would pass laws regarding the Moros and other non-Christians. Under the Act, the United States' Bill of Rights would be extended to Filipinos and two Filipino representatives would be sent to Washington, D.C. to attend sessions of the United States Congress.\textsuperscript{69}

Another important U.S. policy was the Jones Act of 1916 also known as the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Che Man, \textit{Muslim Separatism}, 23.
\item[69] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Philippine Autonomy Act, which replaced the Philippine Organic Act of 1902. It gave
the Filipinos more control over their domestic affairs and it promised to grant them
independence as soon as a stable government was established.\textsuperscript{70} The Jones Act replaced
the Philippine Commission with the Philippine Senate as the upper house of the
legislature. Unlike the Commission, all 24 Senate members, except for two, were
popularly elected. In the lower house, all but nine of the ninety House of Representatives
were popularly elected. The two other Senators and nine Representatives were appointed
by the governor general to represent the non-Christian people.\textsuperscript{71} The Jones Act remained
the basic legislation for the administration of the Philippines until 1934 when the U.S.
Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act.

This Act, also known as the Philippine Independence Act, was signed by
President Franklin Roosevelt on March 24, 1934. With this Act, the 10-year Philippine
Commonwealth was established, with independence scheduled for 1944.\textsuperscript{72} However, due
to the outbreak of World War II, independence was postponed until 1946. The
Commonwealth had its own constitution and was self-governing but the U.S. was
responsible for foreign policy. The Tydings-McDuffie Act marked a new stage in the
U.S.-Philippine relationship although it was still unequal. For example, Filipino
immigration to the U.S. was restricted to 50 people per year while Americans were

\textsuperscript{70} Calit, \textit{The Philippines: Current Issues and Historical Background}, 55.


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 57.
allowed unlimited entry and residence in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{73} In keeping with the Tydings-McDuffie Act, the country’s first constitution was drafted and approved in 1934. This document established the political institutions for the ten-year commonwealth period, and would become the constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.\textsuperscript{74} The first elections were held in September 1935, after which Manuel Quezon became the second President of the Philippines and Sergio Osmena his Vice President.

The Philippines’ path towards independence was interrupted when the Japanese invaded the islands on December 8, 1941, just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. General Douglas MacArthur was designated commander of the United States Armed Forces in the Asia-Pacific region and led the Philippine and American troops against the Japanese.\textsuperscript{75} But MacArthur failed to defeat the Japanese forces, with the result that U.S. and Philippine forces were forced to surrender on the Bataan Peninsula in April 1942.\textsuperscript{76}

In the meantime, the Filipinos continued to organize themselves against the Japanese. Hence, the Japanese encountered large-scale and highly effective guerilla activity. During the Japanese occupation, many tenant farmers banded together in guerilla units to take back their land from the Japanese.\textsuperscript{77} One of the largest and most effective resistance groups was the \textit{Hukbong Bayan laban so Hapon} or \textit{Hukbalahap}.


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
(HUK) in central Luzon.\textsuperscript{78} Between 1943 and 1944, the HUKs had an estimated 70,000 guerillas and hundreds of thousands of supporters throughout the country. Meanwhile, on October 20, 1944, MacArthur’s forces returned to the Philippines.\textsuperscript{79} With the help of the HUKs, full-scale fighting took place until the Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945. Nearly one million Filipinos had been killed.\textsuperscript{80}

In 1946, the U.S. Congress passed the Bell Trade Act, also known as the Philippine Trade Act, which heavily favored the United States.\textsuperscript{81} The Act specified the economic conditions governing the emergence of the Republic of the Philippines from U.S. rule.\textsuperscript{82} It contained some controversial policies such as the parity clause, which granted U.S. citizens equal economic rights with Filipinos to, for example, land ownership, natural resource exploitation, and other business activities.\textsuperscript{83} Payment of war damages totaling $620 million, as promised in the Tydings Rehabilitation Act, was contingent upon Philippine ratification of the Bell Trade Act. The Philippine legislature approved the Act on July 2, 1946, just two days before independence.

With the end of the war, the Filipino people began to prepare for independence, which was scheduled for July 4, 1946. In January 1946, Manuel Roxas, a prewar

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 170.


Senator, announced himself as a candidate of the newly formed Liberal Party. On April 23, 1946, Roxas ran against and defeated Sergio Osmeña with 54 percent of the vote. On July 4, 1946, the Philippines officially became the independent Republic of the Philippines with Roxas as its first president. In granting independence, the U.S. had finally fulfilled a longstanding promise.

**U.S.-Philippine Relations, 1946-1991**

During the Roxas administration, the U.S. recognized the need to secure an elaborate network of military bases worldwide, including in Southeast Asia. This led to the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) signed on March 1947, which allowed for the establishment of U.S. bases in the Philippines. The U.S. leased the bases rent-free for ninety-nine years and they also had jurisdiction over the leased areas. The U.S. military bases in the Philippines were especially important in the face of rising communism, both within (the HUKs) and outside the country.

The HUKs, who were instrumental in defeating the Japanese during World War II, were now viewed as Communists and a serious security threat. They resented the exploitation they suffered under their landlords and demanded land reform. When asked to surrender their arms, the HUKs refused to do so. They demanded the reinstatement of the Democratic Alliance members of Congress; the disbandment of the military police;

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84 Ibid., 42.


86 Ibid., 88.
and general amnesty.\textsuperscript{87} In March 1948, Roxas declared the HUKs an illegal organization and decided to increase counterinsurgency efforts. However, he was unable to defeat the HUKs. Moreover, he suffered a heart attack and died in April 1948.

Elpidio Quirino, the vice president, succeeded Roxas as president. The U.S. intervened to help the Philippines government defeat the HUKs.\textsuperscript{88} Edward Landsale, an American CIA operative, was sent to Manila to organize a counterinsurgency plan with the help of Philippine Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay.\textsuperscript{89} Magsaysay reorganized the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and transformed them into an effective fighting force. In October 1950, with the aid of other American intelligence officers, the HUKs were defeated with the capture of one of their top leaders in Manila.\textsuperscript{90} Many of the HUKs left Central Luzon and moved south, with a large number settling in Mindanao. In August 1951, the U.S. and Philippine governments signed the Mutual Defense Treaty to combat the communist threat.\textsuperscript{91}

Meanwhile, the Moro situation did not improve under the new Philippine republic. The Moros felt largely displaced and marginalized in their area as the national government encouraged Filipinos to migrate from the densely populated northern and

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, 113.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 247.
central islands to the sparsely inhabited southern islands. Under President Magsaysay, a large infusion of about 1.4 million Christians settled in northeastern Mindanao with thousands more immigrants settling in the surrounding areas, hoping to establish a livelihood in farming. The large influx of people inflamed hostilities and incited many land disputes between the Moros and the Christians.

When Magsaysay, who defeated Quirino as president in 1953, died in a plane crash in 1957, Vice President Carlos Garcia succeeded him. President Garcia envisioned a united country in which Christians and Muslims would be offered economic advantages and the Muslims would be assimilated into mainstream society. Thus, in 1957, the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities was established to deal with the Muslims and to integrate them into the dominant culture. Concessions were made for Muslim religion and customs, such as exemption from laws prohibiting polygamy and divorce. The Moros rejected this plan as they suspected that it was an indirect way of destroying their Muslim identity.

There were several events that precipitated the Moros to organize into armed groups. One event was the Jabidah Massacre. On March 18, 1968, Muslim recruits, who were training with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), were taken to an airfield

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92 Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 175.

93 Ibid.


95 Ibid., 84.
and shot to death.  

Another event was the Muslim massacre in Manili, Cotabato. The Muslims were praying in a mosque when a group of armed men dressed in Constabulary uniforms, barged in and started shooting, killing 65 men, women, and children. The Muslims were outraged by the Manili massacre, not only at the blatant disregard for life, but also at the desecration of a sacred place.

More Muslim outrage occurred during the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos. Long-term grievances held by the Muslims were exacerbated by Marcos’ declaration of martial law in 1972. Under martial law, Marcos curtailed the freedom of speech, press, and assembly and also imposed the strict implementation of curfew times. Schools, mass media, public utilities, and industries were closed and placed under military control. Civilians were ordered to surrender their guns, which made the Moros suspicious as they saw the right to bear arms as important as their religion. Moro uprisings began to grow rapidly in resistance to the new administration.

Unhappy with their situation and wanting to protect their rights and safety, the Moros began to organize themselves into armed liberation groups. The first group was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which splintered into the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and then into the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The MNLF was created in 1969 by a group of young, secular educated Moros who had been recruited for

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97 Ibid., 136.

98 Schirmer, 164.

99 Ibid.
military training in Malaysia.\textsuperscript{100} Among the recruits was Nur Misuari who would become Chairman of the MNLF. Misuari was born in 1940 on the island of Sulu. He received a scholarship to the University of the Philippines where he was drawn to Islamic and left-wing causes, and later established the Muslim Nationalist League, becoming editor of its official publication, the \textit{Philippine Muslim News}.\textsuperscript{101}

After graduation from college, Misuari was one of ninety Muslim youth chosen by Sulu leaders for military training in Malaysia. When he returned to the Philippines, Misuari, along with other likeminded Muslim men, organized the MNLF. The sole goal of the MNLF was to seek Muslim political autonomy in the southern part of the Philippines. The MNLF received financial support from Muslims in Libya and Malaysia.\textsuperscript{102}

When Marcos declared martial law, he was met with strong resistance from the Moros. The MNLF increased its revolutionary scope against the Marcos regime, and he retaliated by sending armed forces, inflaming a situation which subsequently erupted into a full-scale war between his and the MNLF troops.\textsuperscript{103} A cease-fire was then reached in 1976 with the signing of the Tripoli Agreement. Under this Agreement, the MNLF gave up its demands for independence and the Philippine government agreed to an

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{100} Che Man, \textit{Muslim Separatism}, 77.
\item\textsuperscript{101} Michael Leifer, \textit{Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia} (New York: Routledge, 2001), 186.
\item\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 148.
\item\textsuperscript{103} E. San Juan, Jr., \textit{U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 97.
\end{itemize}
Autonomous Muslim Region in Moroland (ARMM) made up of 13 provinces.\textsuperscript{104} However, the Agreement was often breached and finally broke down in 1977.\textsuperscript{105} Then in 1987, the MNLF signed an agreement that recognized the government’s offer for a Moro autonomous region comprised of four southern provinces: Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and Tawitawi.\textsuperscript{106}

The MNLF was the principal vehicle for Islamic autonomy until 1977 when Salamat Hashim, Vice-Chairman of the MNLF, challenged Misuari’s leadership and formed the MILF in that year. The establishment of this rival Muslim group was the result of the political schism between Misuari, Hashim, and the 57 MNLF members who supported Hashim.\textsuperscript{107} Hashim did not agree with Misuari’s decision to accept the Philippine government’s offer of the ARMM, and believed that the Moros should continue to pursue an independent Muslim state.

Hashim was born July 7, 1942 in Maguindanao, Mindanao, to an influential, Muslim family. In 1959, he went Cairo to study Islamic philosophy at Al Azhar College, earning his bachelor’s degree in 1967. In Cairo, he was an active leader of the Philippine Students’ Union and the Chairman of the Organization of Asian Students. Shortly after his return to the Philippines in 1970, he began collaborating with Nur Misuari to form the MNLF.


\textsuperscript{105} San Juan, 14.


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 207.
Though the MILF developed from the MNLF, the two groups have very different characteristics. One of the main differences between them is their ideology. The MILF sees itself as a religious movement while it classifies the MNLF as a secular movement.\footnote{Larousse, *A Local Church Living for Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Relations*, 161.} The MILF leaders are mostly religious, conservative clerics who refuse to cooperate with non-Islamic groups while the MNLF leaders are Muslims with mostly secular training.\footnote{Ibid., 160.} The MILF’s aim is to establish an Islamic government in the southern Philippines, while the MNLF, on the other hand, favors autonomy within the framework of the secular Philippine nation.\footnote{Ibid., 162.}

Meanwhile, in 1991, another Moro group, the ASG, emerged from within the MNLF. The ASG was founded by Abdurajak Janjalani, a Muslim scholar who had studied in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Syria. Much like the MILF, the ASG aims to establish an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines but it also uses violent tactics against the Philippine government. The ASG will be covered in greater depth in the next chapter.

During this post-colonial period, one of the predominant issues between the U.S. and the Philippines was the U.S. military bases. Under the Marcos administration, the Rusk-Ramos Agreement was signed in 1966, which reduced the length of the U.S. base lease from 99 to 25 years, to end in 1991 unless re-negotiated. In 1991, the Philippine Senate refused to sign the Philippine-American Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and
Security, which would have extended the lease of the U.S. bases. As a result, the U.S. withdrew its forces and the once-strong military bond between the U.S.-Philippines was weakened. The only legal framework for security relations was the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

In conclusion, the plight of the Moros emerged during Spanish rule, continued under American colonization, and remains a problem under Filipino rule. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the Filipino people believed in animism, a religion based on nature. The basic unit of settlement was the barangay, which was headed by a datu. When the Muslims arrived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they established sultanates in the southern Philippines. The sultans began converting the locals until most of the southern population was Muslim.

The Spanish arrived in 1521 in search of “gold, God, and glory.” The Roman Catholic Spaniards easily converted the Filipino animists in the north, but faced fierce resistance from the Moros in the south. The Spanish orchestrated a large-scale relocation of Filipino Christians from the north to the southern region in order to colonize it by proxy. The loss of land only fueled tensions between the Moros and the Spaniards. After over 300 years of rule, the Spanish were never able to achieve sovereignty in Moroland and the Moros retained a large degree of political, cultural, and economic autonomy.

The condition of the Moros did not improve under American colonization in 1898. Though the Americans were not concerned with converting the Moros to

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Christianity, they still aimed to gain Moro recognition of American authority over Moroland. At the end of the second Philippine war of independence in 1902, the U.S. decided to implement direct control over the Moros. The Moros violently resisted and the two sides engaged in intermittent fighting from 1902 to 1914.

Though the Philippines gained independence from the U.S. in 1946 the Moro situation did not improve as the Philippine presidents attempted to assimilate them into mainstream society. The Moros felt displaced, oppressed, and marginalized in their land especially after the Philippine government allowed millions of Christians in the north to relocate to Mindanao. The 1968 and 1971 massacres of Muslim recruits in the AFP and the imposition of martial law under President Marcos prompted the Moros to organize themselves into armed groups. The first group to emerge was the MNLF in 1969, followed by the MILF in 1977, and the ASG in 1991. The next chapter will discuss the U.S.-Philippine collaboration against the ASG prior to 9/11.
CHAPTER II
U.S.-PHILIPPINE COLLABORATION AGAINST THE ASG BEFORE 9/11

The aim of Chapter II is to analyze the joint efforts of the United States and the Philippines in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. The scope of this chapter covers ten years, from 1991, when the ASG was established, until September 11, 2001. To better understand the bilateral collaboration, this chapter will be organized in five parts. It begins with some background information on the ASG from its formation in 1991, during President Corazon Aquino’s administration in the Philippines and President George H.W. Bush’s presidency in the U.S., until just prior to the 9/11 attacks. The second part discusses the U.S.-Philippine cooperation against the ASG from 1992 to 1998 under President Ramos in the Philippines, which overlaps in the U.S. with the last year of President George H.W. Bush’s term and the start of President Bill Clinton’s administration. The third part traces the joint efforts against the ASG from 1998 to January 20, 2001 under Joseph Estrada whose presidency coincides with that of Clinton in the U.S. The fourth part examines U.S.-Philippine collaboration against the ASG from January 20, 2001 to the days right before the September 11, 2001 attacks. During this period, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was President of the Philippines and George W. Bush was President of the United States. The chapter will end with a conclusion, which traces efforts made against the ASG during each of the three Filipino administrations.
Understanding the Abu Sayyaf: Developments Leading to its Establishment

Developments leading to the establishment of the ASG can be summarized under four main points. One major development was the creation of the ARMM, which caused dissatisfaction amongst some of the Moros who wanted an independent Muslim state. In 1987, in an attempt to broker peace between the Moros and the Philippine government, President Corazon Aquino met with Nur Misuari in Jolo to discuss what could be done to lessen tensions between the MNLF and the Philippine government.¹ Their discussions covered the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, which was signed by Misuari and President Ferdinand Marcos through the intercession of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The Agreement called for a cease-fire between the MNLF and the Philippine government, and provided for the creation of an autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao, which would encompass 13 provinces. It also allowed the Moros to exercise their own legislative power. However, peace never came to fruition as Marcos faltered on his end of the agreement and the MNLF splintered, resulting in the creation of the MILF.

Aquino tried to ameliorate the situation by enshrining the Tripoli Agreement in the 1987 constitution. In 1989, pursuant to the 1987 constitution, Congress enacted Republic Act No. 6734 providing for the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). But, in a referendum, only four provinces (Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi) and two cities (Cotabato City and Marawi City) opted to join the

On November 6, 1990, the ARMM was officially inaugurated in Cotobato City, the provisional capital of the ARMM. The creation of the ARMM did not bring the improvements that it was expected to produce and created further tensions between the Moros and the Philippine government.

The second development leading to the establishment of the ASG in Basilan in 1991 was Abdurajak Jalajalani’s anger over the creation of the ARMM, as he believed that jihad should be used to achieve a larger Islamic state in the southern Philippines not limited to four states. His premise for creating the ASG was for a “Muslim Mujahideen that would be committed to fighting and dying for the cause of Islam.” It is important to note Janjalani’s background to better understand his desire for an independent Muslim state in the Philippines.

Janjalani was born on November 8, 1963 on Basilan, and belonged to the Tausug ethnic group. In 1980, he became a member of the Al-Islamic Tabligh, a Muslim fundamentalist movement. Al-Islamic Tabligh received funding from radical Muslim groups in countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which allowed the group’s members to study in the Middle East. In 1981, he accepted a scholarship to study Islamic jurisprudence and Arabic at Ummu I-Qura University, in Saudi Arabia, and completed his studies in 1984. He went back to the Philippines for three years before traveling in

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2 Ibid., 102.

3 Maria Ressa, Seeds of Terror , 26.

4 Billye Hutchison, Abu Sayyaf  (Alabma: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2009), 4.

1987 to Afghanistan where he trained in a Mujahidin camp and fought the Soviet occupation. In 1988, he traveled to Peshawar, Pakistan where he reportedly met Osama bin Laden. Then in 1990, he traveled back to the Philippines, and, outraged over the creation of the ARMM, began recruiting for the ASG.

Janjalani played on the widespread local grievances of corruption, economic disparities, and political repression to recruit young, unemployed, and marginalized Muslims. He used the rural and mountainous areas of Mindanao to create a safe haven for training new recruits. These recruits come many mainly from Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. The formation of the ASG filled a gap in the Muslim insurgency movement. The ASG is different from the two earlier Muslim organizations in that it is not dominated by a secular, university educated elite, like the MNLF, nor by a religious elite, like the MILF. Instead, the ASG is militantly Islamic made up of unaffiliated youth, mostly considered outlaws from poor communities. The ASG had a membership of around 650 during its inception in 1991.

The ASG’s early activities were directed mostly at Christian churches, Christian missionaries, and Christian communities. One of its first attacks was the killing of two

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American evangelists with grenades on the southern island of Mindanao in April 1991.11 In August of the same year, the ASG bombed the MV Doulos, a Christian missionary ship turned floating bookstore, which was docked in Zamboanga city. This attack was followed by similar bombings on Zamboanga airport and on Roman Catholic churches in the southern part of the Philippines.12

A third development leading to the establishment of the ASG was Janjalani’s connection to Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network and the financial support Janjalani received from them both. According to Philippine intelligence reports, Janjalani first met Osama bin Laden in Peshawar through Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Janjalani was then studying at Sayyaf’s school, Dawa’a al-Jihad, a notorious meeting place for terrorists.13 Sayyaf’s beliefs in the strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam greatly influenced Janjalani and Sayyaf became his mentor. Janjalani named the ASG after this teacher.

The relationship between Janjalani and bin Laden was mutually beneficial. Janjalani’s desire to fight for an independent Muslim state was helped by the designs of bin Laden. When Osama bin Laden decided to increase the scope of the al-Qaeda network to Southeast Asia, he called upon Janjalani to help him, and the ASG served as a

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base for terrorist operations in the region.\textsuperscript{14} Al-Qaeda was crucial in providing financial and organizational support to the ASG in its early days.

Al-Qaeda’s financial support to the ASG came through the informal banking system known as “hawala,” which made it easy to transfer terrorist funds without being detected. Hawala is the primary conduit for terrorist financial transfers because it is based on a trust system in which no money is ever wired, names and accounts of the senders and receivers are not used, and no records are kept. It is also relatively cheaper to use the hawala system as the commission is only 1-2 percent compared to the average banking transfer fee of 15 percent.\textsuperscript{15}

Al-Qaeda used the hawala banking system to transfer money to Islamic charities in the Philippines, which were set up in the late 1980’s by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, to expand the al-Qaeda network to Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{16} Khalifa then used these charities as fronts to funnel money to ASG. He was under orders to “offer funding and support to Janjalani to develop a group that would aim to create an Islamic state in the Southern Philippines.”\textsuperscript{17} Khalifa married a local woman, integrated into Filipino society, and asked Filipino politicians to sit on the boards of his charities.\textsuperscript{18} According to Philippine

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} 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): 183.

