

CHAPTER 6

ISLAM IN THE PHILIPPINES

If Filipinos will acknowledge the advantages of pluralism, if they will accept rather than reject it, then the various cultural groups can share a common loyalty to the national community while proudly retaining their distinctiveness.

—Cesar Adib Majul

Despite relative Spanish success over a 300-year period at consolidating rule over the Philippine Islands, Christianizing the great majority of their population, and evoking by the late 19th century a growing sense of Filipino cultural identity among the disparate tribes and peoples that inhabited the archipelago, two areas that had continued to resist and elude firm Spanish control were the Igorot highland tribal people of northern Luzon and the Moros of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago in the southern region of the country. By 1898, when Spain was forced to transfer control of the Philippines to the United States as a result of losing the Spanish-American War, the sultanates of Maguindanao and Maranao on Mindanao, and Sulu in the Sulu Archipelago remained intact.⁴⁵² From the standpoint of the *sultans*, they remained independent of Spanish control, although, of course, Spain claimed their territories as a part of its colonial holdings, as it had the territory of Sabah on Borneo until 1885, when in exchange for British recognition of Spanish control of Sulu it dropped its claims to Sabah.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² The predominately Tausug-inhabited Sulu archipelago had only one sultanate, based in Jolo. In Mindanao, two and sometimes three sultanates had existed among the predominately Maguindanao peoples that inhabited the Pulangi river valley that emptied into Ilana Bay on the west coast of the island. Further north, around Lake Lanao, the various tribes that constituted the Maranao people counted as many as 43 sultanates (village states actually). In the Philippines, a *sultan* was a sovereign ruler who paid no tribute (taxes) to another. Subordinate rulers who paid such tribute to a *sultan* were called *datus*. Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 50.

⁴⁵³ Notably, although Spain may have dropped its claim to Sabah in 1885, the independent government of the Philippines after 1946 resurrected the issue, and it became a matter of fervent dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines in 1963, when Sabah was formally incorporated into Malaysia and again under the Marcos regime in the late 1960s. Not until after the fall of the Marcos regime did successor Philippine President Corazon Aquino attempt to rush a bill renouncing the Philippine claim to Sulu through the Philippine Congress in November 1987, just prior to a visit by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad to attend an ASEAN summit in Manila. The Philippine Congress failed to act, however, leaving the issue technically unresolved. Ronald E. Dolan, *Philippines: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 237.

THE PHILIPPINES UNDER AMERICAN RULE

The Philippine Insurrection

Filipino independence leaders, headed by Emilio Aguinaldo, collaborated with the Americans during the brief war against the Spanish with the aim of achieving Philippine independence, issued a declaration of independence on June 12, 1898, and began forming an independent government in preparation for international recognition. Nevertheless, their hopes were betrayed by the Treaty of Paris, signed between Spain and the United States on December 10, 1898, in which the former colonial power ceded the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico to the U.S. government, while granting Cuba its independence. The treaty provoked outrage throughout the Philippines and, as a result, U.S. occupation forces that grew to 76,000 soldiers before they finally prevailed in 1903 and found themselves engaged in major counterinsurgency operations aimed at preventing the U.S. from taking control of the country.⁴⁵⁴

Suspicious of both the Christian Filipino insurgents and the Americans, the Moro *sultans* did not join the insurrection, hoping to gain recognition as separate from the rest of the Philippines, while at the same time desiring American protection against Christian Filipino efforts to maintain the unity of the former Spanish colony. Accordingly, in August 1898 the Sultan of Sulu, Jamal al-Kiram II, signed an agreement with U.S. General John C. Bates pledging Muslim neutrality in the U.S.-Philippines conflict in return for a U.S. pledge of non-interference in the affairs of the Muslim populations of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.⁴⁵⁵

While U.S. military efforts to quell the Philippines independence movement continued, at the political level efforts were underway by a series of U.S.-led commissions to establish an American-guided governance structure for the whole of the Philippines that would “eventually” lead the Filipinos toward “self-rule.” The culmination of these efforts was the Philippine Organic Act of July 1902 that, with later changes, became the basis of the constitution governing the Philippines after its grant of independence by the United States in 1946. A part of this Organic Act was a division of the Philippines into provinces, one of which was a Moro province that encompassed both Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ For a well-documented account of this struggle, see Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁴⁵⁵ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 34.

⁴⁵⁶ *The Philippines: A Country Study*, 28–29.

The Moro Insurrection

Almost immediately, in 1903, efforts were begun to implement the provisions of the Organic Act. For the Moro province, like the others, these provisions meant an abolition of slavery; the establishment of new schools in which a new non-Muslim curriculum was provided; the construction of a new provincial government headed by a governor appointed from Manila, whose authority totally bypassed and undercut that of the historic *sultans*; and the traditional *datus*,⁴⁵⁷ who viewed themselves as sovereign rulers and substituted a new legal system that replaced and totally ignored the *shari`a*. From the standpoint of the Moros, but especially their traditional *datus*, American policy in the Philippines was quickly perceived as more destructive and subversive to traditional culture than Spanish rule had ever been. Accordingly, U.S. authorities governing the Philippines soon found themselves faced with a second insurrection against their presence in the southern Philippines, one even more fierce than the first. The Moro insurrection that got underway just as the first insurrection was being quelled continued until 1914, when U.S. forces finally were able to conclude that the



Photo of the Sultan of Sulu, Jamal al-Karim II, who signed an agreement with U.S. forces in 1898 pledging neutrality in the U.S. — Philippines conflict in return for a U.S. pledge of non-interference in the affairs of the Muslim population of Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.