\textsuperscript{16} Ressa, \textit{Seeds of Terror}, 108.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
National Security Advisor, Roilo Golez, Khalifa “built up the good will of the community through charity and then turned segments of the population into agents.”¹⁹

One of Khalifa’s charities in the Philippines was the Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO), which built schools, mosques, and pharmacies, but only in areas controlled by the ASG.²⁰ About 10 to 30 percent of the funding went to legitimate relief projects while the rest went to terrorist operations, such as purchasing arms for the ASG. The IIRO quickly caught the attention of Philippine law enforcement officials, and a Philippine intelligence report stated that the “IIRO which claims to be a relief institution, is being utilized by foreign extremists as a pipeline through which funding for the local extremists are being coursed through.”²¹ However, it took the Philippine government six years, from 1995 to 2001, to take down the IIRO as it was a well-connected charity that received support from the Saudi royal family and whose board members in the Philippines branch included the Saudi Ambassador. The Saudi Arabian government used the visas and jobs for Filipino guest workers in Saudi Arabia as leverage to keep the IIRO open.²²

Another important Khalifa charity was the International Relations and Information Center (IRIC). The director of the IRIC was Abu Omar, Khalifa’s brother-in-law. The IRIC would later fund the abortive 1995 Bojinka Plot aimed at blowing up

¹⁹ Abuza, “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The financial network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya,” 169.

²⁰ Ibid., 176.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.
12 American jetliners, and at assassinating the Pope. However, the IRIC was closed in 1995, but its operations and staff were taken over by Khalifa associate Mohammed Amin al-Ghafari, who would eventually be deported in 2002.\footnote{Ibid., 176.}

A fourth major development in the establishment of the ASG involved the 1992 closure of the U.S. bases. At the time, a pressing issue between the U.S. and the Philippines was the 99-year rent-free lease of the U.S. bases under the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) of 1947. Under the 1966 Rusk-Ramos Agreement, which reduced the lease to 25 years from 1966, a renewal of the lease had to be approved by September 16, 1991, its expiration date. However, the Philippine Senate voted against the renewal and, in November 1991, after the Mount Pinatubo eruption, the Philippine government ordered the U.S. to withdraw from its military bases in the Philippines, which included Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base.\footnote{Thomas Lum, The Republic of the Philippines and U.S. Interests (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 11.} The closure of the U.S. bases in 1992 created a power vacuum in the region and was detrimental to Philippine national security. Without the U.S. presence, the ASG was able to grow its membership and to heighten its terrorist activities, while China also started flexing its power in the South China Sea.

The closure of the U.S. bases in 1992 took place under President Aquino who is credited with paving the way for negotiations between the Moro groups and the Philippine government. Her inclusion of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement in the new 1987 Philippine Constitution became viewed as a blueprint for peace between the Moros and
the Philippine government. Her successor, Fidel Ramos, was left to continue the peace process with the Moros.

**U.S.-Philippines Cooperation under President Ramos, 1992-1998**

Fidel V. Ramos was born on March 18, 1928 in Lingayen, Pangasinan, which is located on the island of Luzon.\(^{25}\) He is the eldest, and only son, of Narciso Ramos, a journalist who would become a five-term congressman and then Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Angela Valdez, a teacher and social worker. Fidel received his bachelor’s degree from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, and his master’s degree in civil engineering from the University of Illinois.\(^{26}\) He is the only Filipino president to have been a professional soldier, and the first and only non-Catholic, as he was raised in the Protestant faith.

Ramos is also the second cousin of ousted president, Ferdinand Marcos, who appointed him as Chief of the Philippine Police in 1972, which made him responsible for enforcing martial law.\(^{27}\) However, in the 1986 elections, when Marcos claimed victory despite allegations of electoral fraud, Ramos began supporting Corazon Aquino, which sparked the “People Power” movement that forced Marcos into exile. When he was appointed Chief of Staff under Aquino, Ramos undertook a series of internal reforms designed to professionalize the Armed Forces of the Philippines. His reforms included


\(^{26}\) Ibid.

dismissing senior officers perceived as Marcos loyalists and implementing a widespread program of reeducation and retraining to instill professional military values at all levels.\footnote{Ronald Dolan, \textit{Philippines: A Country Study}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1993), 250.}

In December 1991, Ramos declared his candidacy for president under the People Power Party. He campaigned on the promise that he would continue the policies of his predecessor, Corazon Aquino, who brought democracy back to the Philippines. He won the elections on May 11, 1992 despite garnering only 23.58\% of the vote, the lowest plurality in the country’s history.\footnote{“Fidel V. Ramos” from \textit{Wikipedia} [database online], available from \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fidel_V._Ramos#1992_Presidential_Election} (accessed September 11, 2011).} Fidel Ramos was elected as the 12\textsuperscript{th} president of the Philippines in the first multi-party election since the People’s Power Revolution in 1986. He was also the first to hold power under the new Freedom Constitution. Ramos’ Vice-President was Joseph Estrada, a former actor. At the time of his victory, Ramos was 64 years old, the oldest Filipino to become president.\footnote{Ibid.}

As president, one of Ramos’ main goals was to increase economic recovery throughout the country. Ramos hoped to make the Philippines a newly industrialized country by the year 2000, and coined the term “Philippines 2000,” which encapsulated his vision of the Philippines under his leadership.\footnote{Ibid.} The Four Ds of reform under Ramos were devolution, decentralization, deregulation, and democratization.\footnote{Ibid.}
Another one of Ramos’ main goals was to seek a peaceful resolution to the Moro problem. In fact, in February 1992, three months prior to the presidential election, Ramos secretly went to Libya to visit with Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who had played a major role in reaching the Tripoli Agreement between the MNLF and the Philippine government in 1976.33 Ramos hoped to get Gaddafi’s assistance to reopen peace talks with the MNLF, which depended on bringing Misuari back to the negotiation table.34 Gaddafi agreed to help and the peace process resumed shortly after the elections in May 1992.35

Resolving the Moro problem also meant that Ramos had to deal with the problem of the ASG, which was then involved in acts of terrorism, including kidnappings for ransom, extortion, bombings, and assassinations. In 1992, the ASG rebels were held responsible for bombings at Christian churches in Mindanao and a bombing at Zamboanga airport. In May 1992, the ASG gained international attention when it publicly claimed responsibility for assassinating Italian Catholic priest, Father Salvatore Carzedda, in Zamboanga City. Janjalani wrote an open letter stating that the ASG had killed Father Carzedda and warned of additional violent actions to attain its Islamist goals.36

34 Ibid.
To deal with the Moro problem, first, Ramos wanted to build an infrastructure to develop the southern part of the Philippines. He proposed to channel government funds to promote the economic development of the resource-rich, but war-ravaged island of Mindanao. Accordingly, Ramos built roads and bridges to help develop their economy.

Second, Ramos attempted to structure a peace process that would help resolve the conflict between the Moros and the Philippine government and promote national reconciliation with all of the separatists groups. Therefore, in July 1992, Ramos unveiled the National Unification Commission program that laid the groundwork for talks, not only with the Moros but also with the communist insurgents and with the military rebels. Then, from April 14-16, 1993, upon request by Ramos and the MNLF, the Indonesian government hosted peace talks for the two groups in Cipanas, Indonesia. The talks resulted in a Statement of Understanding, which stipulated that formal talks would be held and that any outstanding issues of the Tripoli Agreement would be discussed. As agreed, the first round of formal talks were held in Jakarta from October 25 – November 7, 2003, which resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement. In the formal talks, the MNLF and the Philippine government agreed on issues such as implementing an interim cease-fire agreement and establishing committees to work out the details left for discussion by the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF was the only Moro group that

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participated in the talks, as the MILF and the ASG refused to negotiate with the government.

Meanwhile on June 21, 1993, the Philippine government entered into a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the United States as part of a comprehensive bilateral security arrangement. The SOFA establishes the rights and privileges of U.S. military and civilian personnel stationed in the Philippines, and it cites the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 as the basis of the agreement.\(^{40}\)

While the MNLF and the Philippines government engaged in peace talks and the U.S. and the Philippines discussed security issues, the ASG continued their activities with the planning of a large scale attack, dubbed the Bojinka Plot. The Bojinka Plot was planned by Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, al-Qaeda operatives, who arrived in the Philippines in 1994 to create an al-Qaeda cell in Manila.\(^{41}\) The plan was to assassinate Pope John Paul II, to plant bombs aboard 12 U.S. airliners flying trans-Pacific routes, and to crash an airplane into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) headquarters in Langley, Virginia.\(^{42}\) Fortunately, the plan was exposed after a fire that started in Yousef’s apartment led to the discovery of explosive materials, arousing police suspicion.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.


\(^{41}\) Ibid.

The ASG’s activities turned even more violent in 1995 during its raid of the Christian town of Ipil in Mindanao. On the night of April 3, 1995, the ASG, heavily armed and dressed in military fatigues, entered Ipil and continued to arrive through the next morning. Residents of the isolated town, with a population of only 52,000, noticed them, but were not particularly alarmed as they thought they were soldiers. However, at 12:30 p.m. on April 4, one of the disguised ASG rebels entered a restaurant and shot dead a Philippine army major. For the next 2½ hours the ASG opened fire indiscriminately and without warning. They also looted stores, robbed banks, used hostages as human shields, and then set fire to the town. Military forces did not appear until 4:00 p.m., 4 ½ hours after the raid began. At the end of the raid, the ASG left 53 people dead, 44 wounded, and a white flag with the Abu Sayaaf name on it. The ASG also left the town carrying sacks of cash totaling $1 million. Some assumed that the attack was a fundraiser for the ASG. To others, it was in retaliation for the arrest of six Muslim militants on April 1, 1995 for illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

Ironically, Ipil is the home-base for the 102nd Infantry Brigade and is only 40 minutes away from South Command, the Filipino army’s headquarters for the southern Philippines. Despite the proximity of the Philippines armed forces, there was no

44 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
intelligence warning prior to the attack, and no response from the 50,000 troops stationed nearby.\textsuperscript{48} The Ramos administration suspected that ASG sympathizers at South Command purposely failed to report the attack. The Ipil raid was a turning point for the ASG as it was the event that eventually led the U.S. Department of State to designate the group as a terrorist organization. This raid resulted in a crackdown on the Filipino military and in a fervent manhunt for the ASG. For instance, two days after the raid, President Ramos fired the leader of the army’s South Command, Brigadier General Regino Lacson, as well as the commander of the 102\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Brigade near Ipil, Colonel Roberto Santiago. The same week, Ramos instructed more than 1,000 AFP troops to storm the surrounding area and to capture the rebels.

Despite problems with the ASG, President Ramos continued to engage in peace negotiations with the MNLF. On September 2, 1996, Ramos and Nur Misuari signed the Final Peace Agreement, which ended a 24-year separatist movement by the MNLF and established a four-province Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The ARMM provided for a legislative assembly, executive council, special regional security forces, and an economic and financial system. The agreement called for a three-year transition period, during which Misuari would act as ARMM governor while the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) would supervise development programs.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

Ramos had great expectations in signing the Agreement, mainly unity between the Moros and the Philippine government and the development of infrastructure in the southern Philippines. However, less than a month after the document was signed, it was clear that the deal was greatly flawed. First, Executive Order (EO) 371, the presidential directive for carrying out the agreement, did not address issues pertaining to Moro land holdings in the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) as the Moros continued to lack property rights. Also, the governing bodies that were created to aid the transition, namely the SPCPD and the Consultative Assembly (CA), were too powerless to make an impact. They had very “limited funding, no police powers, no control over national projects and programs that were supposed to be within their remit, and no jurisdiction over significant sections of the bureaucracy in the region.” EO 371 was also supposed to create 12 aid programs, but failed to address the basic needs of the people within the ARMM, needs such as water, medical care, sanitation, and the development of roads and bridges. The failure of the agreement only fueled tensions between the Muslims and the government.

Around this time, Ramos also had to deal with the mounting threat from China. In early 1995, the Philippines discovered a primitive Chinese military structure on Mischief Reef in the Spratly Island Chain in the South China Sea. Since this reef is

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
only 130 miles away from the coast of Palawan, the Philippines viewed the Chinese action as a creeping invasion. President Ramos turned to the Clinton administration for support and considered inviting U.S. forces back to the Philippines on a limited basis. This led the U.S. and the Philippines to begin negotiations in 1996 on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) to help the Philippines deal with the China security concern and the ASG problem. The VFA greatly improved relations between the U.S. and the Philippines.\textsuperscript{54}

Another important milestone in the U.S.-Philippines bilateral relationship was Ramos’ declaration of Philippine-American Friendship Day on July 4, 1996, which commemorated the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Philippine independence. This day is still celebrated every year. Ramos’ state visit to the United States in 1998 was also a key event in renewing relations between the U.S. and the Philippines.

While the bilateral ties and the Philippine government-MNLF relationship began to make headway, Ramos still had to deal with the ASG problem. The ASG continued to stage ambushes, bombings, kidnappings, and executions, mainly against Filipino Christians on Basilan and on the west coast of Mindanao.\textsuperscript{55} Its manpower grew steadily until 1996, when operations began to decline, partly as a result of the 1996 settlement between the Philippine government and the MNLF.\textsuperscript{56} The ASG’s ties to al-Qaeda also

\textsuperscript{54} Banlaoi, \textit{The Abu Sayyaf}, 2.
\textsuperscript{55} Niksch, \textit{Abu Sayyaf}, 2.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
deteriorated after the Ramzi Yousef plot was uncovered and Mohammed Khalifa left the Philippines, which meant a decrease in financial support from the al-Qaeda network. This decrease in funding was a key reason why the ASG increased its kidnappings for ransom.

The decline of the ASG was also reflected in the killing of Adburajak Janjalani by AFP troops in 1998 during a shoot out in Basilan. After a power struggle within the group, Khadaffy Janjalani, Adburajak’s brother, eventually emerged as its new leader. Under Khadaffy, the ASG experienced a period of relative inactivity turning away from its ideological roots and becoming a loose group of bandits who performed petty crimes and kidnapping for ransom.

By this time, Ramos’ term was coming to a close and he announced his support for Jose de Venecia, Jr. as his successor, but Venecia lost the election to Vice-President, Joseph Estrada, who took office on June 30, 1998. During his six years in office, Ramos was credited for revitalizing and renewing international confidence in the economy of the Philippines, then labeled as “Asia’s New Tiger.”

**Bilateral Ties under President Estrada 1998 - January 20, 2001**

Joseph “Erap” Estrada was born Joseph Ejercito on April 19, 1937 in Tondo, an urban district of Manila. He belonged to an upper middle class family, and was the eighth of ten children of Emilio Ejercito, a government engineer, and Maria Marcelo, a homemaker. Estrada enrolled in an engineering course at the Mapua Institute of Technology in an effort to please his father, but later dropped out to pursue an acting
career. His parents fervently objected to his chosen career and forbade him from using the family name. Thus, he adopted the screen name Joseph “Erap” Estrada.

Estrada entered politics in 1968 when he became the mayor of San Juan, a suburb of Manila. He held this position for 17 years. In 1987, he was elected to the Senate and was one of the “Magnificent 12” who rejected the treaty providing for the continuation of U.S. bases in the Philippines. In 1992, Estrada ran for the vice-presidency as the running mate of Eduardo Cojuanco, Jr. under the Nationalist People’s Coalition Party. Cojuanco lost the election to Ramos, but Estrada won the vice presidential contest.

In 1998, Estrada ran for the presidency though he faced significant opposition. For instance, Fidel Ramos did not publicly endorse him but instead announced his support for House Speaker Jose de Venecia. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church also denied support to Estrada because he admitted to having four children by women other than his wife. However, he did receive crucial support from former first lady Imelda Marcos, the widow of former president Ferdinand Marcos and a then member of Congress. He was also very popular among the poor for his championing of their rights in his roles as an actor. Despite opposition, Estrada won the 2000 presidential election with 40% of the vote. He became the 13th President of the Philippines and the first Filipino after the People Power Revolution to be elected to both the vice-presidency and then the presidency. His vice-president was Senator Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

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58 Ibid.
Estrada’s goals as president included restoring investor confidence in the economy, protecting the poor from economic crisis, and defeating the Muslim separatists. He also recognized the importance of continuing to strengthen the U.S-Philippine relationship. Under him, the Philippines ratified the Visiting Forces Agreement between the Philippines and the U.S. in May 1999. The VFA revived the bilateral security relationship, which had declined following the U.S. withdrawal of military bases in 1992. The VFA allowed for the dispatch of U.S. military forces to provide military training to the AFP and other cooperative assistance, such as humanitarian projects to civilians.\(^59\) The VFA laid out the rules governing American troops on Philippine soil, and the two governments also agreed to formulate a new U.S. military support program for the Philippines. Though the ratification of the VFA was a positive step in their cooperation, the future of their security relationship was affected by several issues, such as the Philippine-China dispute in the South China Sea, the Muslim insurgency in the southern Philippines, and the weak defense system of the Philippines.\(^60\)

In February 2000, U.S. and Philippine forces engaged in *Balikatan* or “shoulder-to-shoulder,” exercises on Palawan Island. The goal of these joint military exercises was to enhance the capability of both Philippine and U.S. forces in counterterrorism.\(^61\) Its four specific objectives were:


\(^{61}\) Ibid.
1. To improve the interoperability of Philippine and U.S. forces against terrorism

2. To enhance the combat capability of Southern Command infantry battalions in Mindanao

3. To ensure quality in intelligence processing

4. To upgrade Philippine-U.S. capability to wage effective civil, military, and psychological operations.

There were some problems associated with the Balikatan exercises, namely the role that the U.S. would play in training the AFP. U.S. military personnel wanted a combat role but this was not allowed as they were only there to train the Filipino armed forces, though they could use force for self-defense. They eventually agreed on separate but parallel command structures.

Meanwhile, under the leadership of Khadaffy Janjalani, the ASG regained its strength and achieved greater effectiveness as a terrorist organization. Khadaffy developed ties with the MILF and established links with the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Indonesia-based, Southeast Asian terrorist organization with ties to al-Qaeda.

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63 Niksch, *Philippine-U.S. Security Relations*, 16.

64 Rommel Banlaoi, “The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no.2 (August 2002), 304.

65 Lum, *The Republic of the Philippines*, 12.

66 Ibid.
also re-emphasized the ASG’s goal of creating an independent Muslim state in the name of Islam.

With Khadaffy as leader, the ASG began to geographically extend its kidnapping operations while specifically targeting foreigners, with a principal aim of extracting ransom payments. For instance, the ASG kidnapped 20 foreigners and a Filipino from a resort in Sipidan, Malaysia, in April 2000 and demanded ransom. The ASG then took the hostages to an ASG base in Jolo. In July 2000, three French journalists and a German journalist visiting the ASG on Jolo were also taken hostage. In September 2000, Estrada ordered the AFP to commit over 1,500 troops in Jolo to hunt down the kidnappers and rescue the prisoners. The recently resumed annual U.S.-Philippines military exercises proved to be effective in the AFP’s ability to combat the ASG as they successfully killed some ASG members, captured 20 others, and rescued five of the captives. The remaining hostages were later released after mediation with then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and a ransom payment of $20 million.

Using ransom money as their main source of funding, the ASG became better equipped with enough manpower and weapons to continue their activities. Philippine

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67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
intelligence officials estimated that the ASG used the ransom money to expand membership to roughly 1,000 men and to acquire equipment, boats, and weapons. At its peak in 2000, the ASG was said to have close to 4,000 members.

While the U.S. and the Philippines worked together to combat the ASG problem, President Estrada faced his own personal troubles. In October 2000, a corruption scandal surrounded him when a fellow politician made a claim that Estrada had accepted millions of dollars worth of bribes. Estrada also faced mounting criticism of his lifestyle. For example, he held cabinet meetings in a nightclub that he owned. He was also accused of receiving kickbacks from jueteng (an illegal gambling game) lords. The scandals resulted in impeachment proceedings against Estrada, but his allies blocked his trial in the Senate. Meanwhile, other Filipinos protested against Estrada. EDSA II was the four-day revolution consisting of 40,000 citizens who rallied against him. On January 20, 2001, Estrada was ousted from office amidst mass protests and jailed on charges of corruption and economic plunder. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had served as his Vice President, now became President as the result of a Supreme Court decision. The responsibility for quelling the ASG was now in her hands.

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
75 Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, State and Society in the Philippines (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 277.
Continuing Relations under President Arroyo,
January-September 2001

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became the 14th president of the Philippines on January 20, 2001. She was sworn into the presidency after her predecessor, Joseph Estrada, was forced from office following widespread demonstrations in the EDSA Revolution II. The Philippines Supreme Court unanimously endorsed the transfer of power and, under the Philippine Constitution; she was eligible for another full 6-year term as president.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was born on April 5, 1947 in San Juan, Manila, into a prominent political family. Her late father was former Philippine president, Diosdado Macapagal. After receiving her Bachelor’s degree in economics and graduating with honors from Assumption College in 1968, she studied for two years at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service where she met and befriended future U.S. president Bill Clinton. She cut short her U.S. studies to marry Filipino businessman, Miguel “Mike” Arroyo. She later taught in the Philippines at Assumption College. While teaching, she earned a Master’s degree in economics from the Ateneo de Manila University and a Ph.D. in economics from the University of the Philippines.