Source: Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979). Used with permission.

⁴⁵⁷ The term *datu*, literally “ruler,” or “one entitled to rule,” is a complex term that generally refers to the leading male members and descendants of the ruling *sultans*’ families since the establishment of Islam in the Philippines in the mid-15th century. Referred to by one author as a myth of “sanctified inequality,” the “myth” held that the men who first brought Islam to the southern Philippines and became the first *sultans* of Sulu and Mindanao were both of Arab origin and descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. According to the myth, only the descendants might carry the title of *datu* who formed a ruling class from which the *sultans* were drawn. The *datus*, therefore, constituted an aristocratic class, who were honored whether or not they held a formal position of leadership and authority. Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 45–68. The term *datu* corresponds to the term *tunku* in Malaysia. Gowing, 48, notes that every *datu* was served by a *pandita*, a personal advisor in religious matters. The *panditas* and others, such as *imams* who had charge of mosques, constituted the Philippine *‘ulama* class, but there was less sense of their acting as a collectivity in the traditional Philippines as in most Muslim countries. The *datus* more closely resembled the *‘ulama* class found elsewhere in the Islamic world. McKenna later notes that it was only in the 1980s that the religious authority (but not necessarily the political authority) of the *datus* began to be successfully challenged by a new class of *‘ulama*, the products of scholarship educations in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s and known locally as *ustadz* (teacher), who stressed the egalitarianism of Islam and the religion’s stress on social justice. McKenna, 200–207. It was around this new class of non-*datu* *‘ulama* that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was formed by a minor *datu*, Salamat Hashim, in 1984.

major Muslim resistance groups had been subjugated and the Moro province could be released from military rule.⁴⁵⁸

Failure to Curry American Favor

American success in subduing the Moro insurrection led some Moro leaders to adopt a more positive attitude toward U.S. administrators of the Philippines. Whereas U.S. policy was formally aimed at achieving eventual Philippine independence, and U.S. administrators adopted a “policy of attraction” toward the *ilustrado* leadership class⁴⁵⁹ throughout the country, some Moro *datus* curried favor with the U.S. administration in the hope that through cooperation and goodwill they might eventually obtain support for a separate and independent Moro state. American policymakers, desirous of maintaining the goodwill of the large Christian majority in the Philippines, remained committed to the idea of Philippine unity, and in 1920 disestablished the American governor of the “Department of Mindanao and Sulu,” turning over responsibility for governance of the Moro region to the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes of the recently established Philippine Department of Interior that reported to the Philippine Legislature (created in 1906). In response, a few months later, in June 1921, a group of 57 prominent *datus* in Sulu presented a petition both in Manila and Washington requesting that the United States either grant the Moros a separate independent state or retain their lands as “permanent American territory.”⁴⁶⁰

Later, in 1935, reacting to the U.S. decision to grant the Philippines Commonwealth status for a 10-year transition period prior to becoming independent, a group of 120 Lanao *datus* (Mindanao) addressed a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt that read in part:

Because we have learned that the United States is going to give the Philippines independence, we want to tell you that the Philippines is populated by two different peoples with different religious practices and traditions. The Christian Filipinos occupy the islands of Luzon and the Visayas. The Moros (Muslims) predominate

⁴⁵⁸ On the Moro insurrection, the major study is that of Samuel K. Tan, *The Filipino Muslim Armed Struggle, 1900–1972* (Manila: Filipinas Foundation, 1977). For a brief account, see W.K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 46–51.

⁴⁵⁹ The *ilustrado* or “oligarchy of intelligence” was a wealthy Filipino landowning, business, and professional elite that had emerged in the Christianized Philippines in the latter half of the 19th century, typically as a result of close collaboration with the Spanish colonial authorities. Often educated in European schools and universities, it was around this class that ideas of Philippine nationalism, as opposed to local ethnic identity, began to coalesce as well as among some, ideas of securing independence from Spanish rule. *The Philippines: A Country Study*, 16–22, 29. U.S. administrators cultivated this class during the colonial period, and its descendants have tended to dominate Philippine life until now. The Moro *datu* class were not technically a part of this class, but their role in the Moro areas was similar, and some responded by cooperating with American colonial rule and the independent Philippine state after 1946. For a detailed examination of this collaboration, see McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 88–112.