Arroyo was working as a university professor when President Corazon Aquino appointed her Undersecretary of Trade and Industry. Arroyo won a Senate seat in 1992 and was reelected in 1995. In 1998, she was elected vice-president alongside President

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77 Ibid.
Joseph Estrada who named Arroyo Secretary of Social Welfare and Development. In 2001, she became the second female president of the Philippines.

Arroyo identified four core values on which her government would function: winning the war on poverty; emphasizing high morals in government and society; promoting new politics based on party platforms and programs; and leading by example. She stressed poverty eradication and embarked on development projects, such as improving the transportation and road system. She inherited numerous problems, including an unstable economy and violent protests instigated by Estrada’s supporters. She was accused of giving Estrada special treatment when she pardoned him on corruption charges. Arroyo was also thrust into the ongoing battle between the Philippine government and the Muslim rebel forces, especially the ASG. However, she was able to engage in peace talks with the MILF.

Shortly after her confirmation as president, Arroyo announced her intention to begin peaceful negotiations with the MILF. On January 31, 2001, the Arroyo administration initiated its first back-channel dialogue with the MILF. Arroyo met with Ustadz Yahyah and Imam Omar Pasigan, spiritual advisers of the MILF central committee in Maguindanao. The two religious leaders declared that they would relay the new administration’s readiness to restore the peace process to MILF chief Hashim Sagmit and Sagmit-Mendoza, *The Filipino Moving Onward*, 325.

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Salamat. The MILF was more comfortable dealing with Arroyo as MILF legal counsel. Lanang Ali, stated, “We find the Arroyo government more sincere in finding a solution to the problems of Mindanao unlike the previous administration.” In August 2001, in Malaysia, President Arroyo signed a ceasefire agreement with the MILF in hopes that it would encourage peace in war-ravaged Mindanao. Arroyo, however, was not as patient with the ASG, which had increased its kidnappings for ransom.

Arroyo vowed to take a hard-line stance against the ASG, refusing to negotiate with them, and launching military operations against them. This problem with the ASG became more serious when, on May 27, 2001, the ASG traveled by speedboat to attack a tourist resort on Palawan. There, ASG rebels kidnapped 20 people including three Americans – Guillermo Sobero, Martin Burnham, and Gracia Burnham. When faced with this crisis, Arroyo refused to negotiate with the terrorists, unlike Estrada who had allowed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to donate $25 million in order to free hostages taken by the ASG. Instead, she ordered the military to pursue the ASG kidnappers through the remote islands of the Southern Philippines and imposed a news blackout on the military operation.

The U.S. became involved as Department of State Spokesman Philip Reeker called for the “swift, safe and unconditional release of all the hostages.”

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Philippines also asked for help from the U.S., which the U.S. obliged by supplying a $92 million aid package that included eight Huey helicopters, a C-130 transport, and 30,000 M-16s. The U.S. also dispatched an Army assessment team, which began training a new elite all-Filipino counterterrorism unit.

Meanwhile, Americans demanded that the George W. Bush administration become more involved in freeing the hostages. Congressional representatives flew to the Philippines to meet with military and government officials to push for a more active U.S. role, requesting that Americans fight alongside the AFP. Tensions arose when the Philippine government rejected Bush’s request to allow foreign troops to engage in combat with Philippine forces. Arroyo said that such an action would require an act of Congress, something that would not likely happen. She then insisted on “American training, but not American troops.” A U.S. Congressional source acknowledged, “The Philippine government is extremely sensitive to what terms the Americans use. They don’t like the word ‘involvement.’ They prefer ‘cooperation.’ But there could be many more Americans involved in the coming months.”

Regarding the ASG hostage crisis in Palawan, many of the hostages had their ransoms paid and were released after a few months of captivity. However, the Burnhams were held for over a year and, according to ex-hostages, the ASG demanded $2 million as


85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.
ransom for their release. In the case of Sobero, he was beheaded in June 2001. In the case of Martin Burnham, he was killed in June 2002 during a shootout between the Philippine military and the ASG. Of the three captured Americans, only Grace Burnham survived and was released in 2002.

Arroyo’s first few months in office saw an increase in U.S. involvement in the fight against the ASG. The U.S. government placed the ASG on a list of organizations whose assets were frozen by the U.S. due to its connections to al-Qaeda. The U.S. and the Philippines were now inextricably linked to the struggle against international terrorism, especially against the ASG.

**Overview of Efforts Against the ASG Before 9/11**

The ASG problem emerged during President Aquino’s administration and continued under Presidents Ramos, Estrada, and Arroyo. In 1987, in an attempt to broker peace with the Moros, Aquino began negotiations with Nur Misuari, leader of the MNLF, which led to the establishment of the ARMM. Abdurajak Janjalani, a former MNLF member, disagreed with the ARMM, which only provided an autonomous Muslim region, as he believed in using jihad to create an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines. In 1991, Abdurajak Janjalani splintered from the MNLF and founded the ASG in Basilan, an island in the Sulu Archipelago. The ASG received funding from Islamic charities set up in the Philippines by Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khalifa. Early ASG attacks were directed mostly at Christian churches and missionaries. Before her term ended, she had to deal with the closing of the

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87 Ibid., 9.
U.S. bases, which allowed the ASG to grow its membership. When Aquino’s term ended in 1992, her successor, President Ramos was left to deal with the ASG.

Under Ramos, the ASG emboldened its activities. In April 1995, the ASG raided the town of Ipil, Zamboanga, killed 53 people, and then set the town on fire. Despite the proximity of two military bases, South Command and the 102nd Infantry Brigade, the AFP did not respond to the attack until 4½ hours after it began because of alleged collusion with ASG. This led Ramos to begin a crackdown on the Filipino military and a fervent manhunt for the ASG. He fired the leaders of the army’s South Command and of the 102nd Infantry, and then sent over 1,000 AFP troops to storm the Ipil area and to engage in combat with the ASG. The AFP was successful in killing some ASG rebels and capturing others. Besides the ASG threat, Ramos was also concerned about China’s creeping military advances on Mischief Reef in the Spratly Island chain in the South China Sea. Due to mounting security concerns, Ramos turned to the Clinton administration for support and considered inviting the U.S. forces back to the Philippines on a limited basis. In 1996, the U.S. and the Philippines reopened negotiations on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and Ramos signed it in 1998.

In May 1999, Joseph Estrada ratified the VFA, one of his first acts as president. The VFA was the legal basis for U.S. military forces to provide military training to the AFP. Thus, in February 2000, the Clinton and Estrada administrations recommenced the Balikatan exercises. One of the objectives of Balikatan 2000 was to improve the interoperability of the Philippine and U.S. forces against terrorism. In September 2000, with U.S. support, Estrada ordered the AFP to launch an attack against the ASG in Jolo.
where 19 foreign hostages, taken from a resort in Malaysia, were being held. Within a few days, the AFP had captured 20 ASG members. As the crackdown continued, 17 of the 19 hostages were rescued or had escaped from the ASG. The remaining two were released following payment of ransom money. Estrada only served two years in office as he was ousted in January 2001, following allegations of corruption and plunder. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, his vice-president, was sworn in as president.

Arroyo took a hard line stance against the ASG, and unlike Estrada, refused to negotiate with them. In May 2001, during the George W. Bush administration, the ASG kidnapped 20 people, including three Americans, from a resort on Palawan Island. Arroyo swiftly launched a military operation to save the hostages and ordered the AFP to hunt down the kidnappers. The Bush administration became involved in the rescue of the American hostages, requesting Arroyo’s approval to allow U.S. forces to fight alongside the AFP. She rejected the request, stating that American troops can train the AFP in counterterrorism efforts, but cannot engage in combat against the ASG. Some of the victims were eventually rescued by the Philippine military, others were killed, and the remainder escaped on their own. However, it would take until June 2002 for all of the hostages to be released. Meanwhile, on September 11, 2011, a tragic event would occur that marked a pivotal point in the U.S.-Philippine relationship. The next chapter will discuss the closer U.S.-Philippines collaboration against the ASG after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S.
In January 2001, George W. Bush became the 43rd President of the United States. Within eight months of holding office, he faced an event that would come to define his presidency – the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Though it was very tragic, the 9/11 attacks were instrumental in reinvigorating the U.S.-Philippine security alliance. President Arroyo came to Bush’s aid and together the two leaders forged ahead to fight terrorism.

The aim of Chapter III is to analyze the joint efforts of the United States and the Philippines in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf during President Bush’s first term, especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The scope of this chapter covers the three-year period from 2001 to 2004 of President Bush’s presidency. To better understand the bilateral collaboration, this chapter is in five parts. The first part will show the poor state of the U.S.-Philippine relationship before 9/11, and the closer ties after 9/11. The second part will examine the cooperation in 2002, while the third part will discuss the collaboration in 2003 and 2004. The fifth part will conclude the chapter by summarizing the U.S.-Philippine efforts to combat the ASG in President Bush’s first term.

The U.S.-Philippine Relationship in 2001

The United States and the Philippines were both engaged in a political transition at the start of 2001. In America, the Supreme Court decided that George W. Bush was the winner over Al Gore in the contentious 2000 election and his inauguration took place
on January 20, 2001. On the same day, thousands of miles away, Philippine president Joseph Estrada was ousted from his position and Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo took the oath of office.

The two new presidents shared a few similarities between them, besides being sworn in on the same day. For instance, both are children of former presidents. George W. Bush’s father is George H.W. Bush, who served as the 41st president from 1989-1992. Arroyo’s father was the late Diosdado Macapagal, who was president of the Philippines from 1961-1965. They also came to power not by winning their elections but by a Supreme Court decision in their respective countries. Arroyo was declared president after Estrada was overthrown in a popular people’s uprising. Bush’s election was controversial because he was the electoral vote winner but lost the popular vote to Gore. They are also about the same age, with President Bush older than Arroyo by only nine months.

Just prior to the start of Bush and Arroyo’s first term in office, the U.S-Philippine relationship had begun to warm up again after the cooling of relations in 1992 with the closure of the U.S. military bases. Then in 1995, with China’s attack on Mischief Reef, an island claimed by the Philippines in the Spratly Islands, the U.S.-Philippines ties became closer. China’s economic and military rise caused concern for both the U.S. and the Philippines. The lack of cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines over the past decade had created a power vacuum in Southeast Asia, which China readily exploited. The two nations decided to reassess their security alliance and began to negotiate an agreement that would provide a legal framework for American and Filipino
troops to engage in joint military exercises in the Philippines. This was the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), signed on February 11, 1998, and then ratified by the Philippines Senate on June 1, 1999. The VFA drew upon Article II of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) to provide a legal basis for the American military presence under the Balikatan exercises as the Philippine constitution prohibits long-term basing and combat operations by foreign forces. The MDT states that both parties would “separately and jointly by self-help and mutual aid maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.”

For the United States, signing the VFA allowed it to flex its military muscle in the face of China’s burgeoning strength. Under the agreement, the U.S. reinstated joint exercises and resumed naval ship visits to ports in the Philippines. An improvement in security relations would mean greater access to air and naval infrastructures in the Philippines which would facilitate the deployment of U.S. troops should a crisis occur in Southeast Asia. The U.S. also hoped that signing the VFA would lead to a general improvement in bilateral relations as well as “familiarity, cooperation, and interoperability of the two nations’ armed forces.”

From Manila’s perspective, signing the VFA meant acquiring the assistance and support needed to modernize the AFP. An improvement in U.S.-Philippine relations could lead to an increase in the level of U.S. military assistance at least until the

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1 Renato Cruz De Castro, “The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations: A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century?” Asian Survey 43, no. 6, 980.

2 Ibid., 979.

3 Ibid.
Philippines could finance its own military modernization. Having the U.S. military on their side, also provides a hedge for the Philippines should a conflict erupt from its territorial claims in the Spratly Islands.4

One of the Philippines’ reasons for reinvigorating the U.S.-Philippine relationship was the hope of receiving military assistance for its ill-equipped and poorly trained Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The abolishment of the Military Bases Agreement in 1992 had revealed the weakness of the Philippine military. The withdrawal of the American forces and the decline in the U.S. military assistance package left the Philippines with insufficient defense resources and resulted in the deterioration of the aging and obsolete military equipment, which the AFP had relied on the U.S. to maintain.5 Thus, limited resources and equipment greatly hindered AFP operations against the ASG.

The VFA revitalized their security relationship by providing the framework for the development and implementation of an effective AFP modernization program through combined military exercises.6 Under the VFA, the U.S. resumed joint training with the AFP through the Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises, which were first used in the 1980’s. Balikatan exercises began in 1981 and were held annually by U.S. and Philippine forces until 1996 when it was suspended due to questions regarding the

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4 Ibid.


6 Cruz De Castro, 980.
legality of U.S. forces in the country for joint training purposes.\textsuperscript{7} In these exercises, U.S. troops advised, trained, and assisted the AFP in different military operations.

Meanwhile, the ASG was still going through a period of decline after the devastating loss of their leader, Abdurajak Janjalani, in 1998. The members turned into a loose group of bandits conducting a number of violent, though hardly political, kidnappings.\textsuperscript{8} From 2000-01, the ASG were responsible for 16 deaths and 140 hostages but no acts of political-religious terrorism.\textsuperscript{9} They were well armed, but had turned away from their ideological roots. The ASG would soon become a target of an international anti-terrorism campaign with the 9/11 bombing incidents.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001 nineteen terrorists hijacked four American passenger jets and intentionally crashed them into four U.S. cities. The first two planes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. The third plane collided into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, while the fourth plane, which was supposedly headed towards either the Capitol or the White House in Washington, DC, crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers attempted to take control. Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks, which were soon blamed on the al-Qaeda network. Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden denied involvement but praised the


\textsuperscript{8} Zachary Abuza, \textit{Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf}, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 7.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
attacks and the mastermind behind them. Eventually, however, Bin Laden publicly admitted his direct link to 9/11.

On the evening of the attacks, President Bush made an appeal to world leaders to unite against global terrorism. In his address to the joint session of Congress and to the American people, he said of terrorism, “This is the world’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress, pluralism, tolerance and freedom. We ask every nation to join us.” The U.S was fighting, Bush said, to maintain the way of life for free nations. He took a hard line on terrorism, proclaiming that nations were either “with us” or “against us.”

President Arroyo responded to President Bush’s appeal and condemned the attacks. She declared that the Philippines was ready to “go every step of the way” with the United States, and quickly offered the American military access to the former U.S. Clark Air and Subic Naval bases as transit points for troops fighting the war against terrorism in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Philippines also granted the U.S. over-flight rights for its military aircrafts. Arroyo even expressed willingness to send Filipino troops to Afghanistan, contingent upon approval by the Philippine Congress. She stated that the reasons for her strong support of the U.S. were


11 Ibid.

based on morality and national interests.\textsuperscript{13} She defined national interest as the link between the struggle against international terrorism and the struggle against terrorism within the Philippines.\textsuperscript{14}

In connection to her pledge to fight terrorism, President Arroyo formed the Inter-Agency Task Force against International Terrorism on September 24, 2001. This Task Force was responsible for coordinating intelligence reports and facilitating the identification and neutralization of suspected terrorist cells in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{15} President Arroyo also announced a fourteen-pillar approach to combat terrorism. This approach:

- Designated a Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security as the lead anti-terrorism body;
- Sought to undertake a consolidation of intelligence projects;
- Called on the armed forces and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to address terrorist violence;
- Held accountable all public and private organizations seen to abet terrorism;
- Sought a regional consensus, and especially co-operation with Indonesia and Malaysia in the war against terrorism;
- Anticipated legal issues and concerns;
- Pursued Christian-Muslim dialogue and sought to promote ecumenism;
- Called for greater vigilance and concrete measures against all possible terrorist supplies, materials, and finances;


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
• Mobilized disaster co-ordination efforts in the event of major terrorist attacks;
• Attempted to secure critical infrastructure;
• Protected overseas workers and sought their immediate transfer if needed;
• Sought the integration of the global terrorist threat in the AFP/PNP modernization program;
• Asked for media responsibility; and,
• Sought to address the socio-economic and political roots of "perceived fanaticism and irrational violence"\textsuperscript{16}

President Bush was grateful for President Arroyo’s positive response and thanked her for being quick to take action to help the U.S. fight international terrorists. He described the Philippine initiative as “outstanding.”\textsuperscript{17} He publicly praised Arroyo in his 9/11 six-month anniversary speech for “courageously opposing the threat of terror.”\textsuperscript{18} Because of the ASG’s links to al-Qaeda and the American hostages being held by the ASG, Bush raised the prospect of increased U.S. involvement in the Philippine government’s campaign against the ASG.\textsuperscript{19}

In November 2001, President Arroyo made an official working visit to the United States and met with President Bush to reaffirm the U.S.-Philippines security relationship. The two leaders reiterated the validity and strength of the 1951 MDT. They said that the

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Banlaoi, “The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implication for Regional Security,” 295.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Cruz De Castro, “The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations,” 980.
MDT is still vital, especially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. At the same meeting, President Bush promised President Arroyo $100 million in military assistance. The two leaders also approved an integrated plan to provide a robust training package for the AFP, to deliver equipment needed to increase the Philippine military’s mobility, and to implement bilateral defense consultations. The U.S. made provisions for the following supplies: one aircraft, five helicopters, grenade launchers, mortars, sniper rifles, and night vision goggles. More importantly, Bush approved the participation of 200 U.S. troops in a two-and-a half-week joint exercise with the AFP, and 190 Special Forces to train Philippine troops on counterterrorism tactics. The troops would be deployed the following year under Balikatan 2002.

While the U.S.-Philippine relationship was growing, the MNFL was causing trouble for the Philippine government. This was because, in November 2001, Arroyo undercut the MNLF’s political support by suspending Nur Misuari’s governorship of the ARMM and proposing the choice of a new governor. Misuari retaliated by launching an armed attack. Four hundred MNLF fighters formed the Misuari Renegade Group and attacked the AFP airfields on Jolo and at Zamboanga City. Although the AFP was able to defend both airfields and defeat Misuari, 60 AFP troops were killed while another 100

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 981.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 18.
were wounded. After the uprising, Misuari sought refuge in Malaysia. However, Malaysia deported him back to Manila in January 2002.24

**U.S.-Philippine Cooperation in 2002**

In 2002, there was much cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines to fight the ASG. Under the joint exercises, the U.S. helped the AFP to improve its ability to combat the ASG. A United States Special Forces (SF) unit trained and equipped a Philippine light reaction company (LRC) drawn from the ranks of the Philippine army’s special forces and scout ranger organizations.25 The U.S. trained them by sending 660 U.S. soldiers, including 160 Special Forces troops for the Balikatan 2002 joint training exercises.

The purpose of Balikatan 2002 was to enhance the skills and capabilities of the AFP and of the U.S. military, to improve their interoperability in fighting the ASG.26 According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the training is also intended to “demonstrate U.S. resolve to support the Philippines against external aggression and state-sponsored terrorism,” and to “prevent the Philippines from becoming a haven for

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future terror groups.”

This operation was different from previous Balikatan trainings because it was directly linked to America’s global war on terrorism. As Major Marty Cromwell of the American 1st Special Forces Group observed, “It was a unique mission because in one sense SF was training, advising, assisting and maintaining, but the location was a combat zone where AFP soldiers were fighting the ASG.”

U.S. military officials in the Philippines were initially accepting of their role as advisors; however they soon expressed some doubt. Three specific problems divided the Philippine and American commands in the Balikatan exercises. First, Filipino military officials were reluctant to accept the Americans’ label of the exercises as an “operation,” which implied a prolonged and expensive American presence in the Philippines. Both sides eventually came to an agreement and called it “training.” Second, the Philippine government wanted to place American forces under the control of Filipino commanders, which was unacceptable to the U.S. To resolve the problem, Filipino defense and military officials agreed to the U.S. demand for parallel and separate command structures for both American and Filipino troops. Third, President Arroyo insisted that the American troops be geographically confined to the tactical command

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27 Ibid.


29 Ibid.


31 Ibid.
post, though U.S. soldiers were eager to join their Filipino counterparts in combat operations in ASG operated areas. According to the U.S. troops are armed, but only for self-defense, and cannot engage in combat operations.

Upon arriving on Basilan in January 2002, the U.S. SF first took inventory of the assets and equipment of the AFP and found them to be lacking items necessary for combat, such as ammunitions and weapons. Moreover, special operations engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom-Afghanistan received higher priority. This meant that the SF in the Philippines had to wait for their ammunition and weapons to arrive, which usually took a few weeks. While waiting for ammunition and weapons, the U.S. SF taught basic individual tactical skills to junior officers of the AFP; and leadership, planning, and defensive skills to sergeants.

U.S.-SF also had to enhance force protection around the Philippine soldiers’ base camps. For instance, many of the Filipino troops had their families living with them, and the Americans stressed the necessity of providing more secure living conditions for women and children. The Americans encouraged the soldiers to push out the camp perimeter beyond the hand-grenade range. The Philippine soldiers then built fighting bunkers to defend the camp and stretched barbed wire along the outer perimeter.