⁴⁶⁰ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 168.

in the islands of Mindanao and Sulu. With regard to the forthcoming independence, we foresee what condition we and our children who shall come after us will be in. This condition will be characterized by unrest, suffering, and misery and because of this we do not desire to be independent. It is by living under the Stars and Stripes that those hardships would not bear down against us. The Americans have ever respected our religion, customs, traditions and practices. They have also recognized our rights to our property. The Americans have directed most of their efforts for the welfare of our people.⁴⁶¹

Regardless of the relative accuracy of the prediction made in this letter, various U.S. administrations remained committed to maintaining the integrity of the Philippine state that had been ceded to the United States by Spain in 1898 and won by hard-fought battle.⁴⁶² Most U.S. administrators, committed to a “civilizing mission” of promoting education, improved health care, economic development, rule by [American-derived] law and democratic principles of governance, and originating in a society that took religious tolerance and freedom of religion for granted, simply could not see that their well-intended efforts might fail to achieve the civilizing goal toward which they were directed, especially in “Moroland,” as they tended to call it. American administrators were also strongly influenced by the adamant opposition of Philippine Christian leaders, who represented 95 percent of the country’s population, to any diminution of the Philippine state. Moreover, although

the largely Protestant orientation of most U.S. administrators led many of them to view the historically dominant role of the Catholic Church in the Philippines with



Map of the Philippines showing areas of Muslim concentration.

Source: Author.

⁴⁶¹ Cited in Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 169.

⁴⁶² The ultimate rationale for this position was that failure to maintain the unity of the Philippine state might open the door to competing imperial powers — England, the Netherlands, Germany, Japan — to inherit parts of the Philippines left unclaimed by the United States. At the beginning, some, including Admiral Dewey, argued that the U.S. should lay claim only to Manila as an American naval base in the far Pacific and perhaps one or two other places as coaling stations. After the hard-fought battles to defeat the Philippine insurgency, however, it was politically difficult to challenge those who argued that the Philippines was America’s by right because of the blood and sacrifice expended by its soldiers and sailors during a more than decade-long military campaign. See Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, 13–30.

some suspicion, their general view of the Moro lands, which they shared with most Christian Filipinos, was that they were inhabited by a backward and stubbornly unprogressive people who needed association with the more economically developed Christian-dominated Philippine state in order to share the benefits of the modern, more “civilized” world.⁴⁶³

During the period of direct American rule over the Philippines (until 1920 in the Moro province), American administrators did pay special attention to the Moro province. Its first and only U.S. civilian governor, Frank Carpenter, was an educator who placed great emphasis on the building of schools and promoting universal education based on a modern [American-based] curriculum of instruction. The provision of health clinics, new roads and port facilities, telephone and telegraph networks and other infrastructure to promote economic development were also parts of the American program.

Christian Transmigration into Mindanao

The establishment of a number of Christian Filipino agricultural settlements on the still sparsely populated island of Mindanao also had as its aim the more rapid economic development of the island as well as facilitating Christian-Muslim interaction and eventual integration of both as members of a united Philippine society. This last policy, which became a flood during the Commonwealth period (1935–1946) and continued unabated in the years after independence in 1946, became the primary issue that finally led to the emergence of the Moro separatist movement in the 1970s. The Moros were not pleased with all U.S. policies in their region, however, and were even less pleased when, in the years after 1920, administration of Moroland was increasingly in the hands of Christian Filipino rather than American administrators. Outbreaks of resistance were common, usually over specific issues and in specific locations, but were rapidly suppressed, at first by U.S. forces, and later increasingly by elements of the Philippine Constabulary. The overall defeat of the Moros by U.S. forces by 1913 had gravely weakened them and prevented any immediate revival of a common struggle. Specific issues such as the *cedula* (a government-imposed head tax on all inhabitants) that the *datu*s opposed because it eliminated their traditional role as revenue collectors; the requirement to turn in arms; opposition to compulsory education in the new government schools that did not teach *shari`a*; exactions for road construction; efforts to enforce monogamy; and maltreatment by the Philippine Constabulary⁴⁶⁴ were the usual sources of dissatisfaction.

⁴⁶³ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 38–42.

⁴⁶⁴ For details concerning many of the resistance movements, see Tan, *Filipino Muslim Armed Struggle*, 32–42, and Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 51–56.

Table 3				
Estimated Moro and Non-Moro Populations in Mindanao, 1903–1980				
Year	Moro Population		Non-Moro Population	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1903	250,000	76	77,741	24
1913	324,816	63	193,882	37
1918	358,968	50	364,687	50
1939	755,189	34	1,489,232	66
1948	933,101	32	2,010,223	68
1960	1,321,060	23	4,364,967	77
1970	1,669,708	21	6,294,224	79
1975	1,798,911	20	7,348,084	80
1980	2,504,332	23	8,400,911	77

Source: W.K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 25. Citing Philippines, National Economic and Development Authority (1980a).

Transmigration: Source of Growing Alienation

By far the most irritating issue related to conflicts associated with land resettlement by Christian Filipinos on Mindanao. Historically, although there long had been small settlements of Christians on the island, they lived on lands claimed by the *sultans* and paid taxes to them. The political authority of the *sultans* and *datus* was no longer recognized by the government created by U.S. administrators and was gradually turned over to Filipino administrators, having no clear title to most of these lands as new Filipino law required. Hence, it was not a difficult matter for Philippine officials to lay claim on behalf of the government to unsettled tracts of land for purposes of Christian settlement, particularly with the Philippine Constabulary available to enforce government policy. Matters became more critical during the Commonwealth period after 1935, when resettlement became part of an overall economic development plan for Mindanao (a reaction to the Great Depression of 1929). This plan, which foresaw aggressive settlement and economic development of Mindanao as a project beneficial for the entire Philippine state and involved confiscation of settled lands for purposes of economic development, virtually ignored the original Muslim inhabitants of the land and was designed almost entirely around the new settlers whose numbers were growing rapidly. Significant corruption in the National Land Settlement Administration (NLSA) that administered this plan also enabled a number of wealthy Christian speculators

with advance knowledge of government plans to obtain title to lands that placed them in a position to exploit both Christian settlers and Muslim inhabitants of the island.⁴⁶⁵

Cooperation During World War II

Despite continuing and growing alienation between the Muslim inhabitants of the South and the emerging Philippine government, Moros generally joined in with Christian Filipinos and American forces in resisting the Japanese forces that occupied the Philippine islands between 1942 and 1945. Unlike their policy in Malaysia and Indonesia, where the Japanese had sought to empower the existing Malay Muslim national movements against the former colonial powers—Britain and Holland—they were equally harsh with both Muslims and Christians in the Philippines. Although a number of *ilustrados* and *datus* collaborated with the Japanese occupation forces in order to protect their private interests—a collaboration that became an important issue in Philippine politics after the war—a number of them also led resistance forces against the Japanese during the occupation.

The vast majority of Moros in fact were quite active in the resistance against the Japanese, as they had been against all forces trying to occupy their soil, be it the Spanish, the Americans, the Christian Filipinos, or the Japanese. Somewhat empowered by funds and large quantities of arms and ammunition provided by American submarines based in Australia, some Moros took advantage of the fall of the Commonwealth government to the Japanese to drive Christian settlers from their recently occupied farms into the cities of Mindanao, where the bulk of Japanese occupation forces were located. At the same time, they also collaborated closely with Christian Filipino resistance groups against the occupation.⁴⁶⁶

THE MOROS UNDER PHILIPPINE RULE

Early Benefits

The role played by the Moros during the war in resisting the Japanese produced several outcomes in the post-war period. In gratitude for their service, the restored Commonwealth government appointed a number of former Muslim guerrilla leaders (mostly *datus*) to high political office (including governorships of the Moro provinces), and a number of Muslim leaders ran successfully for Congress. This policy continued under the independent Republican government after 1946, giving the Moros a sense of self-government they had not known for half a century.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ An excellent analysis of the settlement process is provided by McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 114–119. See also Cesar Adib Majul, *The Contemporary Muslim Movement in the Philippines* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1985), 26–27, and Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 24–29.

⁴⁶⁶ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 181–182.

⁴⁶⁷ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 27–28.

Secondly, back pay awarded to those who could demonstrate their participation in the resistance and Japanese reparations payments to families for destroyed properties poured monies into the local economy, fueling a period of relative Moro prosperity. The impact of this new wealth cut two ways, however. On one hand, it tended to transform the Moro areas from a traditional barter economy into one based more on cash transactions, leading many to aspire to salaried jobs and professional and business careers, rather than traditional farming. As the economic bubble gradually receded by the late 1950s, however, the Moros increasingly became conscious of how relatively disadvantaged they were in relation to the rest of the country. On the other hand, the period of prosperity also facilitated a growing sense of Moro nationhood, a pride in being Moro that expressed itself in stronger commitment to Islamic activities. Hundreds now could afford to make the annual *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca and began doing so. There was also an emphasis on the construction of new mosques and *madrasas* and a revival of numerous and often impressive, as well as costly, religious festivals.⁴⁶⁸

Finally, a third outcome stemmed from the large quantities of arms and ammunition that had come into Moro hands during the war. Determined not to be disarmed again, as they had been after the American suppression of the Moro resistance in the early part of the century, some Moros adamantly refused to turn in their weapons, while others simply proclaimed they had “lost” them. At least the Moros now possessed a stronger deterrent against government efforts to impose policies in the Moro areas they didn’t like.⁴⁶⁹