32 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 20.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
From January – July, some 1,300 American troops participated in Exercise Balikatan 2002. This exercise produced some ambiguous results. The operation halted the ASG’s expansion, but most of its leaders and troops escaped to other parts of the Sulu Archipelago, namely Jolo. However, one of the successes of the Balikatan 2002 was that the AFP was better equipped to combat the ASG. For example, the AFP improved its operations as a result of U.S. assistance in intelligence gathering, the supplying of modern equipment, and aid in the planning of operations. Also, U.S. presence in the region helped in the rescue of kidnapped Americans. In addition to military support and training, the Philippines received $25 million in new military assistance and infrastructure improvements in Muslim areas in the southern Philippines in FY2002.

That year, Philippine-U.S. counterterrorism efforts included a non-military component to reduce the possibility of civilians joining the ranks of the ASG. According to a U.S. military official: “80% of the effort has been civil-military operations to change the conditions that allow those high-value targets to have a safe haven. We do that through helping to give a better life to the citizens.” For example, during the Balikatan exercises, American and Filipino military personnel engaged in civic and humanitarian projects. They built roads, drilled several deep-water wells, installed water purification sites, established farmer’s markets, and built piers for fishermen. In addition, the joint forces renovated schools, built clinics, and provided medical training and assistance.


39 Ibid.
After Balikatan 2002 ended, SF created the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOT-P) in August 2002 to continue monitoring the humanitarian projects. These efforts established a positive relationship between the American forces and the people of Basilan, which was a critical component in the counterterrorism efforts.

Filipino public opinion was generally supportive of the American military being in the Philippines. In a survey taken by *Pulse Asia*, a polling institution, after Balikatan 2002 73% of Filipinos were in favor of the American military mission. Support was highest in the southern part of the Philippines, which cited economic gains and the training of the AFP as the primary reasons for backing American involvement. However, not everyone agreed with the presence of American forces in the Philippines.

For instance, President Arroyo’s administration was divided on the American issue. From a short-term perspective, Filipino defense officials saw the benefits the AFP stood to gain from increased military assistance. On the other hand, some of her Philippine foreign affairs officials questioned the strategic and tactical interests of the U.S. They believed the U.S. was using the Philippines to monitor developments in Southeast Asia’s more unstable areas due to the fact that at this time the “U.S. does not enjoy close military ties with Indonesia and Malaysia, and has been watching the political

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40 Ibid., 20.


42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.
developments in Indonesia and the rise of Islamic revivalism in the region." Filipinos who were anti-American suggested that the ulterior motive of the exercise was to construct a U.S. base in Mindanao.

In November of the same year, the Philippines and the U.S. signed an agreement that would spark even more controversy – the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA). While the Visiting Forces Agreement pertained to the movement of troops, the MLSA pertained to the barter of goods and services related to the joint military exercises. The MLSA involved the mode of transferring supplies and services in exchange for goods and services rendered. For example, the Philippines could provide gasoline for a U.S. aircraft or ship in exchange for other goods and services.

The Agreement was controversial in part because of the secrecy that surrounded the negotiations and of the insistence of Filipino legislators that Arroyo did not submit the MLSA to the Philippine Senate for ratification, in compliance with the Philippine Constitution, before it became binding. To Arroyo, the accord was a “low-level executive agreement” that did not need approval from the Senate. Some legislators

44 Ibid.


47 Ibid.


49 Ibid.
feared that the MLSA would lead to virtual basing rights for Americans. Filipino Congresswoman Imee Marcos called the MLSA a “Trojan horse,” which, when coupled with the VFA, would lead to a wider scope of jurisdiction for U.S. troops in the Philippines.\footnote{Ibid.} Arroyo denied the allegations and claimed that the MLSA is simply an accounting contract that facilitates the transfer of materials and services from the United States to the Philippines during joint military exercises.\footnote{Ibid.}

In 2002, bilateral cooperation to fight the ASG was met with some difficulties. First, operations against the ASG had a limited amount of military equipment. It had a shortage of helicopters, mortars, naval patrol craft, and surveillance aircraft. It also lacked night vision equipment and even basic necessities like military boots.

Second, mountainous jungle terrain in the southern Philippines and the Philippine government’s inability to control the area made it difficult for U.S. and Philippine forces to track and locate the ASG. Underground caves, triple canopy jungles, swamps, and mountains provide the perfect cover for outlaws.\footnote{Max Boot and Richard Benet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines,” \textit{The Weekly Standard} (January 5, 2009), \url{http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/015/956zznwj.asp} (accessed January 4, 2012).} Also, the surrounding waters were hardly monitored by the Philippines Navy and thus the many boats that go in and out of the area are easily able to smuggle arms, drugs, and terrorist operatives.\footnote{Ibid.}
Third, the ASG received support from the civilians on Basilan, Jolo, and Tawitawi, which made it difficult to separate the insurgents from the non-insurgents. The ASG has a huge local support base in the Sulu Archipelago as many of its members are relatives, friends, classmates, or neighbors. The ASG garners support by patronizing local merchants, who, in turn, reward the ASG by providing either “early warning signals” or a place to take cover during military offensives.\(^54\) Moreover, the ASG takes advantage of the anger over corruption and economic disparity to secure protection from local politicians and military officials.

Fourth, alleged military corruption involving collusion with the ASG perpetuated the group’s activities.\(^55\) Alleged military collusion with ASG rebels has made it difficult for Filipino troops to defeat the terrorist group and for the U.S. to help them. Many Filipinos suspect that some high-ranking military officers are in conspiracy with the ASG and take a cut of the profits collected from kidnapping ransoms.\(^56\) Perhaps one of the most infamous accusations of collusion came from a Basilan Catholic priest, Father Loi Nacordo. In 1994, Father Nacordo was kidnapped by the ASG and held hostage for two months. It was then that he started to suspect links between the AFP and ASG as he was brazenly dragged around Basilan right next to the army camp. Father Nacordo says he


\(^{55}\) Niksch, *Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation*, 12.

saw ASG ammunition boxes and weapons clearly marked with the initials of the AFP and suspected that the military was selling its U.S. supplied arms to the ASG.\textsuperscript{57}

This collusion between ASG rebels and the AFP was also seen on June 2, 2001 when the ASG raided the hospital in the town of Lamitan and took the medical staff as hostages. The ASG and the AFP exchanged gunfire all day until Filipino troops surrounded the ASG and it appeared that there was no way out for the rebels. However, the kidnappers inexplicably broke free at nightfall and escaped into the jungle. Basilan residents immediately suspected that some military commanders had let the ASG go in exchange for a cut of the ransom money, which was delivered during the siege.\textsuperscript{58} Local Lamitan volunteer police forces have corroborated the story, citing that an AFP company abandoned their post at the back of the hospital just as darkness was setting in.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Joint Collaboration Against the ASG in 2003 & 2004}

As early as January 3, 2003, the U.S. and the Philippine forces made some headway in their fight against the Abu Sayyaf with the capture of one of its middle ranked members, Merang Abante, near Zamboanga City. Abante was captured for his involvement in the 2002 kidnappings of three Indonesian fishermen in Sulu after the Philippine government had offered an $18,500 bounty on his head.\textsuperscript{60} The following

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.


month, in February 2003, American and Filipino officials engaged in an exercise aimed at the ASG in Jolo. This time the U.S. was supposed to have a combat role. A Pentagon official stated, “This is an actual combined operation, and it is U.S. forces accompanying and actively participating in Philippine-led offensive operations.” But the announcement caused an immediate public outcry in the Philippines, as it was interpreted as a declaration that U.S. troops would be illegally deployed combat against the ASG. Moreover, Moro leaders warned of a Muslim backlash in Mindanao. As a result, by the end of February 2003, the joint combat operation in Jolo was cancelled.

Despite the cancellation of the combat operation, President Arroyo continued to support the United States in its war against Iraq. For instance, on February 8, 2003, the Philippine government expelled Iraqi diplomat, Husham Husain, for his alleged ties to the ASG. Philippine intelligence officials had discovered that Husain had received a phone call from an ASG member on October 4, 2002, the day after the group staged a bombing in Mindanao, which killed a U.S. soldier who had come to the Philippines for the Balikatan exercises. After Husain’s expulsion, Hamsiraji Sali, an ASG leader, confirmed on Philippine TV that Iraq was paying bounties to the Abu Sayyaf to murder U.S. troops. Then, in March 2003 Arroyo sent about 175 Filipino soldiers, police, and

61 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
humanitarian workers to Iraq. On April 14, 2003, she signed the Executive Order to create the Public-Private Sector Task Force for the Reconstruction of Iraq, which would coordinate manpower and rebuilding efforts in public works, telecommunications, health services, and law enforcement.

A few days later on April 17, Balikatan 2003 officially commenced. This was the nineteenth training series and took place in Luzon at Clark Air Base, Fort Magsaysay, and in the Ternate vicinity. This exercise was not related to counterterrorism training, but was designed to train American and Filipino air, ground, and naval forces to handle contingencies, emergencies or disasters, which may arise throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Balikatan 2003 was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of the creation of a joint task force headquarters staff, which focused on crisis planning and peace enforcement operations. The second phase consisted of cross training, field training, and humanitarian civil assistance exercises. Balikatan 2003 ended on May 9 of that year.

Later that month, from May 18-24, 2003, President Arroyo made an official state visit to Washington during which she and President Bush reaffirmed the U.S.-Philippines

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65 Robin Bowman, “Is the Philippines Profiting From the War on Terrorism?” (Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2004), 42.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.


70 Ibid.
security alliance. Bush designated the Philippines as a Major Non-NATO Ally, a status that made the Philippines eligible to receive more sophisticated U.S. arms and military training. He also stated that the designation would allow the U.S. and the Philippines to cooperate on military research and development. In turn, Arroyo ensured that she would continue to support Bush’s war on terror. She also requested U.S. assistance in conducting a strategic assessment of the Philippines’ defense system.

Following Arroyo’s visit, the Joint Defense Assessment Planning and Implementation Group (JDA), composed of U.S. and Philippine defense analysts, conducted a series of evaluations to estimate the AFP’s capabilities to perform its essential missions. These missions include internal security operations, territorial defense, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, maritime security, support for national development, and support for regional and global initiatives. The results of the 2003 JDA revealed that the AFP was only partially capable of performing its most critical missions and that the lack of strategy-based planning was the root cause of most of the AFP’s shortcomings. Thus, at the conclusion of the JDA, the Philippine Defense Reform (PDR) program was created in 2003. The purpose of the PDF was to introduce improvements in areas such as planning, programming, budgeting, and

71 Ibid.


74 Ibid.
logistics. It also aimed to professionalizing the workforce by establishing effective staff development programs and increasing training to improve core competencies.\(^{75}\)

Due to the Philippines’ new status as a major non-NATO ally, the U.S. increased its military and infrastructure improvement assistance to the Philippines from $25 million in FY2002 to $45 million in FY2003.\(^{76}\) The largest portion of this U.S. aid went to health and education programs in the southern part of the Philippines. For example, in 2003, the U.S. created the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, which provides scholarships to Muslim students.\(^{77}\)

That year, on October 18, 2003, President Bush visited the Philippines. He made an eight-hour visit to the Philippines on his way to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Bangkok. During his short trip, he focused on trade and terrorism and applauded President Arroyo’s efforts in combating the ASG. He pledged to continue to help the Philippines fight the ASG and to assist with the PDR.

The Philippines needed more U.S. aid as the ASG was expanding its attacks. On February 27, 2004 a Superferry, one of the main forms of inter-island travel in the Philippines, was bombed shortly after it left the port in Manila. The ASG quickly claimed responsibility for the attack, which left 180 people dead. The ASG stated that

\(^{75}\) Ibid.

\(^{76}\) Manyin, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, 16.

the Superferry bombing was revenge for the conviction and sentencing of two ASG members, who were accused of involvement in the 2000 kidnapping of an American.\footnote{“Philippine Group Says Ferry Fire is Revenge,” Los Angeles Times (February 29, 2004), http://articles.latimes.com/2004/feb/29/world/fg-phil29 (accessed March 4, 2012).}

The fact that the Superferry tragedy occurred outside of the Muslim area was evidence that the ASG had become active in Manila. ASG activity in Manila was further confirmed, in March 2004, when President Arroyo announced that the Philippine government had uncovered an ASG plot to launch bombings in Manila. The police arrested six alleged plotters and seized 80 pounds of explosives. Filipino police personnel determined that the ASG had help from the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) in the Superferry incident and the Manila bombing plot. The RSM, founded in 2002, comprise a group of radical Filipino Muslim converts based out of the Manila area. It emerged from the estimated 200,000 Filipinos who had converted to Islam since the 1970s. Many of them had worked in the Middle East when they became attracted to the Islamic faith and soon converted.\footnote{Niksch, Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation, 7.} As RSM members, these converts support the ASG’s aim for an independent Islamic state in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, presidential elections took place in May 2004. President Arroyo defeated her main rival, actor Fernando Poe, Jr., and took office again. Although the 1986 Philippine Constitution bars a president from seeking reelection, it allows for the election of a person like Arroyo who came to office upon the removal of a president. She was inaugurated on June 30, 2004.
President Arroyo soon faced a crisis in the Middle East, with the kidnapping of a Filipino driver, Angelo de la Cruz, near Fallouja, where he was delivering supplies from Saudi Arabia. His kidnapping led to demands in the Philippines that she remove Filipino troops from Iraq because the Iraqi kidnappers had threatened to behead de la Cruz if she did not pull them out. After much deliberation, she decided to recall the remaining 51 Filipino troops in Iraq on July 19, 2004. With their demands met, the kidnappers released de la Cruz.

In making her decision, Arroyo had national and personal interests in mind when she withdrew the troops thereby saving de la Cruz’s life. She realized that many poor workers, like de la Cruz, who were supporters of her predecessor, Joseph Estrada, never recognized her as a legitimate president because she was not voted into office. If she had allowed his beheading, she would have been faced with mass protests that could have toppled her presidency. De la Cruz, whose name means Angel of the Cross, was a symbol of the everyday Filipino man’s struggle for survival. He lived in a village north of Manila in a one-room bamboo hut and was working in Iraq to pay for his son’s eye surgery. The father of eight children, de la Cruz sent money home from Iraq for his family. He is only one of about 8 million overseas Filipino workers, whose remittances bring in more revenue to the Philippines than does foreign assistance.

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.
In the U.S., Arroyo’s decision to recall the soldiers was met with much criticism. As the Philippine forces were already scheduled to leave Iraq a month later, in August, the United States objected to the withdrawal, saying that giving in to terrorist demands should not be an option. U.S. media called the removal an act of cowardice and Australia agreed.\textsuperscript{83} The Philippine government, however, strongly disagreed. Whereas earlier they been silent, now, Ignacio Bunye, presidential spokesman, said that the Philippines should not be accused of cowardice as “we have proven our courage and bravery in Bataan and Corregidor and every other battlefield where we have fought. At this point we are upholding the national interest of the Philippines.”\textsuperscript{84}

Despite Washington’s criticism of Arroyo for giving in to the terrorists, the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, Francis Ricciardone, acknowledged that she was put in a difficult situation. For instance, he remarked: “Leaders are called upon in a crisis to do hard things, and she has stood up and shown deep care for the hostage, but also deep care for the country’s longer-term interests.”\textsuperscript{85} However, some argue that negotiating with terrorists in Iraq could harm and complicate matters for the Philippines, especially in areas controlled by the ASG.

In the Philippines, Arroyo’s decision to remove the troops was met with much praise and support. Many had disagreed with Arroyo’s decision to send troops there in

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
the first place as they viewed the war in Iraq as a U.S. war. Some Filipinos saw her as a U.S. puppet who was only too eager to do the bidding of the U.S.\textsuperscript{86}

**Summary of ASG Policy under President Bush’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Term**

In conclusion, in the period before 9/11 the bilateral relationship was starting to get closer after a decline in 1992 with the closure of the U.S. military bases. Due to growing concern over the ASG threat and China’s emerging military aggression, the two nations reassessed their security alliance and then negotiated a legal framework for an American military presence in the Philippines, which resulted in the signing and then ratifying of the VFA in 1999. In 2000, U.S. and Philippine forces participated in the first joint training exercise since 1996, when it was suspended due to doubts over the legality of U.S. troops being in the country for training purposes. This exercise was called Balikatan 2000.

In 2001, the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks on the U.S. led to an even closer relationship when President Arroyo responded to President Bush’s appeal for help in fighting international terrorism. Arroyo offered the American military the use of former U.S. Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base as transit points for U.S. troops going to Afghanistan. She granted the U.S. over-flight right for its aircrafts, and she also expressed a willingness to send Filipino troops to Afghanistan. Bush was grateful for her support and raised the prospect of supporting the Philippine government’s campaign against the ASG, which had links to al-Qaeda. Then in November 2001, during Arroyo’s

\footnote{86 Ibid.}
official visit to the U.S., Bush promised Arroyo nearly $100 million in military assistance.

The U.S.-Philippine relationship further deepened in 2002 with their cooperation in fighting the ASG. Under Balikatan 2002, which was directly linked to the fight against terrorism, U.S. and Philippine forces engaged in training to increase their interoperability against the ASG. However, there was some tension surrounding the exercises as the U.S. wanted a more combat role, but were limited to a training and advisory capacity by the Philippine Constitution. Arroyo made accommodations by allowing a separate but parallel command structure. Balikatan 2002 also included a non-military component. U.S. troops, along with the AFP, engaged in civic and humanitarian projects such as building roads, drilling water wells, renovating schools, and providing medical services. These efforts were made with the aim of improving the lives of the Muslims in the southern part of the Philippines so as to discourage them from joining the ASG.

Bilateral cooperation in 2002 to fight the ASG was met with some difficulties. First, the AFP had a limited amount of military equipment, vehicles, vessels, and aircrafts. Second, the mountainous jungle terrain in the southern Philippines made difficult to track and locate the ASG. Third, the ASG received strong support from the locals on Basilan, Jolo, and Tawitawi who provided the ASG protection during military offensives. Fourth, AFP collusion with the ASG perpetuated the group’s activities.

In the same year, in November, the U.S. and the Philippines signed the MLSA, which pertained to the bartering of goods and services related to the joint military
exercises. The agreement sparked controversy because of the secrecy surrounding the negotiations, and also because Arroyo did not seek approval from the Philippine Senate before signing it. She claimed it was a low level agreement that only served as an accounting contract between the U.S. and the Philippines.

The following year, the U.S.-Philippine collaboration against terrorism continued. In January 2003, the U.S. and the Philippines had a small victory with the capturing of an ASG leader, Merang Abante. Two months later, Arroyo sent about 178 Filipino soldiers, police, and humanitarian workers to Iraq. The next month, on April 17, Balikatan 2003 officially opened in Luzon. Then in May 2003, Arroyo made her second official visit to Washington during which President Bush designated the Philippines as a major non-NATO ally, a status that made the Philippines eligible to receive more military training and assistance. As a result, the U.S. increased its military and infrastructure funding to the Philippines from $25 million in FY2002 to $45 million in FY2003, with the largest portion of this aid going to health and education programs in the southern Philippines. Following Arroyo’s visit, Bush made a short trip to the Philippines in October 2003 where he pledged his support to the Philippines to continue fighting the ASG.

The Philippines needed more aid as the ASG expanded its attacks in 2004. In February of that year, the ASG bombed a Superferry near a port in Manila. This bombing left 180 people dead and showed that the ASG was moving its attacks outside of the Sulu Archipelago. The Philippine police determined that the ASG received help from the RSM, a group of former Christians who had converted to Islam and were based in Manila.
Later in July 2004, President Arroyo faced a crisis in the Middle East with the kidnapping of Filipino driver, Angelo de la Cruz, near Fallouja. The Iraqi kidnappers threatened to behead de la Cruz unless Arroyo removed the Filipino troops from Iraq. After much deliberation, she decided to remove the soldiers and, with their demands met, the kidnappers freed de la Cruz. Arroyo’s decision to recall the Filipino forces was met with much criticism from the Americans who believed that she should not have given in to the kidnappers. This led to a chill in the U.S.-Philippines relationship, however, as the next chapter shows, it was only momentary.
CHAPTER IV

U.S.-PHILIPPINE COOPERATION AGAINST THE ASG UNDER PRESIDENT BUSH’S 2nd TERM, 2005-2008

As George W. Bush and Gloria Arroyo began their new presidential terms, the United States-Philippines relationship was stronger than ever. The aim of Chapter IV is to analyze the joint efforts of the United States and the Philippines in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf during President George W. Bush’s second term. The scope of this chapter covers a four-year period from 2005 to 2008. To better understand the collaboration, this chapter is in three parts. The first part traces the bilateral cooperation from 2005 to 2006, which now focused more on humanitarian and civic projects. This part also covers the conditions in the Philippines and some of Arroyo’s domestic problems during this period. The second part discusses the U.S.-Philippine collaboration from 2007 to 2008 and includes continuing troubles with her leadership. The third part concludes the chapter by evaluating the United States’ ASG policy under President Bush’s second term.