Acceleration of Transmigration

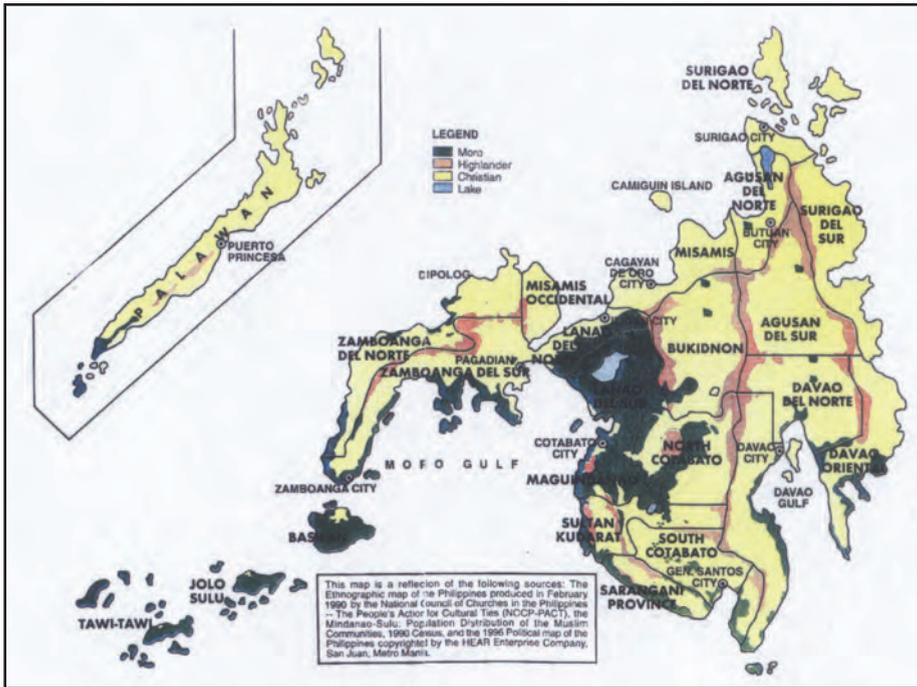
While the Moro region remained increasingly self-assured and relatively quiescent during the immediate post-war period, the major problem faced by the central government in Manila was the Hukbalahap (Huk) rebellion in central Luzon, the main northernmost island of the Philippines. Fundamentally a rural peasant uprising against rich landowners who dominated the Philippines both politically and economically, the movement was also a continuation of resistance against the Japanese occupation,⁴⁷⁰ with which so many of the wealthy landowners had collaborated. Although government forces ultimately prevailed by 1954, the Huk rebellion preoccupied the government for nearly a decade. One mechanism finally used by the government to defuse the rebellion was resettlement of some 950 families of former Huks on lands purchased for them by the government on Mindanao.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 28. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 136.

⁴⁶⁹ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 183.

⁴⁷⁰ The Hukbalahap, or People’s Anti-Japanese Army, had been organized in 1942 by Luis Taruc, a member of the Philippines communist party. An estimated 30,000 strong during the war, it was the leading resistance movement against the Japanese occupation in Luzon, but it was also opposed to any restoration of U.S. authority in the Philippines after the war, and also to the wealthy Filipino landowning class that exploited the peasants making up the Huk movement. *Philippines: A Country Study*, 41.

⁴⁷¹ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 48.



Map of the southern portion of the Philippines, indicating predominantly Muslim areas of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan islands.

Source: HEAR Enterprise Company, San Juan, Metro Manila, Philippines. Provided to the author by Eugene Martin, United States Institute of Peace. Used with permission.

The resettlement of the Huk rebels, who previously had held the status of criminal terrorists in the eyes of the government, and their families on Mindanao was only part of a much larger resettlement program that had resumed after the hiatus period of World War II. Now managed by the Army-administered Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), the program had as its goals not only relief of overpopulated areas in the northern Philippines by resettlement in the relatively underpopulated south but also the economic development of Mindanao as a means of more effectively integrating the southern islands into the Philippine economy. A part of this program was provision of low-interest loans and other forms of government assistance, such as new varieties of seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, tractors and farm machinery, as well as the building of new roads, irrigation networks, and swamp-draining projects. The recipients of the benefits of these programs were mainly the new settlers who happened to be Christian rather than the indigenous inhabitants who happened to be Muslims.⁴⁷²

The long-term result of these efforts was a major demographic shift in the population of Mindanao. Whereas in 1903 Muslims had constituted approximately 75 percent of the population of the island, by the 1960s they constituted no more than 25 percent,

⁴⁷² McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 116–117.

and significant numbers of them had been driven off their farm lands and into villages or growing urban slums in the increasingly Christian major towns of Mindanao. More important perhaps than the demographic shift was the gradual “marginalization” of the Moros in their own lands, both economically and socially, if not entirely politically.

In a purely technical sense, such marginalization need not have happened, for government policy officially provided equal access to state resources for both Christians and Muslims.⁴⁷³ The Moros, however, generally remained aloof from dealings with the government as much as possible, and they deeply resented official efforts to forge Philippine unity by application of national laws that contradicted or did not take into account the requirements of Muslims under the *shari`a*. They also resented a nationally-run education program and curriculum designed to forge a strong sense of Philippine identity but that also seemingly designed to alienate their children from Islam.⁴⁷⁴ Then too, Philippine government administrators-mostly Christian-identified more closely with the needs and aspirations of the settlers and tended to be oblivious to the needs and aspirations of the Moros, who preferred to minimize their contacts with Filipino administrators in any case. As the leading Muslim historian of the Philippines put it:

The increase of the non-Muslim population in [Mindanao] led many Muslims to conclude that there was a deliberate government scheme either to disperse them or to ensure that they remain a permanent minority in their own territories. They noted with frustration, if not envy, that the areas where the Christians had settled now had better roads and more effective irrigation projects, civic centers, and schools in comparison with their own backward facilities. So they believed that they were the victims of government discrimination and of neglect by their own leaders. In turn, Muslim leaders blamed all the ills on the so-called Christian government in Manila.⁴⁷⁵

Continued Moro Quiescence

Although perhaps it was only a matter of time before the situation reached some type of crisis, no organized opposition to the central government or its policies in the south emerged until the late 1960s and early 1970s. In part, this was due to the continuing role played by leading Muslim political figures as elected representatives to the Congress-often with the help of votes from Christian settlers who linked their own sense of security with voting for Muslim candidates-and the continued appointment of Muslim governors and mayors in Muslim majority areas. Usually these figures were members of the traditional *datu* class who had thrown in their lot with cooperation and collaboration with the central government, were still honored and remembered as

⁴⁷³ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 118.

⁴⁷⁴ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 29–30.

⁴⁷⁵ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 32.

guerrilla leaders against the Japanese occupation, and continued to reap the benefits of participation in Philippine politics. Although the Moro population was in general alienated from the larger Filipino society, its members continued to respect their *datus*, a legacy of traditional Moro society that remained helpful in containing mounting Moro resentment.

Yet another mechanism used by the Philippine government as an effort to facilitate the integration of young Moros into mainstream society was education. In 1957, in response to a study of Moro needs, the government established a Committee on National Integration (CNI), the chief focus of which came to be the granting of scholarships to Muslims and other minority groups. Over the next 20 years, several thousand young Muslims were provided with free higher education at academic institutions in Manila, especially in law, which provided them entry into government and professional positions.⁴⁷⁶ Such educations, however, tended to promote cynicism about the old political order among the Moros, especially the *datus* and those political figures whom the students tended to define as collaborators.⁴⁷⁷ Many became involved in a host of new activist organizations—the Muslim Association of the Philippines, the Muslim Progress Movement, the Agama Islam Society, the Sulu Islamic Congress, the Muslim Youth National Assembly, the Union of Islamic Forces, the Muslim Lawyers’ League, the Supreme Islamic Council, and others⁴⁷⁸—that had as their aim the raising of Moro consciousness as Muslim Filipinos and advocating programs to benefit their less fortunate countrymen. Although not originally intended as opposition groups, they did have the impact of giving voice to a new “articulately literate class” capable of analyzing and defining the plight of the Moros in new and more modern ways.⁴⁷⁹

Simultaneous with this trend was another set of scholarships that were made available during the same era for Muslim students from the Philippines to study in various universities in the Middle East. Several hundred Filipino Muslims studied in these years at universities in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Algeria and Libya. Although some focused on professional studies, such as engineering or medicine, a great many devoted themselves to Islamic studies at Cairo’s al-Azhar University or the Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia.⁴⁸⁰ The experience of these students had the impact of broadening their horizons and raising their consciousness of being connected to a larger Islamic world beyond their small provincial region in the southern Philippines. Many others also established contacts with fellow students from many parts of the Islamic world that later would be useful in soliciting international Islamic support for the Moros of the Philippines.

⁴⁷⁶ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 140.

⁴⁷⁷ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 36.

⁴⁷⁸ Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 186.

⁴⁷⁹ The term “articulately literate class” is that of McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 136.

⁴⁸⁰ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 57.

THE MORO REVOLT

The Moro National Liberation Front

The revolt, when it finally erupted in the early 1970s, was due to a variety of factors, in addition to those already mentioned. Centered on a new movement among the Moros, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the revolt was led by the new generation of university-educated Muslims from the south who conceptualized the Moros, not as Tausugs or Samals of Sulu, Maguindanao of Cotabato [Mindanao], Maranao or Iranun of Lanao [Mindanao], or Palawani or Molbog of Palawan, all owing loyalty to their respective *datus* or *sultans*, but as a single Muslim nation (*Bangsa Moro*), inherently separate from the rest of the Philippines, and more closely attached to the larger Islamic world of which the Moros were a part, especially the Malay Muslims of Indonesia and Malaysia.⁴⁸¹

Established clandestinely in late 1968 or early 1969, the MNLF was a nationalist movement modeled after other anti-colonial resistance organizations that were common in many parts of the Third World in the 1960s, such as the FLN in Algeria, the PLO among the Palestinian Arabs, or the PULO among the Malays of nearby Thailand. Having as its aims the mobilization of general Moro support; the recruitment, training, and equipping of armed cadres to resist Philippine “imperialism”; and obtaining international backing for the justness of its cause, the MNLF unambiguously organized itself with the ultimate aim of achieving Moro political independence from the Philippines.

The Jabidah Incident. The event that sparked the formation of the MNLF was the so-called Jabidah massacre of Muslim conscript soldiers on the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay in March 1968. President Ferdinand Marcos, elected President of the Philippine Republic in 1965, was widely perceived as engaging in a cover-up of the incident in order to dissociate his Presidency from it. Allegedly being trained for military operations in Sabah, a province of Malaysia since 1963, in support of the Philippines’ historic claim to that region, the Moro soldiers were said to have mutinied upon learning the purpose of their training and were killed in cold blood to ensure their silence.

⁴⁸¹ McKenna presents the interesting argument that the historic tendency of the Spanish, then the Americans, and finally the Filipinos themselves to conceptualize the Muslims of the southern Philippines as a more or less collective entity—the Moros—despite the vast ethnic diversity and inter—as well as intra-ethnic rivalries that characterized traditional “Moro” society and contributed to its weakness politically was finally absorbed by a critical mass of Moro students studying in Philippine schools and universities. In other words, the idea that the Moros constituted a single people was fundamentally a Western idea that was finally absorbed by those Filipino Muslims who had been drawn into the Philippine educational system with the purpose of facilitating their integration into Philippine society. The unintended consequence was to facilitate an idea of Moro nationalism, based on new and modern premises, that contributed to the formation of the MNLF. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 86–88, 110–112.