Bilateral Efforts in The First Two Years, 2005-2006

In 2005, the U.S.-Philippines collaboration against the ASG began with Balikatan 2005, which was launched on February 21 at a ceremony in Manila at Camp Aguinaldo, the headquarters of the AFP. The top priority for Balikatan 2005 was to conduct humanitarian and civic projects. Approximately 300 U.S. and 550 AFP personnel participated in this exercise.\(^1\) Besides training in the Sulu Archipelago and dealing with the ASG, the joint forces distributed medical supplies, treated patients, and attended to

animals in the typhoon impacted areas of Quezon and Laguna provinces in Luzon.\textsuperscript{2} U.S.
and AFP engineers also built five new classrooms to alleviate crowding at the San
Buenaventura High School in Laguna province and completed a 1.2-kilometer road ahead
of schedule.\textsuperscript{3} This farm-to-market road was economically vital in connecting the towns
of Alima and San Buenaventura.\textsuperscript{4} Balikatan 2005 ended on March 8 with a ceremony at
Camp Aguinaldo.

In 2005, U.S. and Philippine authorities also maintained the Rewards for Justice
program, which was launched in the Philippines in 2002 to help in the capture of ASG
rebels.\textsuperscript{5} It is one of the most valuable U.S. government assets in the fight against
international terrorism. Under this program, in 2005, the U.S. offered to pay $2,500 to
$50,000 to citizens who could provide information that could help in the capture of ASG
members.\textsuperscript{6}

The U.S. also continued giving assistance to the Philippines, especially in the
Muslim areas in the south. For example, in FY 2005 the Philippines received $30 million
for Economic Support Funds (ESF), which promotes economic development and access
to education in this area.\textsuperscript{7} Other important U.S. funded programs included the Child

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{5} “Rewards for Justice,” \textit{Rewards for Justice.Net}
http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/index.cfm?page=Philippines (accessed March 25,
2012).

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
Survival and Health (CSH) funds which was given $27 million in FY 2005.\footnote{Ibid.} The CSH supports programs dealing with maternal and child health, nutrition, the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and family planning. Development Assistance funds targeting corruption, economic growth, the environment, and education, received $27.5 million in FY 2005. Foreign Military Financing (FMF), which contributes to the military capabilities of the armed forces of the Philippines, was given $29.8 million in FY 2005. The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program received $3 million in FY 2005. This program promotes military professionalism, civilian control of the military and military-to-military contacts between the United States and the Philippines.\footnote{Ibid.}

Meanwhile, in 2005, the ASG remained a terrorist threat. For example, on February 14, 2005, three simultaneous bombs ripped through Manila and the southern cities of Davao and General Santos, leaving at least twelve people dead. The ASG was quick to claim responsibility for the explosions, with Abu Sulaiman, an ASG senior leader, heralding that the bombs were a “Valentine’s Day gift to Mrs. Arroyo,” in retaliation for the government’s “atrocities committed against Muslims.”\footnote{“New Abu Sayyaf; Terrorism in the Philippines,” The Economist, (February 19, 2005), http://www.economist.com/node/3675637 (accessed February 1, 2012).} These attacks showed a greater degree of sophistication on the operational and technical levels. At the time, the Philippines government doubted that the ASG was capable of pulling off such a

\footnote{Thomas Lum, U.S. Foreign Aid to East and South Asia: Selected Recipients, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 23.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
deadly assault, as its usual modus operandi had been the kidnapping for ransom of foreign tourists and Christian businessmen. It was now evident that the ASG was not working alone.

The ASG was not working alone because three other rebel groups were helping it. The most important of these groups was the MILF. For example, the MILF tried to help ASG members escape from a jail in Manila on March 15, 2005. Earlier that day, an ASG member attempted to deliver weapons and explosives supplied by the MILF to the 129 ASG inmates. When the Philippine police intercepted this member, a riot broke out amongst the prisoners. The Philippine police then stormed the prison and killed 22 inmates, including four leaders of the ASG. The four ASG leaders killed were Kair Abdul Gapar, known as Commander Robot; Nadzmie Sabtulah, known as Commander Global; Abu Sayyaf spokesman Ka Lando; and Alhamber Manatad Limbong, known as Kosovo, who police claimed was the ringleader.11 Philippine officials said that the uprising “displays Manila’s inability to stop Abu Sayyaf from mounting such deadly attacks, especially with protection from the MILF.”12

The second group helping the ASG in 2005 was the JI, which was founded on January 1, 1993 by Indonesian clerics Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar.13 JI has


roots in Darul Islam, a violent radical movement of the late 1940’s that advocated the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim country. The group actively recruited Indonesians, Filipinos, and Malaysians to go to Afghanistan, first to wage a guerilla war against the Soviets and later to train as terrorists in al-Qaeda camps. JI emerged as a terrorist organization in 2000 when it coordinated bombings in Jakarta, Manila, and Thailand. Additionally, it was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed nearly 200 people and wounded 300 others, mostly foreigners. After the 2002 attacks, the JI sought sanctuary in the Philippines. JI also established operational links to other militant Islamic groups in Southeast Asia by providing money, terrorist training, and ties to global Islamic terrorist groups, such as the al-Qaeda network. Thus, by the late 2000’s, the Southeast Asian region saw the emergence of an international terrorist network.

The third group helping the ASG was the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM). The RSM, a group of Filipino Muslim converts in the northern Philippines, is largely financed and trained by the ASG and the JI, although it also has ties to the MILF and the


14 Ibid.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.
MNLF. This relatively new group emerged in 2002 and is based out of Manila. In February 2005, the RSM helped to geographically expand the ASG’s attacks to Manila during the Valentine’s Day bombings.

The ASG’s strengthening of ties with the members of the MILF was, of course, of great concern to the U.S. and the Philippines, as the MILF had been engaged in peace talks for years with the Philippine government. As part of the peace negotiations, in 2002, the MILF had agreed to distance itself from terrorist organizations like the ASG. Thus, its links to the ASG called into question the viability of the peace talks. On its part, the MILF claimed to be doing what it could with plans to interdict some of the extremists from the JI and the ASG. In this connection, government officials conceded that it was the renegade MILF members that were in league with the JI and the ASG.

The U.S. expressed concern over the increased linkage among terrorist organizations in Southeast Asia, especially those in the southern Philippines, and vowed to increase cooperation with the Philippine government in combating the ASG. For example, on July 22, 2005 American and Philippine military forces launched a joint operation to capture Khadaffy Janjalani. This operation took place in the MILF


20 Kirk, “Prison Revolt.”

controlled areas of Mindanao as the MILF had allowed the AFP to operate in its areas, unlike in earlier years. As a testament to their dedication to the peace talks, the MILF cooperated with the AFP and even blocked off some ASG escape routes that could be used by the ASG. The U.S. provided intelligence and communications support to capture Janjalani as well as military assistance and training. Intelligence for this operation came from a P3-Orion surveillance aircraft that flies missions from its base in Okinawa, and from small pilotless planes, commonly known as drones. American officials said they had already pinpointed Janjalani’s location and that he would be captured in a few weeks. However, they were too optimistic and did not succeed in capturing him.

Meanwhile, in 2005, President Arroyo faced problems from the 2004 presidential elections. Just one year into her six-year term, she faced allegations that she had rigged the 2004 presidential race. For instance, in a press conference held on June 10, 2005, former deputy director of the National Bureau of Investigation, Samuel Ong, claimed that he had audio recordings of telephone conversations between Arroyo and an official of the Commission on Elections, in which she told the commissioner that she wanted to secure a million-vote margin. According to Ong, the recordings served as evidence that Arroyo had ordered the rigging of the national elections in order to win by around one million votes against Poe. The same month, Arroyo publicly apologized for a “lapse in


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

judgment,” but vowed to remain in office and to allow the controversy to be “mediated through the constitutional process.”

But many Filipinos called for Arroyo’s resignation. Among them were Susan Roces, widow of Fernando Poe, and former presidents Joseph Estrada and Corazon Aquino. Some members of Arroyo’s cabinet also felt pressured to step down and a few of them resigned. However, on August 31, 2005, a Congressional committee ruled to overturn all impeachment complaints against the President. At the same time, while the Filipino public disapproved of Arroyo’s actions, most of them believed that there was no other viable alternative to her leadership. In any case, Arroyo’s approval rating dropped from 50% in May 2005 to under 25% in June 2005. Nonetheless, few Filipinos believed her ouster would improve the political system or the economy and there was no mass pressure for her to resign. Impeachment cases against Arroyo arose in 2006 and 2007, but both failed due to the failure of her opponents to get the necessary 1/3 vote in Congress to remove her from office.

In 2006, President Arroyo faced more problems. For example, there was an elaborate coup against her, which led her to declare a state of emergency on February 24, 2006. The head of the AFP’s elite Scout Rangers regiment, Brigadier General Danilo Lim, was accused of leading the plot and was arrested. Ten others, including the

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
commanders of an elite Marine unit and a special police squad were held for questioning. Arroyo lifted the emergency on March 3, 2006.

Meanwhile, U.S.-Philippines cooperation continued with Balikatan 2006, which commenced on February 20 at Camp Aguinaldo. Balikatan 2006 was conducted in three phases: humanitarian and civic assistance on the island of Jolo; a combined task force staff exercises in Cebu; and cross training and field training exercises in Luzon. Approximately 5,500 U.S. personnel and 2,800 AFP personnel from all over the Philippines participated in Balikatan 2006. Of the participants, 400 went to Jolo for engineering and medical civic action projects. They constructed new school buildings and provided medical, dental, and veterinarian services. Although the February 17, 2006 mudslide in Leyte, Philippines, caused 1,500 U.S. troops to be diverted in support of the relief efforts, 3,500 U.S. service members worked to ensure the successful operation of Balikatan 2006.

That year was marked with a new Philippine-specific counterterrorism strategy. In March 2006, the Department of State, USAID, and the U.S. Pacific Command orchestrated a campaign of public diplomacy, assistance development, and civil-military operations in Jolo. On April 4, 2006, Ambassador Henry Crumpton, Coordinator for


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
Counterterrorism, in a testimony to the House Armed Services Committee outlined the Department of State’s policy against terrorism, which integrates diplomatic, economic, and military capabilities.\textsuperscript{34} In the case of the Philippines, the strategy took the form of development assistance and public information campaigns to undercut the ASG and further divide the insurgents from the locals. Also that same month, the U.S. and the Philippines engaged in the bilateral U.S.-Philippines Security Engagement Board (SEB).\textsuperscript{35} Together, they addressed issues such as counterterrorism and maritime security, and focused on civil affairs, capability upgrades, and support for AFP operations.\textsuperscript{36}

In August 2006, the AFP and the U.S. launched “Operation Ultimatum,” a concerted effort to capture or kill the top ASG and JI operatives on Jolo. They had great success in locating ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani and killed him on September 4, 2006. American and Filipino military forces had been tracking Janjalani since 2005. Janjalani had a $5 million bounty on his head, offered by the United States.\textsuperscript{37} Two other JI suspects, Umar Patek and Dulmatin, were also targeted.\textsuperscript{38} Patek and Dulmatin were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{35}\textit{Country Reports on Terrorism 2006}, (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 2007), 80.
  \item \textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{37}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{38}“Tests Confirm Abu Sayyaf Leader’s Death,” \textit{USA Today}, January 20, 2007, final edition.
\end{itemize}
among the alleged masterminds of the 2002 Bali bombings, and were believed to have fled to the Philippines shortly after the Bali attacks.

Janjalani’s death led to a serious decline in ASG strength due to the loss of leadership and funding. Without his direction, the ASG’s ability to carry out large-scale bombings collapsed. The ASG broke down into smaller factions and reverted back to its main activity of kidnapping for ransom. Also without Janjalani, the ASG lost close ties to the MILF and the JI. ASG members reacted to Janjalani’s death in much the same way that they had reacted to his brother’s death years earlier: members went back to smaller alliances with friends and family in close proximity.

U.S.-Philippines Collaboration in the Last Two Years, 2007-2008

In 2007, the U.S. and the Philippines continued implementing their new strategy whereby they would make selective actions based on specific intelligence instead of making large sweeps across an area. Philippine military officials believed that if ASG leadership was destroyed then the group would fall apart as the ASG is composed of many Muslim tribes and requires a strong leader to unite them. Without the right guidance, insurgents would simply go back to their respective tribes.

39 Fellman, 2.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.


43 Ibid.
This strategy was successfully applied in capturing and killing ASG leader, Abu Sulaiman. He was fatally shot on January 16 in a gun battle with the AFP in Jolo. At the time of his death, Sulaiman was the highest-ranking ASG member. The AFP, with help from the American military advisers, had been hunting him for many years because of his involvement in major bombings and mass kidnappings, including the 2001 Palawan hostage incident and the 2005 Valentine’s Day attacks in Manila, Davao, and General Santos. Sulaiman had a $5 million bounty on his head, offered by the United States.

The successful capture and killing of Sulaiman involved the help of informants embedded in ASG camps who provided precise and current information on Sulaiman’s location. These informants were handsomely rewarded through the U.S. Department of State’s Rewards for Justice Program. In a ceremony held by the U.S. and Philippine governments on June 7, 2007, these informants were rewarded a total of $5 million. Technology also played a part in the reconnaissance effort through the use of unmanned airplanes, commonly known as drones, which were outfitted with cameras.

Also in 2007, maritime security was stepped up. The Philippine Navy, with support from the U.S. Navy, began to enforce a stricter maritime security program to capture the ASG. The unique geographical makeup of the Philippine Islands has

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.
provided an escape route for ASG militants. They have been able to easily maneuver around and even out of the Philippine islands to neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. The Philippine Navy planned to conduct more efficient patrols around Jolo and to inspect more vessels in 2007.

Also that year, President Bush’s Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes, praised the Philippines for its success on the war in terror, namely the 2006 death of Khadaffy Janjalani and the 2007 demise of Abu Sulaiman. Hughes proclaimed that the Philippine armed forces “are sacrificing to protect not only the citizens of the Philippines but also Americans and people around the world who are interested in peace and stability and confronting the international threat that is terrorism.” She also stated that economic development was just as important in pursuing terrorist groups and that the U.S. and the Philippines should invest in people’s lives by providing education, health care, job opportunities, and by building roads.

In the spirit of goodwill and nation building, Balikatan 2007 commenced with a focus on more humanitarian efforts. It officially began on Jolo on February 19, 2007 with a ceremony celebrating fifty years of the U.S. and the Philippines’ cooperation in joint exercises. Approximately 390 U.S. and 1,200 Philippine forces, including medical and engineering personnel, participated in the 2007 exercises. One of the projects that

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.


51 Ibid.
the two militaries worked on was the paving of a four-kilometer road that allowed local residents to travel year round from their village to the island’s largest municipality.\footnote{Balikatan: Shouldering the Load,” Global Security.Org.} They also worked with local governments and partners to provided free medical, dental, and veterinary clinics in Mindanao.\footnote{Ibid.} Patikul, an area once ravaged by the bloody fighting of the ASG, received a large water tank.\footnote{Douglas Bakshian, “U.S.-Funded Water, Roads, Schools Helping Philippines In War On Terror,” U.S. Fed News Service, February 20, 2007.} The tank is part of a water distribution network built by U.S. and Philippine troops. With this installation, about 5,000 residents now have easy access to water instead of having to transport water themselves.\footnote{Ibid.}  

During Balikatan 2007, the U.S. and Philippine forces also conducted staff exercises in which they created a scenario for crisis action planning in maritime operations against the ASG.\footnote{Ibid.} The goal of the staff exercises was to learn to work together to address challenges, such as terrorist transit routes, piracy, drug smuggling, and critical infrastructure protection.\footnote{Ibid.} The 2007 exercises were closed on March 3 by U.S. Ambassador Kristie Kenney; Philippine Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process, Jess Dureza; and Philippine Defense Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane. A few months later on September 7, 2007, President George W. Bush pointed that the U.S. had delivered aid
to Muslim communities in the southern Philippines, “where they’re building roads and bridges and schools and health clinics. The whole purpose is to isolate the terrorists and extremists.” These comments were given by Bush at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Sydney, Australia.

Besides building schools and water wells, the U.S. and the Philippines collaborated on other peace building initiatives. For instance, in 2007, USAID provided computers and computer training to Jolo residents thus introducing them to technology and enabling them to communicate with people around the world. Even Muslim protestors of the U.S. presence in Jolo begrudgingly acknowledged the good work that the Americans have done since their arrival in 2002. For example, Abdel Khan, a 24-year old Muslim graduate of Islamic Studies at the University of the Philippines, admitted that although he wished to see both Filipino and American troops leave the island, the Americans had helped the Jolo residents.

Thus, during this period, the Philippine military worked side-by-side with U.S. troops in hopes that nation-building initiatives would help bring peace to the Sulu Archipelago. According to Philippine Marine General Juancho Sabban, the U.S. and Philippine governments wanted to offer the Moros a “better life than the offer that the terrorists are trying to give them.”

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59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.
efficient military operations to Jolo did make a difference there with violent crime dropping as much as 80 percent and ASG membership down to around 150-200.\textsuperscript{62}

Despite the progress made by the AFP and U.S. forces, the ASG remained an active terrorist organization. In fact, in July 2007, ten Philippine Marines were captured and beheaded in Jolo by ASG rebels.\textsuperscript{63} Then, on August 9, 2007, the ASG and some renegade MILF members ambushed a convoy of troops transporting supplies. This attack resulted in the killing of at least ten soldiers while two others were injured.\textsuperscript{64} Another ten soldiers and 31 insurgents were killed the same day during a shootout by the AFP on one side and the ASG and the MILF on the other side.

The killing of the AFP soldiers in both incidents showed that the ASG was still a serious security threat in 2007. One of the main reasons why they remained a security threat had to do with the pervasive poverty in the Sulu Archipelago. Though U.S. aid has brought some help to many Muslim families, the vast majority of them live in virtual poverty. To Ramon Casiple, head of Manila’s Institute of Political and Electoral Reforms, poverty is the “Breeding ground of rebellion. To lessen poverty would take a fundamental and sustained shift in economic, social, and political structure as well as a sustained change in Manila’s commitment to improve the lives of everyone in this region.”\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
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In attempts to lessen the ASG threat, U.S. prosecutors and FBI agents provided training to 34 representatives of the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Council in December 2007. This training was directed at assisting the Philippines in implementing their newly passed Human Security Act (HSA), which permitted wiretapping of members of terrorist organizations.\textsuperscript{66} The American Embassy also received cooperation from Philippine law enforcement in obtaining access to terrorist detainees and witnesses for FBI interviews, and access to criminal, immigration, financial, and biographic records via the mechanisms established in the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty.\textsuperscript{67}

In February 2008, the U.S. and the Philippine forces had to deal with a serious ASG rebel attack in Mindanao where civilians claimed that the U.S. forces were in breach of the ‘no combat’ agreement. This accusation arose after Philippine forces, backed by U.S. advisers, were sent to the area to rescue two hostages who were kidnapped by ASG members a month earlier.\textsuperscript{68} In this rescue operation, ten people were killed, including two Philippine soldiers, five combatants, two children, and a pregnant woman. According to a survivor of the shootout, Sandrawina Wahid, she saw four U.S. soldiers amongst the two Filipino elite forces, the Army’s Light Reaction Company and


\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

the Navy’s Special Warfare Group. But, to Major General Nelson, chief of the Western Mindanao Command, her claims that the U.S. troops were there were preposterous because direct combat by U.S. soldiers was strictly prohibited.

Meanwhile, the Balikatan 2008 exercises were held in two phases from February 18-March 3 in Palawan, Mindanao, and in the Sulu Archipelago. The first phase focused on training the AFP to provide relief and assistance in the event of natural disasters and other crises that might endanger the public’s health and safety. The second phase involved the provision of free medical, dental, veterinary services, and the building of schools in the Muslim areas by both forces. One U.S. official praised the humanitarian contributions that had been made through the Balikatan exercises. He was Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, who while on a visit to Zamboanga in June 2008, pointed out the importance of these works in stabilizing the region, claiming that it is as vital to “build a school, rebuild a bridge or host a medical clinic as it is to kill an extremist.”

In 2008, further bilateral progress against the ASG was achieved when U.S. and Philippine troops raided an ASG camp on Jolo on April 30, 2008. Around 200 JI and ASG members were at this camp, a bomb-making facility. The AFP and the militants engaged in heavy artillery and mortar fire, which resulted in the deaths of several ASG


70 Ibid.


72 Ibid.
members. The attack was a “surgical assault” after Philippine officials received intelligence that ASG leaders and JI leader, Umar Patek, had planned to meet to organize a major attack.  

During this raid U.S. and Philippine troops also found bomb-making supplies at the camp to be used by the ASG rebels. This raid was successful as a major bombing attack was prevented and because it led to the death of many ASG members.

Despite the progress that the U.S.-Philippine joint forces had made, the United States decided to decrease its military aid to the Philippines on the grounds of continued human rights abuses by the Arroyo administration. One of the most serious human rights abuses concerning Arroyo was her knowledge of extrajudicial killings, especially by warlords in the south. This led the U.S. State Department to reduce, in 2008, the amount for the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and the International Military Exchange Training (IMET) programs to the Philippines, from $27.7 million in 2007 to $11.1 million in 2008.

**Overview of U.S.-Philippine Policy Against the ASG from 2005-2008**

In conclusion, this four year period saw greater collaboration between the U.S. and the Philippines and some successes in that they captured several ASG leaders and a JI leader. In the first two years of this period, U.S.-Philippine collaboration focused on

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73 Ibid.


76 Ibid.
humanitarian and civic action projects, such as building schools and providing clean water, through Balikatan 2005 and Balikatan 2006, and through U.S. economic assistance for health and educational programs. Also in 2005 and 2006, the U.S. continued its Rewards for Justice Program (RJP) whereby the U.S. offered a monetary reward to anyone who could provide information to help in the capture of ASG leaders. The RJP was instrumental in the apprehension and killing of several members of the ASG.

Meanwhile, in 2005 and 2006, the ASG was stronger because it was receiving help from three other Muslim militant groups – the MILF, the JI, and the RSM. In the case of the MILF, help for the ASG came from its renegade members. The ASG collaborated with all of these groups in the Valentine’s Day bombings in three Philippine cities and during a failed attempt to free ASG prisoners from a Manila jail. The U.S. expressed concern over ASG’s increased links with these terrorist organizations and vowed to increase cooperation with the Philippine government. Thus, in 2005 the U.S. embarked on a new Philippine-specific counterterrorism strategy to locate and apprehend senior members of the ASG. This strategy was successfully applied in 2006 with the capture and killing of Khadaffy Janjalani, the leader of the ASG.

In 2006, the ASG’s strength was considerably weakened due to Janjalani’s death, which resulted in the loss of close ties to the MILF and the JI and decreased funding from both. Without Janjalani’s direction, the ASG was no longer able to carry out large-scale bombings and reverted back to kidnappings for ransom. It also broke down into smaller factions and many members went back to their respective Muslim tribes.
In the next period, from 2007 to 2008, U.S.-Philippine collaboration also met with some success. In early 2007, they continued implementing their new counterterrorism strategy of targeting ASG leaders, which was successfully applied in the capture and killing of senior ASG member, Abu Sulaiman, on January 16. The use of information provided by informants embedded within the ASG was critical in helping the AFP and the U.S. forces to locate and kill Sulaiman.

The U.S. and the Philippines continued to conduct humanitarian and nation building projects in the Muslim areas through Balikatan 2007 which was launched on February 19. During Balikatan 2007, joint forces built schools, constructed roads, provided free medical services, and installed clean water tanks. Also in 2007, the Philippine Navy stepped up its maritime security program with a plan to conduct more efficient patrols around the Sulu Archipelago.

Besides humanitarian projects, the U.S. and the Philippines collaborated on peace building initiatives. For example, in 2007, USAID provided computers and computer training to Jolo residents, introducing them to technology and enabling them to communicate with people around the world. Even the Muslim protestors of the U.S. military presence in Jolo, acknowledged that the Americans had helped Jolo residents.

Bilateral cooperation in 2008 began with the launch of Balikatan 2008 in February. It was held in two phases in Palawan, Mindanao, and the Sulu Archipelago. The first phase focused on training the AFP in natural disaster situations. In the second phase, joint forces provided free medical, dental, and veterinary services.
Also in February, the U.S. was accused of engaging in combat activities against
the ASG during a rescue operation to free hostages taken by the ASG. Sandrawina
Wahid, a survivor of the shootout, claimed that she saw four U.S. soldiers amongst the
Filipino elite forces. U.S. Major General Nelson said this claim was preposterous as
American troops were not allowed to engage in combat.

Then, in April 2008, the AFP received intelligence that the ASG and the JI were
planning a major attack. With help from the U.S., the AFP successfully launched a
“surgical attack” on an ASG camp in Jolo. The forces captured several ASG members
and JI leader, Umar Patek. The next chapter will examine the greater U.S.-Philippines
cooperation against the ASG under President Barack Obama’s administration.
CHAPTER V

THE U.S.-PHILIPPINE RESPONSE TO THE ASG THREAT UNDER PRESIDENT BARACK H. OBAMA, 2009-MARCH 2012

On January 20, 2009, President George W. Bush stepped down from office and Barack H. Obama was inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States and the first African-American to hold this position. The aim of Chapter V is to analyze the joint efforts of the United States and the Philippines in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf under President Obama in the United States and Presidents Arroyo and Benigno Aquino III in the Philippines. The scope of this chapter covers the years 2009 to March 2012, and is focused on the security aspects of the bilateral efforts to combat the ASG. The organization is in four parts. The first part will give some background information on Obama, his ties to Southeast Asia, and his aims to strengthen relations with the Muslim world and to reengage with Southeast Asia through ASEAN. The second part will trace U.S.-Philippines ties during President Obama’s first 1½ years in office, which marked the closing years of Arroyo’s presidency. This part will also cover some of the domestic challenges that Arroyo faced at this time. The third part will discuss bilateral relations from June 2010 to March 2012 when they were further strengthened under Obama’s administration in the United States and President Benigno Aquino III’s administration in the Philippines. The fourth part will conclude the chapter by analyzing the U.S.-Philippine relationship under President Obama in America and Presidents Arroyo and Aquino in the Philippines.
Background Information on Barack Obama and his Aims as President

Barack Hussein Obama, Jr. was born on August 4, 1961 in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Stanley Ann Dunham, from Kansas, and Barack Hussein Obama, Sr., from Kenya. Barack’s Muslim middle name, Hussein, comes from his father who had converted to Islam from Christianity. Dunham and Obama, Sr. met while both were students at the University of Hawaii at Manao. They married on February 2, 1961, and Obama was born six months later.¹

In September 1962, when Obama was two years old, his parents separated after his father went to Harvard to pursue his Ph.D. in economics. Dunham filed for divorce in 1964, which Obama, Sr. did not contest. In 1965, Obama’s father returned to Kenya. A year later, in 1966, Dunham married Lolo Soetero, an Indonesian student, whom she had met in Hawaii. When Obama was six years old, his mother and stepfather moved the family to Indonesia, where Obama’s half-Indonesian sister, Maya Soetero, was born on August 15, 1970.²

Obama spent four years in Indonesia as a child, from 1967 to 1971. In his autobiography, Dreams from My Father, he fondly recalls Indonesia as the place where he lived in a small house with a mango tree out front and where he ran in fields with water buffalos and goats. In Indonesia, he spoke the language, ate the food, and learned about Islam. He used his stepfather’s last name, Soetero, and was commonly called

² Ibid.
Barry throughout his childhood in Indonesia. Due to political unrest in Indonesia, Obama’s mother sent him to live with his maternal grandparents in Hawaii.³

Obama lived with his grandparents in Hawaii until he graduated from high school, when he moved to Los Angeles for two years and studied at Occidental College. He then transferred to Columbia University in New York where he majored in political science with specialization in international relations, graduating in 1983. He worked in New York for two years at the Business International Corporation then at the New York Public Interest Group. In 1985, he moved to Chicago to work as the Director of the Developing Communities Project, where he helped set up a job training program and a college preparatory tutoring program for low-income residents.⁴

In 1988, Obama entered Harvard Law School. The following year, during a summer internship in Chicago at the Sidley and Austin law firm, he met Michelle Robinson, when she was assigned as his adviser. They began dating and eventually married in October 1992. While at Harvard, he was selected as the first African-American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. In 1991, he graduated magna cum laude from law school and returned to Chicago, practicing civil rights law. He also taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School, and helped to organize a voter registration drive during Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign.⁵


⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Barack Obama,” *Biography.com*
His work as a civil rights advocate and his experience with the voter registration drive, led Obama to run as a Democratic candidate for the Illinois State Senate in 1996. Obama was elected State Senator for the 13th District in the November election, winning 82% of the vote against David Whitehead and Rosette Caldwell Peyton. As a State Senator, Obama drafted and helped pass legislation on ethics, health care services, and early childhood education programs for the poor.

In 2004, while serving as an Illinois State Senator, encouraged by poll numbers, Obama decided to run for the U.S. Senate. He won the November 2004 elections against Republican Alan Keyes, receiving 70 percent of the vote to Keyes’ 27 percent. He was sworn into office on January 4, 2005. As a U.S. Senator, he worked on a bill to destroy weapons of mass destruction in Eastern Europe and Russia. He also pushed for alternative energy development and improved veterans’ benefits.

In February 2007, Obama announced his candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, running against U.S. Senator Hillary R. Clinton. He won the Democratic bid on June 3, 2008, and Clinton offered her full support for the duration of his campaign. On November 4, 2008, with Joe Biden as his choice for Vice President, Obama defeated Republican John McCain for the position of U.S. President. On January 20, 2009, he became the 44th president of the United States and the first African-American to hold this office.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Regarding Obama’s ties to Southeast Asia, they are rooted in the four years that he spent in Indonesia as a child. These ties are also linked to his Indonesian stepfather, his half Indonesian half sister, and to her husband, Konrad Ng, whose Chinese ethnic parents were originally from Sabah, Malaysia. Another link is through his mother whose doctoral dissertation, entitled “Peasant Blacksmithing in Indonesia: Surviving Against All Odds,” was a study of the “resilience of Indonesian village industries in the face of encroaching urbanization.”\(^9\) He is the first president to have such close ties to and first hand knowledge of Southeast Asia, putting him in a position to improve U.S. relations with the region.

Regarding his aims as president, in his speeches made while campaigning for the position of president, he said that he wished to strengthen ties with the Muslim population. Because he had spent four years of his childhood in Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation in the world, he saw the importance of Islam. He called for the need for more peace and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, he was an early opponent of America’s war against Iraq, calling it a “dumb, rash war based on politics.”\(^10\)

In his campaign speeches, he also expressed his intent to reengage with Southeast Asia through ASEAN. After limited ties with the region throughout President George W. Bush’s two terms, Obama aimed at more cooperation between the U.S. and the Southeast

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\(^10\) Ibid., 33.
Asian nations. Whereas Bush did not sign ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), Obama indicated that he would. He recognized the importance of the U.S. signing the TAC was one of the major the requirements for joining the East Asian Summit (EAS), a forum focused on promoting peace, stability, and economic prosperity in East Asia.

**Relations under Obama & Arroyo, January 2009-May 2010**

Soon after Barak Obama took office in 2009, he and President Arroyo reaffirmed the strong relationship between their two nations. For example, Arroyo said in a statement released earlier that year: “In my conversations with Senator Barack Obama before the elections and President-elect Obama after his election, it was made clear that the special relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines will continue unabated. Our ties run deep.” In turn, President Obama recognized the Philippines’ importance to the U.S. claiming that it is “a vital link between the United States and East Asia.”

Meanwhile, just a few days before his inauguration for the position of president, Obama announced that he would use his middle name, Hussein, when taking the oath of office. This use of Hussein, an Arabic name, was one of Obama’s attempts to reach out to the Muslim world as promised in his campaign speeches. Then, soon after becoming

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11 Ibid., 47.


president, he made an attempt to strengthen ties to the Muslims in a speech made in Cairo, Egypt on June 4, 2009. In this address, he noted the strained relationship between the U.S. and the Muslims and his hopes to open a new dialogue. He said, “I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world.”

His Cairo speech was well received by Americans and Muslims alike. Since the Moros in the Philippines are Muslims, his speech probably made some impact on them.

In the Philippines, the government continued its fight against the ASG with the help of the U.S. Together, they commenced Balikatan 2009 on April 14, 2009. During Balikatan 2009, U.S. and Philippine forces participated not only in military exercises but also in community and humanitarian projects such as providing medical, dental, and veterinary services. The Dental Civic Action Programs (DENCAP) offered free dental services to more than 12,000 people and an additional 10,000 received other free medical services through Medical Civic Action Programs (MEDCAPs) in Mindanao. Two veterinarian Civic Action Programs (VETCAPs) treated more than 300 animals.

Moreover, joint forces built and renovated schools, constructed roads, and dug water wells. The U.S. Air Force visited Filipino children at schools and at an orphanage in


15 Ibid.


17 Ibid.
Angeles City where they donated school supplies, athletic equipment and toys, and spent time meeting with children. Additionally, they raised money and made a cash donation to the orphanage.\textsuperscript{18}

As part of Balikatan 2009, the U.S. Air Force conducted staff exercises, which focused on joint force management. The U.S. Navy also sent two Landing Craft Utility (LCU) vessels to support the Philippines 31\textsuperscript{st} Marine Expeditionary Unit, and together they held cross training and field training exercises.\textsuperscript{19} Philippine soldiers were trained to use a variety of weapons, including the M16 rifle, M24 sniper rifle, 81mm mortar and the 50-caliber machine gun.\textsuperscript{20} Balikatan 2009 officially concluded on April 30, 2009.

Soon after the Balikatan exercises, on July 30, 2009, President Obama received President Arroyo at the White House in Washington, D.C. Arroyo was the first Southeast Asian leader to visit Obama upon his becoming president. They discussed strategies to enhance U.S.-Philippines cooperation on critical global issues, such as counterterrorism, which included strategies to combat the ASG. At this meeting, President Arroyo thanked the U.S. for the millions of dollars that it had poured into the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines since the September 11, 2001 attacks. She acknowledged that this financial aid had been essential in the fight against the ASG. Arroyo also thanked the U.S. for professionalizing the Philippine military and for all its assistance with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
humanitarian and civic projects in the southern Philippines, such as building roads and schools and providing medical services. She stated that because of this U.S. help, “The Philippines has been able to continue fighting terrorism and work towards a formal peace talk with the Muslim secessionists.”

At the same meeting, President Obama praised the progress that President Arroyo had made on counterterrorism issues, especially her efforts to engage in peace talks with the Muslim radical groups including the ASG. Obama said that the process Arroyo initiated had the “potential to bring peace and stability to a part of the Philippines that has been wracked by unrest for too long.” President Obama also commended the Philippines’ leading role in ASEAN.

Earlier that month, Obama’s Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, attended her first ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in Phuket, Thailand, on July 22, 2009 where she worked to develop the Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Work Plan. This plan is a comprehensive and coordinated strategy that focuses ARF efforts on issues such as biological terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and transnational maritime security. Bolstering maritime security is an important issue to both the U.S. and the Philippines because the Philippines Navy has had problems monitoring the waters around Mindanao, which has made it easy for the ASG to escape by boat during AFP raids.

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
At this ARF meeting in Phuket, Thailand, Secretary Clinton signed the TAC on behalf of the United States. Acceding to the TAC was beneficial to the U.S. and to ASEAN as it expanded the U.S. presence in the region and elevated Southeast Asia’s political stature.\textsuperscript{25} It is important to note that the TAC had not been signed under President Bush, which prevented the U.S. in gaining membership to the EAS as accession to the TAC was one of the main requirements. The EAS is a forum for “dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern, with the aim of promoting peace, stability, economic prosperity in East Asia.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, signing the TAC paved the way for the U.S. to join the EAS and it also improved America’s political-security relationship with ASEAN.

In August of the same year, Defense Secretary Robert Gates decided on the deployment of an elite 600-troop counterinsurgency operation to the Philippines.\textsuperscript{27} The soldiers were part of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), sent to support the Philippines in counterterrorism efforts and to work alongside the AFP in an advisory capacity. Earlier, Secretary Gates had faced pressure from Pentagon officials to reassign the JSOTF-P troops to fulfill more urgent needs, such as in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{28} However, after a visit to the Philippines with C.I.A. director Leon Panetta in June 2009, 

\textsuperscript{25} Carroll, “U.S.-ASEAN Relations under the Obama Administration, 2009-2011,” 49.


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
Gates “felt it was not the right time to begin scaling back our support.” As noted by Pentagon Press Secretary, Geoff Morrell, while U.S. and Philippine forces “have made real progress against international terrorist groups there, everyone believes they (terrorist groups) would ramp back up their attacks if we were to draw down.” In 2009, the JSOT-P provided advice and assistance to the AFP, including military training, intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

Also in August of 2009, the Department of State continued its Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) Program in the Philippines, maintaining its focus in the Muslim areas where the terrorist threat was most acute. The ATA provides the Philippines with training, equipment, and technology needed to increase their capabilities to find and arrest terrorists. During FY2009, the State Department through the ATA, provided training on a wide range of counterterrorism skills, including investigating terrorist incidents; ensuring infrastructure security; managing critical incidents; employing surveillance detection equipment; and investigating and seizing digital evidence.

Meanwhile, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) continued to work closely, as in previous years, with Philippine law enforcement agencies to gain access to terrorist suspects and also to criminal, immigration, financial, and biographic records.

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.


32 Ibid.
The FBI conducted numerous interviews with suspected members of the JI, ASG, and the MILF.

A few months later, Secretary Clinton flew to Manila where she held meetings with senior Filipino government officials from November 12-13, 2009 to discuss the U.S.-Philippines security alliance, especially regarding the threat of insurgent groups in the Philippines. During this visit, Clinton discussed the role that the U.S. would play in the peace talks with the MILF. She noted that the Obama Administration would have a more visible presence in the peace process and would continue military and economic assistance. The MILF and the Philippine government had finally negotiated a truce in the summer of 2009 after years of fighting and agreed to resume negotiations by the end of that year.

After her Manila visit, Secretary Clinton joined President Obama in Singapore where he hosted the first U.S. – ASEAN Summit, on November 15, 2009, as part of his goal to revitalize the U.S. relationship with Southeast Asia. At this meeting, ASEAN welcomed the accession of the U.S. to the TAC. This meeting was crucial as it marked the first time that a U.S. President met directly with all ten leaders of ASEAN to discuss U.S.-ASEAN relations, as President Bush had not held such a summit. Other countries, such as China and Japan, had already hosted summits with ASEAN. Some of the issues discussed during the U.S.-ASEAN meeting, included climate change, nuclear

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33 Ibid., 56.


35 Ibid.
proliferation, and global economic recovery. Obama and the ASEAN leaders also agreed to expand U.S.-ASEAN cooperation to promote educational exchanges. For example, Obama promised to increase opportunities for English language training in Southeast Asia and opportunities for educational exchanges in the U.S. and ASEAN. Meanwhile, as Arroyo’s last full year as president came to a close, her administration achieved some success in operations against the ASG. For instance, on February 21, 2010, the AFP, with help from the U.S., killed prominent ASG sub-commander Albader Parad and five other ASG militants in Jolo. However, despite this setback for the ASG, it continued to launch attacks in the southern Philippines. There was an upsurge in violence by the ASG in the period right before the Philippine national elections in May 2010. On February 27, 2010, members of the ASG raided the town of Maluso on Basilan Island, killing a government employee and ten civilians. The same month ASG rebels crossed over to Sabah, kidnapped two Malaysian citizens, and took them to the Philippines for ransom. The AFP rescued the two men in late December. On April 13, 2010, the ASG also bombed a cathedral in Isabela City, Basilan.


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
While the U.S.-Philippine relationship was met with success, President Arroyo faced many domestic challenges during her last years in office. The first challenge was the death of the beloved and widely popular former president Corazon “Cory” Aquino on August 1, 2009. Aquino had publicly opposed the Arroyo administration, led numerous protests against her, and had called for her resignation.\(^{41}\) Arroyo and Aquino were once allies but their relationship began eroding in 2005 during the scandal over Arroyo’s election in 2004.\(^{42}\) Because Aquino was held in high regard by the Filipinos, many had joined in mass protests against Arroyo. Not surprisingly, Filipinos were enveloped in grief over Aquino’s passing, and their sorrow only increased public opposition to Arroyo.\(^{43}\) Cory Aquino’s death also bolstered support for her son, Senator Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III, who would file his official bid for the presidential post on September 9, 2009.\(^{44}\)

A second challenge was a devastating tropical storm, Typhoon Ondoy, which hit Metropolitan Manila on September 30, 2009. It caused the greatest flooding the capital had seen in 40 years with severe economic consequences. The storm created so much devastation it actually slowed down or even reversed, the economic progress that Arroyo

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.
claimed she had made during her presidency. For example, gross domestic product (GDP) was reduced to slightly above 2% in 2009, down from 7.3% in 2007, while the fiscal deficit grew on missed revenue collection targets.45

A third challenge, perhaps the worst for Arroyo, was the politically motivated acts of violence against journalists and the extrajudicial killings of individuals linked to leftist groups. On November 23, 2009, the notorious warlord and mayor from the powerful Ampatuan clan, Andal Ampatuan, Jr., ordered the massacre of a convoy of his political opponent’s family members and lawyers as well as a group of accompanying journalists. The 57 victims were on their way to enter the name of Ismael Mangudadatu as a candidate for the governorship in the province of Maguindanao. Clan leader, Andal Ampatuan Sr, was the incumbent governor and Amapatuan Jr. had hoped to succeed his father in this post.46

The Ampatuans possessed a private army and enjoyed close ties to Arroyo, reportedly helping her to win the province in the 2004 elections.47 Videos of the site of the killings were uploaded on to the Internet and widely viewed. Arroyo attempted to distance herself from the massacre, claiming the murders as unconscionable. However, the case caused uproar not only in the Philippines but also abroad from international organizations, such as Reporters without Borders and the Committee to Protect

45 Ibid.


47 Lum, _The Republic of the Philippines and U.S. Interests_, 5.
Journalists, as so many local journalists were killed in the attack.\textsuperscript{48} With so much domestic and international pressure, Arroyo had no choice but to order the arrest of the warlord, an ally of hers.