Although probably more rumor than fact-the government position was that the mutiny was over back pay issues and living conditions-the story was widely believed among the Moros and also in Malaysia, whose government lent its support to the newly established MNLF.⁴⁸² The final acquittal of those Philippine officers and soldiers associated with the killings sparked massive anti-government demonstrations in Manila and produced the resolve among many Moros to align themselves with the idea of an independent *Bangsa Moro*.

Christian Transmigrants React. Almost immediately, on May 1, 1968, *Datu* Udtog Matalam, the former influential governor of Cotabato [Mindanao], announced the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) out of which the MNLF grew as its “student branch.” Its stated purpose was to “work toward gaining independence for Mindanao and Sulu.”⁴⁸³ Despite the apparent inactivity of the new organization, the growing popularity of the movement and of *Datu* Matalam caused concern among the Christian settlers of Mindanao, and various Christian militia groups began to emerge to defend Christian rights on the island. Although open conflict did not emerge until 1970, the atmosphere on Mindanao became increasingly tense, leading *Datu* Matalam at one point to change the name of his organization to the Mindanao Independence Movement (still MIM) in an effort to reassure Christian settlers, among whom the *datu* had been historically popular.⁴⁸⁴

The MIM was in fact a cover organization for the MNLF, the student branch of MIM that was being organized clandestinely, primarily in Sabah, under the leadership of Nur Misuari, a former professor of politics at the University of the Philippines. What *Datu* Matalam and other *datu*s associated with him did not realize at this point was that Misuari’s vision of the organization he was forming was that of a modern nationalist movement in which the traditional “feudalist” position of *datu* in Moro society would eventually have to be overturned. Conflict between Misuari and the traditional *datu*s would in the end emerge as a source of grave weakness for the MNLF, when many *datu*s turned back to collaboration with the Marcos government, as Misuari and the MNLF increasingly gained Islamic world recognition as the official representative of the Moro cause in the southern Philippines.

For the moment, however, the MNLF and the MIM worked in close collaboration. Key figures in the development of the MNLF were Matalam colleague *Datu* Rashid

⁴⁸² Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 139–140.

⁴⁸³ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 45.

⁴⁸⁴ McKenna argues that *Datu* Matalam, long a proponent of Christian-Muslim harmony in Mindanao, formed the MIM, not out of ideological reasons, but for personal political motives. A member of the Liberalista party, he was defeated in the 1967 elections for governor of Cotabato by a younger Muslim *datu* who was aligned with President Marcos’ Nationalista Party. His personal interest, therefore, was less to achieve Moro political independence, despite his public stance, than to advance his own personal political standing among the Muslims of the Cotabato region. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 144–146.

Lucman of Lanao, Misuari, and Tun Mustafa, the elected governor of Sabah.⁴⁸⁵ In 1969 a first batch of 90 young Muslim recruits, mostly Maranaos provided by Lucman, but including Misuari, a Tausug from Sulu, quietly departed for Sabah to receive military training provided by professional Malaysian instructors under the overall guidance of Tun Mustafa. Additional groups were sent for training in the following years.⁴⁸⁶ On their return to the southern Philippines to train other recruits for the MNLF, they also smuggled in weapons provided by Tun Mustafa and the Malaysian government, and after 1972 by Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi who became a major external supporter of the MNLF.

Outbreak of Violence. Growing sectarian tension in Mindanao erupted into violence in mid-1970. This was not a matter of Christian militias fighting Muslim militias, but rather of one militia attacking and burning the undefended village of the other sect and then being retaliated against by the destruction of a village associated with the offending militia—a strategy designed to inflame tensions rather than to achieve victory. Such tit-for-tat violence continued through 1971, when by the end of the year it was estimated that more than 100,000 inhabitants of Mindanao from both sides had been made homeless refugees and 800 lives had been lost.⁴⁸⁷

Escalation of the Conflict

Two events in 1971 and 1972 rapidly transformed the escalating conflict into a full-scale civil war between the MNLF and the Government of the Philippines. The first was congressional elections held in November 1971 in which Muslim candidates, for the first time since the establishment of the Republic in 1946, were swept from office. The growing insecurity in Mindanao led many Christians who previously had voted for Muslim candidates as a guarantee of their security now expressed their lack of confidence in the Muslim *datu*s by voting for Christian candidates. As a result, “political power in areas that historically had been part of the sultanates shifted from Muslims to Christians.”⁴⁸⁸ Some of the violence during 1971 had been politically motivated and designed to secure precisely the political results that occurred. Ironically, following the election, sectarian violence subsided and the security situation in Mindanao under the new political order became increasingly benign until the end of 1972, although the psychological shock of what had happened proved transformative.

⁴⁸⁵ Tun Mustafa was a Tausug Muslim with many close relatives living in Sulu and also a close associate of *Datu* Rashid Lucman. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 147–148.