The massacre was a reflection of the unchecked power of local clans and military units and the violent struggles amongst families. It also exposed the rampant lawlessness in the southern Philippines and the government’s ties with these entities. Some Philippine experts have argued that Arroyo’s focus on security and fighting terrorism, which reflects U.S. concerns, contributed to her neglect of human rights issues.\textsuperscript{49} Observers also argue that, in return of the military’s support, Arroyo protected the security forces from charges of corruption and human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{50}

Moreover, human rights groups have accused the Philippine security forces, the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) for participating in the extra-judicial killings of civilians. These human rights groups assert that the killings are part of an indiscriminate military campaign against the communists and the Muslim insurgents.\textsuperscript{51} Some Philippine analysts claim that Arroyo was reluctant to discipline the military because its top ranks provided her with much needed political support. Arroyo denied the allegations and took major steps to correct any human rights atrocities committed by the military. For example, she promised to bolster the investigation and prosecution of cases

\textsuperscript{48} Kirk, “Philippines Massacre,” 4.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{50} Lum, \textit{The Republic of the Philippines and U.S. Interests}, 6.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 4.
involving extra-judicial killings and to establish procedures to ensure greater accountability in the military and in the police. The AFP also established a human rights office and became more selective in its targets.  

A fourth challenge for Arroyo occurred in November 2009, when the Philippine Senate targeted her and her husband, Jose Miguel Arroyo, for further investigation due to corruption charges. The charges were in connection with the alleged kickbacks that both had received in a $329-million broadband deal with China’s ZTE Corp. Arroyo denied the allegations and quickly canceled the deal.

Meanwhile, there had been speculation that Arroyo would manipulate the law and try to run for office. However, the Philippine Constitution legally bars a president from serving more than one term of six years. In any case, in December 2009, Arroyo announced that she would run for a seat in the lower house of Congress. Thus, in May 2010, Arroyo stood for election and won a seat in the House of Representatives representing the 2nd District of Pampanga. In the same month, Senator Benigno Aquino III was elected 15th president of the Philippines.

**Joint Efforts under Obama and Benigno Aquino III, May 2010-March 2012**

Benigno Simeon Aquino III, better known as “Noynoy” to distinguish him from “Ninoy,” his father, was born on February 8, 1960, in Manila, Philippines. Much like his predecessor, Aquino comes from a long line of politicians. Aquino is a fourth-generation

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52 Ibid.

politician as his great-grandfather, Servillano “Mianong” Aquino, served as a delegate in 1898 to the drafting of the Malolos Convention of the Constitution of the First Philippine Republic.\textsuperscript{54} His grandfather, Benigno Aquino, Sr., served as Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines from 1943 to 1944. Moreover, he has distinguished parents, former President Corazon Aquino and the late Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr. His family members on both sides come from pedigreed stock and are landed, wealthy aristocrats of the elite class.

Aquino’s father, Ninoy, a senator and opposition leader during the Marcos administration, was arrested in 1973 for subversion and incarcerated at Fort Bonifacio, Manila for seven years.\textsuperscript{55} Ninoy had led a movement to depose dictator Marcos.\textsuperscript{56} After several heart attacks, Ninoy was allowed to seek medical treatment in the United States in 1980. Ninoy, his wife, and daughters went into self-exile in the U.S. and Nonoy joined them after graduation from Ateneo de Manila University in 1981. In 1983, after three years in exile, Ninoy returned to the Philippines. Upon his arrival at Manila International Airport on August 21, 1983, Ninoy was shot in the head while being escorted from an aircraft to a vehicle waiting to transport him to prison.\textsuperscript{57} Marcos was accused of being involved in the assassination and public outrage over Ninoy’s murder was the catalyst for


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
the “People Power” revolution in February 1986 that led to Marcos’ removal from power and eventual exile in Hawaii. Ninoy’s widow became the next president.

After Cory Aquino’s death in early 2009, Noynoy Aquino’s supporters and friends coaxed him into running for the post of president. Aquino admits that he would not have run for office had it not been for the massive outpouring of public grief and affection that followed his mother’s death. He says of his parents, “They made automatic in me the preference to take up the cudgels for those who have less in life, for the powerless. Why should I veer away from their footprints?” He announced his official bid for presidency on September 9, 2009.

On May 10, 2010, in unofficial tallies, Aquino was announced as President-apparent. He was officially declared as President on June 9, 2010 and then sworn in on June 30. At age 50, Aquino is the third youngest Filipino to be elected and the first president who is a bachelor. He defeated his opponents, former president Joseph Estrada and Senator Manuel Villar, by a large margin of 45%. However, Estrada’s vice-presidential candidate, Jejomar Binay, won the vice-presidential race over Aquino’s running mate, Senator Manuel Roxas III, grandson of former President Manuel Roxas.

58 Ibid.


60 Ibid.

Aquino inherited numerous problems from his predecessor, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Her decade-long rule had brought out the worst in the political process, and her administration was “marred by corruption and driven by the patronage and violence of political dynasties and warlords.” Aquino promised to fight political corruption and used his parents’ legacy of integrity to garner support. One of his first initiatives as president was to institute the no wang-wang policy, which bans the use of sirens by all government officials. This motion was greatly welcomed by residents of congested Metro Manila, who associated sirens with the abuse of power by Arroyo. Arroyo had frequently blared sirens illegally in order to avoid sitting in traffic. Aquino has also gone after tax evaders, and has sent his internal revenue chief to charge a number of business leaders known for cheating the government.

Under his administration, Aquino has promised to engage in peace talks to end decades-long Islamist insurgencies. Unlike Arroyo, who took a hard-line stance against the ASG, Aquino vows to use non-violence methods to combat the ASG. He made good on his promise to continue efforts to seek peace in the southern Philippines, when, on July 19, 2010, he launched a counter-radicalization program called Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA), which means “resilient communities in conflict affected communities.” This was Aquino’s flagship program for peace building,

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 168.
66 Ibid., 44.
reconstruction and development in such troubled areas. The following month, he formed a new panel for renewed peace talks with the MILF and then resumed the talks in September after Ramadan.

Meanwhile, Aquino’s first major crisis occurred two months into his presidency. On August 23, 2010 in Manila, a disgruntled former policeman seized a busload of Chinese tourists from Hong Kong and held them hostage. The negotiations were badly handled and a poorly planned rescue led to the death of seven of the hostages. The event was widely televised and Aquino was criticized for failing to control information flow to the media, as the gunman was able to monitor the situation via the bus’s television set. The tragedy put Philippine violence in the limelight, discouraged tourists from visiting the country, and created tensions with China.

While the Philippines’ relationship with China went downhill, Philippine relations with the U.S. remained steady under Aquino. In September 2010, Aquino made his first official visit to the U.S. While in the U.S., he met with Secretary Clinton in New York and presided over the signing of the $434 million Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC), which opens a new era of collaboration between the U.S. and the Philippines. The agreement will help fund Aquino’s various programs for poverty reduction, revenue generation, and infrastructure development.

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67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

During this visit, Aquino also met with President Barack Obama at the 2nd ASEAN-U.S. Leaders Meeting in New York. At this meeting, Aquino welcomed the United States’ commitment to reinvigorating its relationship with Southeast Asian nations, including the Philippines. Obama also expressed his intention to elevate the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relationship to a higher level, and welcomed the Philippine government’s anti-corruption efforts, which was a large factor in the approval of the MCC grant. The two presidents also discussed the possibility of removing thousands of war materials that Allied forces had left behind on Corregidor Island during World War II.

From New York, Aquino made a stop in San Jose, California, where he delivered a speech to U.S. business leaders. He expressed his optimism that U.S. companies will expand their operations in the Philippines, which would create thousands of new jobs for Filipinos. U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Harry Thomas stated that he was “eager to see how many U.S. firms will decide to take up Aquino’s promise that the Philippines is open for business.” Thomas added that Aquino’s visit strengthened U.S.-Philippine relations and that “we are regional partners in supporting ASEAN’s integration efforts.

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
and bilateral partners in advancing good governance, employment, public health, and security in the Philippines."

While President Aquino’s visit reaffirmed the closeness of the U.S.-Philippine relationship, President Obama was making efforts to reach out to the Muslim world in a November 2010 speech delivered in Jakarta, Indonesia. He stated, “Relations between the United States and Muslim nations have been frayed over many years. As president, I have made it a priority to begin to repair these relations.” Obama then praised Indonesia for the progress it has made in “rooting out terrorists and combating violent extremism.” He also recognized his ties to the country, stating that, “Indonesia is a part of me.”

Meanwhile, as 2010 came to a close, U.S. and Philippine forces continued to make progress against the ASG. In December 2010, Madhatta Asagal Haipe, one of the ASG’s original founding members was extradited to the United States. He was sentenced to 23 years in prison in U.S. District Court, Washington, D.C., for his role in the 1995 kidnapping of U.S. citizens. Also, according to the State Department, the ASG was at its

74 Ibid.


76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.
lowest active membership levels in recent years with approximately only 200 to 400 members.  

The next year, 2011, began with continuing U.S.-Philippines cooperation against the ASG, with Balikatan 2011 which commenced on April 5 at Camp Aquinaldo, Manila. About 6,000 U.S. service members trained with the AFP during the bilateral exercises. Components of Balikatan 2011 included civil-military operations, field training exercises, and a command post exercise. Joint forces provided medical and dental services, non-lethal weapons training, cross-training interoperability. Balikatan 2011 ended on April 15 of that year.

On June 23, 2011, Philippines Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario met with Secretary Clinton in Washington, D.C. At this meeting, Clinton acknowledged the longstanding relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines and noted the 60th anniversary of the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty, which she called a “pillar of our relationship and a source of stability in the region.” Clinton also remarked on the two nations’ continued counterterrorism and maritime security efforts, noting that the U.S. recently transferred a U.S. Coast Guard cutter to the Philippines Navy and helped


the Philippines establish a coastal radar system so that it can monitor its own seas more closely. However, perhaps the most critically discussed topic was the China problem in the South China Sea.

At this meeting with Clinton, del Rosario explained the Philippines’ difficult relationship with China, especially since the Mischief Reef incident in the Spratly Islands in 1995. He also noted the intrusions made by Chinese vessels in the South China Sea, especially since nine of them had been made. Secretary Clinton told him that America desires freedom of navigation and adherence to the rule of international law in the South China Sea. She added that diplomacy, and not coercion, should be used to settle the matter. Clinton also stated that the “United States does not take sides on territorial disputes over land features in the South China Sea, but we oppose the use of force or the threat of force to advance any claims of any party.”

A few months later, in November 2011, Secretary Clinton made an official visit to the Philippines. She stood on the deck of an American warship in Manila Bay, reaffirmed the strong military relationship between the United States and the Philippines, and stated the importance of settling the China issue by diplomacy. She also referred to the Spratly Islands as the West Philippine Sea, the locally coined name for that area. Clinton then stressed the U.S.-Philippines historical security alliance and military relationship. She also noted that the U.S. will continue to assist the Philippines in

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

modernizing its naval forces. Thus far, this assistance has included the granting of a U.S. naval ship and some modern naval technology.\(^{84}\)

Meanwhile, the U.S. and the Philippines are making advances against the ASG. For instance, in October 2011, Philippine authorities, with help from the U.S., arrested Adzhar Mawalil, a ASG gunman linked to the 2000 kidnapping of Western tourists from a resort off of Sipadan in Malaysia.\(^{85}\) The state of the ASG in 2011 has led to a debate among political analysts about the rebels, with some claiming that they are little more than bandits while others argue that they are genuine Islamic militants fighting for an autonomous Muslim state in the southern Philippines.\(^{86}\) Regardless of how they may be viewed, the ASG rebels remain a serious security threat.

In early 2012, in a dialogue that took place from January 26-27 in Washington, D.C., the U.S and the Philippines discussed the U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Trepidation over China’s rising military capabilities led some political analysts to believe that the U.S. would seek to establish a permanent base in the Philippines. However, at the dialogue the U.S. stated that it would not re-establish a base but would instead seek other ways of cooperation, such as raising the frequency of joint exercises, rotating U.S. troops through Philippine bases, and increasing U.S. Navy operations in the Philippines.\(^{87}\)

\(^{84}\) Ibid.


\(^{86}\) Ibid.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
On February 2, 2012, there were reports that ASG leader Umbra Jumdail and JI leader Zulkifi Hir Marwan had been killed in a U.S.-backed airstrike on Jolo Island. Singaporean terrorist and Marwan ally, Abdullah Ali, better known as Muawiyah, was also thought to have been in the same location when AFP forces struck. Though U.S. and Philippine intelligence reports indicate that Marwan, a Malaysian, was in Jolo on the day of the raid, his body has yet to be found, fueling speculations that he escaped and fled the island.\textsuperscript{88} Marwan had a US $5 million FBI bounty on his head and was on the FBI’s Most Wanted List in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{89} According to the State Department, only four other people in the world have higher bounties for their capture than Marwan and one of them is al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri.\textsuperscript{90} Marwan, an engineer trained in the U.S., had been hiding out at ASG bases since 2003, and is believed to have turned desperate peasants into ASG recruits and trained them in bomb making.\textsuperscript{91}

If confirmed, the killings of Marwan, Jumdail, and Muawiyah will represent a huge victory for the U.S. and the Philippines as the ASG and the JI will be deprived of their key leaders. Philippine officials say that local villagers were crucial in finding

\textsuperscript{88} Steven Daniel, “Philippines Yet to Confirm if Terrorist Marwan is Dead,” \textit{The Star}, March 1, 2012.


\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

Marwan and Jumdail.\textsuperscript{92} Surviving militants believe that villagers, secretly working for the military, pretended to seek treatment, and traveled to Jumdail’s hideout, where they left some kind of sensor that the led the military to the ASG.\textsuperscript{93} The villagers had purposely gone to the hideout because Jumail had taken a medical course and was a rebel medic who treated wounded comrades.

The fact that a Filipino ASG leader, a Malaysian JI leader, and a Singaporean terrorist were all suspected to have worked together is significant because it indicates that the ASG is in league with other terrorist groups. Regarding the ASG’s link with the JI, they were closer in the early years because the JI supplied them with financial assistance, training, and weapons. The JI was also ASG’s link to the al-Qaeda network. However, while that era has passed, as most of the JI and the ASG leaders are either dead or imprisoned, the February raid makes it apparent that the days of collusion are far from over as the terrorist groups have kept in contact with each other. Together, they continue to derive their main sources of funding from drugs and arms trafficking, and from kidnapping for ransom.\textsuperscript{94}

The following month, in March 2012, President Aquino had to deal with problems regarding the former president and her husband. Aquino pursued the corruption charges brought against them for their role in the ZTE Corp scandal. He barred an ailing Arroyo

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.

from seeking medical attention in Singapore while the investigation against her and Mr.
Arroyo continued. Later that month, a Philippine court issued arrest warrants against
Arroyo and her husband. As of March 30, 2012, while Mr. Arroyo is out on bail, his wife
is being held in a military hospital.95

**Analysis of the Response to the ASG under Obama, Arroyo, and Aquino**

President Obama’s administration marked a new stage in the U.S. approach to the
ASG, to Muslims, and to relations with Southeast Asia. Obama was the first U.S.
president to have ties to and first-hand knowledge of Southeast Asia as he spent four
years of his childhood in Indonesia. He also has ties to this region through his Indonesian
stepfather, his half Indonesian half sister, his brother-in-law who is originally from
Sabah, and his mother who wrote her doctoral dissertation on an Indonesian topic. These
ties put him in a position to improve U.S. relations with Southeast Asia.

Obama’s aims as president include strengthening ties to the Muslim world and
reengaging in Southeast Asia through ASEAN. Both aims apply to the ASG because it is
a Muslim group based in the Philippines, a Southeast Asian nation. One of his first
efforts to improve relations with Muslims was his decision to use his middle name,
Hussein, during his inauguration. Then, shortly after becoming president, he made a
speech in Cairo, Egypt in which he reaffirmed his commitment to open up a new dialogue
between the U.S. and the Muslim world. Regarding his aim to reengage in Southeast

95 “Philippines: Arrest Warrants for Gloria and Jose Arroyo,” *BBC*, March 13, 2012, final
dition.
Asia, Obama indicated that, unlike President George W. Bush, he would sign the TAC. He recognized the importance of signing the TAC in gaining membership to the EAS.

In 2009, under President Obama and President Arroyo, the U.S. and the Philippines fight against the ASG began on April 14 with the launch of Balikatan 2009. During this exercise, the joint forces focused on health, education, and veterinary services. They offered free dental and medical screenings and treated sick animals. They also built roads, constructed schools, and dug water wells. Balikatan 2009 ended on April 30, 2009.

Then on July 30, 2009, Arroyo visited Obama in Washington, D.C. and together they discussed strategies to enhance U.S.-Philippines cooperation on counterterrorism. That same month, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, attended her first ARF meeting where she worked with ASEAN leaders to develop the CTTC Work Plan, very important for Philippine maritime security. Also at this ARF meeting, Clinton signed the TAC which is a major requirement in gaining membership to the EAS.

In August of the same year, Defense Secretary Gates deployed an elite 600-troop counterinsurgency operation to the Philippines. These soldiers were part of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), sent to support the Philippines in counterterrorism efforts. Earlier, Pentagon officials had pressured Gates to reassign these troops to Afghanistan, where they more urgently needed, but he refused stating it was not the right time to scale back support in the Philippines.

A few months later, Secretary Clinton flew to Manila and met with senior Filipino officials from November 12-13, 2009. During these meetings, Clinton discussed the role
that the U.S. would play in the peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF. She noted that the Obama Administration would have a more visible presence in the peace process and would continue military and economic assistance.

After her Manila visit, Clinton joint President Obama in Singapore where he hosted the first U.S.-ASEAN Summit on November 15, 2009, as part of his goal to revitalize the U.S. relationship with Southeast Asia. This was a very important meeting because it was the first time that an American president met directly with all ten leaders of ASEAN. During this Summit, ASEAN welcomed the accession of the U.S. to the TAC.

Meanwhile, as Arroyo’s last full year as president came to a close, she faced many challenges. The first challenge was the death of Corazon Aquino, which sparked many comparisons between Arroyo and the beloved Aquino and led to numerous protests calling for Arroyo’s resignation. The second challenge was Typhoon Ondoy, a tropical storm that flooded Manila and caused massive devastation. The third, and perhaps the worst, challenge was her involvement in the political violence by warlords. The fourth challenge was in connection to the charges that she and her husband had received kickbacks in a deal with a Chinese corporation. As her term came to a close, there was speculation that she would run for president again. However, the Philippine Constitution bars a president from serving more than one six-year term.

The following year, in 2010, the U.S. and the Philippines became even closer under Presidents Obama and Aquino. In September 2010, Aquino made an official visit to the U.S. where he met with Secretary Clinton in New York and presided over the
signing of the $434 million MCC. The MCC will help fund Aquino’s various programs for poverty reduction, revenue generation, and infrastructure development. During this visit, Aquino also met with President Obama at the ASEAN-U.S. Leaders Meeting in New York. The two presidents reaffirmed the strength of their bilateral relationship.

Regarding the ASG, President Aquino vowed to use non-violent methods to combat the ASG. Unlike Arroyo, who refused to negotiate with the group, Aquino promised to engage in peace talks and peace building initiatives. He made good on this promise with his creation of PAMANA, his flagship program for peace building, reconstruction, and development in troubled areas.

The year 2011 began with continuing U.S.-Philippine relations against the ASG with Balikatan 2011 which commenced on April 5 at Camp Aguinaldo. During this exercise, joint forces conducted civil-military operations, field training exercises, and a command post exercise. They also provided medical and dental services.

Two months later, in June 2011, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario met with Secretary Clinton in Washington, D.C. and discussed the U.S.-Philippines counterterrorism and maritime security efforts. They also discussed the China problem in the South China Sea, which has become more serious as China is showing more aggression. During this meeting, Clinton pointed out the Obama administration’s intention to step up the Philippine’s maritime security program by providing naval ships and technology to the Philippine Navy. Then, a few months later, November 2011, Clinton made a visit to the Philippines, reaffirmed U.S. support for the Philippines in the face of the China issue, and noted that the U.S. would continue to support the
Philippines’ efforts to step up their maritime security. Also in 2011, the U.S. and the Philippines made advances against the ASG in October. The AFP, with help from the U.S., arrested Adzhar Mawalil, an ASG member linked to the 2000 kidnappings of Western tourists at a resort in Malaysia.

In early 2012, there were reports that ASG leader Umbra Jumdail, JI leader Zulkifi Hir Marwan, and Singaporean terrorist Abdullah Ali had been killed in a U.S.-backed airstrike on Jolo Island. If confirmed, their killings will represent a huge victory for the U.S. and the Philippines as the ASG and the JI will be deprived of their key leaders. The next and last chapter will make recommendations for better U.S.-Philippines collaboration against the ASG and assess bilateral efforts since 9/11.
The aim of Chapter VI is to provide recommendations for more effective cooperation against the ASG and to give an overall assessment of the U.S.-Philippine collaboration. The scope covers all the ten years of this thesis from 2001 to 2012. The organization is in three parts. The first part discusses political-military recommendations while the second part covers economic and socio-cultural recommendations. The third part concludes the chapter with a summary and analysis of U.S.-Philippine efforts against the ASG.

**Political-Military Recommendations**

This thesis makes five recommendations on the political-military level. The first recommendation is that the Philippine government make military officials more accountable for defense spending in order to reduce corruption within the AFP. Accountability for defense funds is essential for ensuring that the military’s money is being used for necessary security efforts, such as counterterrorism operations. One way to carry out this recommendation is for the Philippine government to enhance the transparency of the AFP’s financial accounting records and of its military procurement process. This is important because, in 2005 during a Senate Hearing, former AFP budget chief, Lieutenant Colonel George Rabusa, testified that several AFP officers collected monthly allowances from a $20 million slush fund, with money skimmed off the salaries...
of soldiers and from the operational expenses of various military units.\(^1\) Rabusa claimed that retired AFP chief, Angelo Reyes, received $116,000 a month from the slush fund. At the same Hearing, Rabusa confirmed that Chief Reyes profited from the purchases of ammunition and an unmanned vehicle. These purchases were made through private negotiations rather than through the normal competitive bidding process.\(^2\)

In connection with this first recommendation, the Philippine government should impose more effective auditing methods to account for AFP funds. AFP financial officers must be held accountable for keeping meticulous records and must make the records easily available for public scrutiny. The institution responsible for ensuring fair procurement processes, the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), must be made more accountable during military purchasing. The BAC must make certain that all military procurements are made through the public bidding system and at the disclosed price.\(^3\)

Another way to carry out this recommendation is to prosecute individuals found guilty of engaging in corruption. They must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, as so far this has not yet been done. For instance, in 2011, 19 AFP officers were prosecuted for alleged corruption, accused of stealing millions of dollars from military


coffers, taking bribes from the ASG, paying each other “retirement gifts,” and profiting from deals made during the procurements of military equipment and vehicles. However, of the 19 officers, Major General Carlos Garcia was the only one arrested and convicted on the charges of corruption and plunder, while the other cases were dismissed.\(^4\)

Presently, corruption is rampant within the AFP because the rewards far exceed the risks, and guilty officers must receive harsher punishments as deterents.

A second recommendation is to increase the salaries of military personnel to reduce corruption through collusion with the ASG. Salaries can be increased by improving methods of tax collection; revitalizing the economy; and conducting an overhaul of the government’s budget. Inadequate pay hampers the AFP’s operations against the ASG because, in exchange for money, military personnel allow the ASG to escape during raids. Military officials have been accused of taking profits from the ASG during kidnappings for ransom. For example, in June 2001, when the ASG kidnapped 16 people from a resort in Palawan, the rebels were still able to escape despite being surrounded by the AFP. This was because senior military officers helped the rebels to escape in exchange for cash payments.\(^5\)

A third recommendation is to increase efforts on training the local police force in basic counterterrorism techniques, as more needs to be done. The Philippine police are integral to U.S.-Philippine efforts to combat the ASG because they are the first line of defense.

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defense against terrorist groups. According to Walter Ladwig, a visiting fellow at the London Royal United Services Institute, a research center on defense and security issues, the local police force is the agency that is best suited to disrupt insurgent network while protecting the local population. This is because the police live and work amongst the population and interact with civilians on a regular basis and are connected to the local knowledge network.\(^6\) The U.S. has been able to provide some financial support to develop the Philippine National Police (PNP) but this sum is so much less than the amount given to the AFP. For example, in 2010, the U.S. allotted $118 million to the AFP though it only provided $13 million for the PNP.\(^7\) Perhaps U.S. aid to the AFP and the PNP can be more equally distributed.

The fourth recommendation is for the Philippine government to enhance the country’s maritime security as the nation faces security threats from China and from several insurgent groups, especially the ASG. One way to accomplish this is to increase funding to the Philippine Navy (PN). Inadequate funding has left the PN ill equipped and have caused its operational effectiveness to suffer, leaving the country’s seas largely unchecked.\(^8\) For example, the poorly policed area in the Sulu Archipelago has made it easy for the ASG to engage in maritime crimes, such as the February 2004 Superferry bombing near a port in Manila and the April 2004 kidnappings of two Malaysians and an


\(^{7}\) Ibid.

Indonesian in a sailing vessel off the coast of Sabah. Historically, the Philippine Army (PA) has received more financial support because the bulk of security threats have been land-based. Now, however, maritime security requires more attention.

The present Philippine government has made some effort to increase funding to the PN. For example, in October 2011, President Beningo Aquino allocated $46 million for the PN. However, this $46 million came from a sum of $349 million for the AFP modernization, which meant the bulk of the money went to the Army. While these efforts are a good start for the Navy, the Philippine government should work to decrease this disparity in allocations to the PN and the PA. More funding for the Navy would allow it to procure more vessels, making it better able to defend the Philippine seas against the ASG. Meanwhile, President Obama has supported the revamping of the PN by authorizing the transfer of two outdated U.S. ships to it.

The fifth recommendation is to reduce the political marginalization of the Muslims as their exclusion from the political process causes feelings of frustration and resentment. One way to accomplish this is to create programs that will include Muslims

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For example, one U.S.-Philippine political program is the Congressional Internship for Young Mindanao Leaders (CIPYMP), which began in 2002. Its objective is to further educate young people within the ARMM about democratic values and institutions to make them less politically marginalized and more aware of the work of the Philippine government. The interns work with Congressional Committees and in the offices of individual representatives where they assist with policy formulation, research, and the preparation of legislation.

**Economic and Socio-Cultural Recommendations**

This thesis makes four recommendations for fighting terrorism on the economic and socio-cultural levels. The first recommendation is to reduce poverty in all of the Muslim areas, especially Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago by providing more educational and job opportunities, building and repairing schools, and implementing job-training programs. Most members of the ASG are young, poor, marginalized Muslims with very little education. Without educational and job opportunities, these youths are induced by economic and social circumstances to join jihadist groups, like the ASG, in order to support themselves and their families.

In recent years, the U.S. and the Philippines have instituted some programs to increase the quality of education in the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines. For

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example, from July 2006 to July 2011, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in cooperation with the ARMM Department of Education, reintegrated 70,000 out-of-school youth back into the formal school system; distributed two million math and science books to different schools; and constructed or renovated 900 classrooms in the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines.\textsuperscript{14} USAID has also provided technical and vocational training opportunities for out-of-school youth, prepared these youth for employment, and strengthened English language proficiency among Muslim students.\textsuperscript{15} Increasing educational and job opportunities for the youth in the Muslim areas will provide them with means to earn a living instead of joining the ASG.

A second recommendation is to encourage more interaction between the Muslim and Christian populations so that they can better understand each other and become more tolerant of their differences. For centuries, the Moros have been discriminated against and have been seen as violent terrorists though not all are members of insurgent groups. This “us” versus “them” mentality has fueled jihadist activities. One way to accomplish this recommendation is to foster cross-cultural programs. For example, in April 2010, the U.S. Embassy in Manila and the Cultural Center of the Philippines sponsored a summer camp where 50 Muslim and Christian teens shared their love of dance. The “Hip Hop Happy” camp brought together emerging student artists from Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago and Christians from the northern Philippines to participate not only in dance


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
but also in discussions on trust, respect, and understanding and on exploring their goals and aspirations. The program changed the lives of its participants and transformed their perceptions of each other. By the end of the 12 day camp, one Muslim student from Tawitawi exclaimed: “We learned a lot – not only about hip hop but also working with groups and understanding one another’s culture. This learning will be treasured and shared with our own communities.”

The Philippine government must further develop and host programs that promote equality and mutual understanding of different cultures. These positive interactions help to break down barriers between Muslims and Christians, creating a more stable environment in the southern Philippines.

A third recommendation is for the U.S. and the Philippines to continue to provide incentives to the local population to help in the capture of ASG insurgents. One way to achieve this is for the U.S. to maintain the Rewards for Justice Program (RFJ). The RFJ is one of the U.S. government’s most valuable tools for collecting information on terrorist leaders. Through the RFJ, the U.S. offers rewards for information, and has been highly effective in engaging the civilian population to provide intelligence tips regarding the ASG. For example, the information provided by local citizens to the U.S. and Philippine

16 Ibid.

forces was instrumental in locating and killing Khadaffy Janjalani in 2006. The U.S. rewarded the citizens $5 million in a ceremony in 2007.\textsuperscript{18}

The fourth recommendation is to hasten economic development in the Muslim areas of the southern Philippines as economic deprivation is a huge motivating factor in turning Muslims towards terrorism. Fortunately, President Aquino is working on speeding up economic development. For example, in September 2010, he drafted a plan to boost economic development in the Muslim areas. The plan includes constructing more roads and building a mega dam to address the power outage problems. The road networks should link all ports around Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, which will lessen the inconvenience of transporting goods in and out of the ARMM.\textsuperscript{19} These plans produced some impact as big chains, such as Starbucks and Jollibee’s, opened up in the Muslim region in 2011.

Fortunately too, in 2010, USAID allotted $70 million a year for peace efforts and development in Muslim areas.\textsuperscript{20} USAID stated that the strategic vision of U.S. foreign assistance for the Philippines is a “more prosperous, well-governed and stable democracy that is able to meet the needs of its people, especially the poor, and is no longer a haven

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In its Country Assistance Strategy for the Philippines, USAID announced that it would implement “programs in the Muslim areas in the south to enhance private sector-led growth, improve access to credit for micro and small enterprises, increase agricultural productivity, and improve the provision of economic infrastructure.”

Assessment of U.S.-Philippine Collaboration Against the ASG Since 9/11

The Moro problem in the Philippines goes back to centuries before September 11, 2001. The clash between the Philippine government and the Moros has been long and bloody, dating back to 1521 with the arrival of the Spaniards. The Muslim secessionist movement as we know it today, however, began in 1969 with the MNLF, followed by the MILF in 1977, and then by the ASG in 1991. Since 2001, the Philippine government’s approach towards the Moro rebels has been to clear, hold, consolidate, and develop an area against insurgents. The U.S.-Philippine cooperation against the ASG began before the 9/11 attacks when the U.S. got involved in the Burnham kidnappings in May 2001. It increased after 9/11 because of continued security problems with the ASG and because of its links to al-Qaeda.

Of the Moro groups, the Philippine and U.S. governments have had the most problems with the ASG. The ASG has managed to avoid complete annihilation mainly

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22 Ibid.

due to its links with the MNLF, the MILF, the RSM, and the JI. The local Muslim groups share the same goal of creating an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines, whereas the JI seek to establish a pan-Islamic state across Southeast Asia. The MILF emerged as a separatist group in 1977, stemming from a political rift between MNLF leaders Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat. The latter accused Misuari of corruption and the abuse of power.\textsuperscript{24} Salamat also disagreed with Misuari’s decision to sign a deal with the Philippine government to create an autonomous Muslim region with only four areas. The MILF is the largest local Muslim group, with approximately 11,000 members, and it continues to have strong ties with the ASG and the JI. Philippine intelligence officials report that the JI trained ASG and MILF members in bomb assembling and detonation.\textsuperscript{25} Collaboration deepened when many JI leaders relocated to Jolo, as many were pursued by Indonesian forces following the 2002 Bali attacks. Further collusion became evident when an ASG and JI leader were both captured and killed at a MILF camp in 2011. In the case of U.S.-Philippine collaboration on the Moros, it is closest in fighting the ASG.

The ASG engages in extortion, kidnappings for ransom, bombings, and assassinations. After the death of its leader, Abdurajak Janjanlani, in 1996, the ASG turned away from its ideology and became known as a loose gang of bandits. When

\textsuperscript{24} Robin Bowman, “Is the Philippines Profiting From The War on Terrorism?” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 2004), 50.

Khadaffy Janjalani assumed control in 2005, he was able to unite the ASG and to move the group back towards its original objective of creating an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines. He also strengthened ties with the MILF and the JI.

U.S.-Philippine collaboration to fight the ASG has been complicated by the role of the MILF. The MILF has allowed the ASG to operate in its territory and has provided a sanctuary for many ASG members. The MILF’s support has made it difficult to eliminate the ASG because the AFP is reluctant to strike against the MILF, which has been engaged in peace talks with the government since 2001. Arroyo took a hard line stance against the ASG, but she communicated with the MILF through negotiations because she was reluctant to undermine the peace talks by attacking the MILF’s territory. The Philippine government’s best prospect for peace in Mindanao is to come to an agreement with the MILF. While the U.S. has suggested that the MILF be listed as a terrorist group, in the ten years under Arroyo, she refused.

Another complication has been the weak state of the AFP. The withdrawal of the U.S. troops left Philippine security weak. The state of the AFP’s surveillance equipment and military vessels, vehicles, and aircraft deteriorated as they were no longer maintained by the U.S. military. The Philippine government wanted to modernize the AFP, but was financially constrained and found it difficult to cover its basic manpower and logistics needs. For example, their patrol boats were outdated and slow, making it difficult to
monitor the waters around Mindanao. In fact, the ASG rebels possessed superior equipment to that of the AFP, including modern speedboats.²⁶

Because of the weak state of the AFP, the Philippine government turned to the U.S. for military assistance due to the AFP’s need for modernization, the growing ASG threat, and mounting security concerns over China’s emerging influence in the region.²⁷ An alliance with the U.S. strengthened the Philippines’ capacity to thwart any threat because this granted them access to military training and equipment. Furthermore, an alliance provides a substantial increase in military capability as it can accommodate a rapid transfer of funds and other resources such as military expertise, technology, equipment, and even personnel.²⁸

U.S.-Philippines relations started improving in 1998 with the signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which paved the way for increased military cooperation under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. The Philippine Senate approved the VFA in May 1999 and ratified it on June 1, 1999. Under the Agreement, the U.S. has conducted ship visits to Philippine ports and has recommenced joint military exercises with the AFP.²⁹

Then, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and President Bush’s decision to create a global coalition against international terrorism, provided an opportunity for the Philippines to further revive its alliance with the U.S. and to seek


²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.
assistance for its defense needs. After the 9/11 attacks, America needed allies, such as the Philippines, against international terrorism as Southeast Asia had become the “second front” in the U.S. global war on terror due to its large Muslim population and to some links to militant Muslims and the al-Qaeda network. President Arroyo quickly responded to Bush’s appeal to all nations to unite together against terrorism and she offered the use of the former U.S. Clark Air Force and Subic Naval bases as staging areas for troops going to Afghanistan. She also granted the U.S. Air Force fly-over rights and sent troops to Iraq, though she would later recall them in order to save the life of a Filipino hostage in the Middle East. Moreover, Arroyo issued a 14-pillar counterterrorism program to provide intelligence exchanges with the U.S.  

President Bush, concerned about the ties between al-Qaeda and the ASG, supported Arroyo’s counterterrorism efforts and aimed to further the interoperability between the two countries’ forces. During Arroyo’s visit to Washington in November 2001, President Bush promised her nearly $100 million for military equipment and assistance to improve the AFP’s ability to fight the ASG. Components of the revitalized alliance came in the form of joint military exercises, U.S. military assistance, and institutional access agreements.  

In 2002, U.S. troops were sent to the Philippines under the Balikatan joint training exercises. Their mission was to create a credible counterterrorism force within the AFP

30 Ibid.

and to deny sanctuary to the ASG by driving them out of their safe havens. Around 1,650 troops arrived in the Philippines including 150 Special Forces (SF) personnel, who specifically conducted counterterrorism training. The SF advised and assisted the AFP, but did not engage in direct combat unless in self-defense, though they were not supposed to be in situations where that would occur. Unlike traditional military support, the SF performed small unit training to make Philippine soldiers and marines more professional. Under the joint military exercises, the AFP enhanced their planning and readiness skills as well as improved their interoperability with U.S. forces. Besides military operations, the U.S. and Philippines forces engaged in civic and humanitarian projects. For example, they constructed medical and dental clinics and treated, without charge, thousands of patients. They also worked side-by-side to construct roads and wells, in hopes of developing the economy in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Moreover, they built and renovated schools and the U.S. offered funding for educational exchange. These efforts were meant to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the civilian population and to give the Philippine government greater legitimacy with the locals.

Another component under the revived U.S.-Philippines alliance was more U.S. military assistance. Under the United States’ support of the Philippines counterterrorism efforts, Manila received a considerable increase in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). These FMF funds, earmarked for improving AFP, capabilities jumped from $1.9 million

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33 Ibid.
in 2001 to $19 million in 2002. An additional $25 million was allocated for emergency support while over $100 million went towards enhancing military equipment and capabilities, including cargo aircraft, helicopters, two-and-a-half ton trucks, patrol vessels, grenade launchers, and M-16 rifles.\(^{34}\) In 2003, the AFP received $20 million worth of spare parts for its C-130s, UH-1H helicopters, M-35 trucks and patrol boats.\(^{35}\) More funding came in the form of the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, which provides military training on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations and totaled to about $3 million in 2002.\(^{36}\)

Another result of the U.S.-Philippines alliance was the signing of a five-year Military Logistic Support Arrangement (MLSA) on November 22, 2002. The MLSA, a technical arrangement, is significant for three reasons. First, it provides the administrative structure and framework for logistic support, supplies and services between the AFP and the U.S. forces.\(^{37}\) Second, it lowers the cost of cooperation by allowing both forces to develop interoperability and operational strategies. Third, it shows the determination of both governments to implement a formal access arrangement.\(^{38}\)

\(^{34}\) Bowman, “Is the Philippines Profiting from the War on Terrorism?” 20.

\(^{35}\) Renato Cruz De Castro, “Philippine Defense Policy in the 21\(^{st}\) Century: Autonomous Defense or Back to Alliance?” Pacific Affairs 78, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 419.

\(^{36}\) Bowman, “Is the Philippines Profiting from the War on Terrorism?” 20.

\(^{37}\) Cruz De Castro, “Philippine Defense Policy in the 21\(^{st}\) Century,” 419.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
U.S.-Philippines counterterrorism efforts have made some progress in fighting the ASG. U.S. support has increased the AFP’s counter-insurgency operations beginning with the Balikatan 2002 exercises, which were successful in driving the insurgents out of their home base in Basilan. However, the ASG then relocated to Jolo. Humanitarian efforts improved relations with the civilian population, which resulted in better intelligence tips for “surgical strikes.” Thus, the U.S.-Philippines forces were triumphant in capturing and killing several ASG leaders, especially Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Sulaiman. At the same time, in the process of separating the insurgents from the locals, the U.S. and the Philippines found that the ASG had strengthened their relationship with other Muslim groups namely the MILF and the JI. Unfortunately, the ASG, the MILF, and the JI have increased their cooperation. For example, in 2005 three simultaneous bombs went off in the cities of Manila, Davao, and General Santos. While the ASG quickly took responsibility for these bombing incidents, their limited resources and lack of a home base indicated that they were supported by the MILF and the JI. Despite the arrest and the killing of many of its key leaders, the ASG remains a formidable force. For example, the ASG’s latest attack on March 4, 2012 in Jolo, left two people dead and thirteen wounded. Though it is the smallest of the three main Muslim groups in the Philippines, it is the most violent.

Meanwhile, the U.S.-Philippine relationship continues to grow under Aquino. In an interview conducted in February 2012, Aquino stated that he is strengthening the Philippines’ security and diplomatic relationships with Washington and is targeting
corruption in the Philippines in order to be a more reliable ally for the U.S.\textsuperscript{39} Obama and Aquino are discussing a plan for their militaries to cooperate more effectively especially with the looming China territorial dispute. On Friday, February 10, 2012, the U.S. Congress approved the transfer of a Coast Guard cutter as part of an effort to build up the Philippines’ weak Navy and to provide a second ship for patrolling the South China Sea.\textsuperscript{40}

In conclusion, the abovementioned political-military and economic and socio-cultural recommendations are vital to fighting the ASG. Of these recommendations, perhaps the most important are providing jobs and educational opportunities to Muslims in the southern Philippines, increasing salaries for AFP personnel, and promoting cross-cultural programs amongst Muslims and Christians. Poverty and illiteracy are attributing factors for Muslim youth to turn to terrorism, thus more education and job prospects would give them options outside of joining the ASG. Better salaries would also reduce the temptation for military officers to turn to corruption and collusion to support their families. With less corruption, military funds would then go to much needed operations like counterterrorism efforts. Positive interactions between Muslims and Christians must be encouraged in order to facilitate more understanding between them.

Bilateral cooperation against the ASG since 2001 has had some success in decreasing its strength. For instance, the ASG’s manpower is at the lowest point that it has ever been. The rebels are no longer self-sustaining but must rely on their ties to other


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Islamic militant groups for assistance. Moreover, the death of Osama bin Laden, on May 11, 2011, was a serious blow for armed Muslim groups, like the ASG, as he was the symbol of their jihad efforts. The loss of such an iconic ideological leader can lead to further disintegration within the ASG. U.S. support for the Philippines has been integral in the fight against insurgent groups like the ASG. The U.S.-Philippine relationship in fighting this group is an ongoing effort and continues to grow in 2012.
2. Map of ASG Strongholds

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