⁴⁸⁶ Included in the second group in 1970 was Haj Ali Murad, later Chief of Military Operations of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a breakaway organization from the MNLF, and later head of the the MILF after the death of its founder and leader, Hashim Salamat, in July 2003. International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process” (Singapore/Brussels: ICG Asia Report No. 80, July 13, 2004), 4. URL: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2863&l=1>. Accessed April 13, 2005.

⁴⁸⁷ For a detailed analysis of this pattern of violence, see McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 149–156. Also Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 47–58, and Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 192–196.

⁴⁸⁸ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 56.

Declaration of Martial Law

The second shock arrived on September 21, 1972, when President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law throughout the Philippines. Although the communist-inspired New People's Army (NPA), established in 1968, was a growing threat, it did not yet constitute the challenge to government authority posed by the Huk rebellion, its predecessor movement in the 1950s, and the proclamation of martial law only strengthened the appeal of the NPA within the country.⁴⁸⁹ The primary reason for Marcos' action appears to have been to lay the basis for arresting and detaining about 30,000 individuals whom he considered part of his political opposition, including rival politician Benigno Aquino.⁴⁹⁰ In publicly stating his rationale, however, he gave the principal reasons for the declaration of martial law the existence of armed conflict between Muslims and Christians and a Muslim "secessionist movement" in the southern Philippines.⁴⁹¹ From the perspective of the Moros, the declaration was the final straw. It was a declaration of war against a defeated people who now had no option except that of resistance.



Ferdinand Marcos, controversial long-time President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986.

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Internationalization of the Moro Issue

Marcos may have been influenced in his decision to declare martial law by pressures coming from a number of Islamic countries expressing grave concern about the welfare of the Moros in southern Philippines. International reporting on the violence, especially with regard to those few cases where Philippine government forces seemed to be in league with the Christian militias, spurred charges of genocide and pressure on the Marcos government to be more active in preventing it. Malaysia and Kuwait were particularly vocal, but the most indignant was Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, who on October 7, 1971, made a bitter speech accusing the Philippine government of genocide. He also announced that he was sending a personal mission to the Philippines to study the situation and to provide aid to the refugees.⁴⁹² Later, in January 1972, another delegation consisting of the ambassadors to the Philippines of eight different Islamic countries⁴⁹³ toured the south at the request of President Marcos to investigate

⁴⁸⁹ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 280–290.

⁴⁹⁰ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 52.

⁴⁹¹ Ferdinand Marcos, "Proclamation of Martial Law," *Philippine Sunday Express*, 1, 141 (September 24, 1972), 7.

⁴⁹² Majul, *Contemporary Islamic Movement*, 55.

⁴⁹³ Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. Singapore, though technically not a Muslim country, nevertheless has a 15 percent Malay Muslim population, is a significant regional entity, and is perforce closely tied to the affairs of its predominately Islamic region.

the situation. Although their report absolved the government of charges of genocide, its description of the wretched plight of especially the Muslim refugees in Mindanao garnered widespread attention in the Islamic world.

The issue of the southern Philippines was raised at the Third Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) that met in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, between February 29 and March 4, 1972. The Conference referred the issue to the Seventh Conference of the Research Academy of al-Azhar University (Egypt), scheduled to meet in Cairo on September 9, 1972. There on behalf of the Islamic Conference Organization (OIC) that would remain engaged with the situation in the southern Philippines until today, “the Conference passed a resolution expressing grave concern over the situation of Muslim Filipinos.”⁴⁹⁴ Two weeks later, despite the fact that violence in the south had virtually ended, at least for the moment, President Marcos made his decision to impose martial law, disestablish the Philippine Congress, and assume dictatorial authority.

Under the circumstances, “the imposition of martial law was, in fact the proximate cause, not the consequence, of [the] armed Muslim insurgency against the Philippine state,”⁴⁹⁵ that likely would at least have been delayed had there been no martial law. As it was, the Army moved immediately to collect all unauthorized weapons in the Philippines and a ban was placed on all political organizations. The moment was an existential one for the Moros of the Philippines. The choice was to submit or resist. Most Moros chose the course of resistance.

The MNLF Takes Charge

The ban on political organizations brought the clandestine MNLF to the forefront of the gathering confrontation. The previously above-ground organizations, such as the MIM or Salamat Hashim’s *Nurul Islam*, were immediately dissolved, with many of their members rallying to the MNLF. Salamat, later leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) after his break with Misauri, became vice-chairman of the MNLF. Throughout the conflict, the MNLF remained a loose-knit organization, which at best could only coordinate and support various groups of fighters operating independently in different sectors. The primary reason for its ascendancy derived in large part “from its access to critical resources, particularly weapons, from outside the Philippines.”⁴⁹⁶ These came primarily by boat from Sabah, having been delivered there from Libya and a number of other Muslim states.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Majul, *Contemporary Islamic Movement*, 59.

⁴⁹⁵ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 156.

⁴⁹⁶ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 157.

⁴⁹⁷ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 148.

Yet another reason for the MNLF ascendancy was the fact that it had gained the attention of the external Islamic world, which was a vital source of support for the Moro struggle. From fairly early in the conflict, most of the top leadership of the MNLF, including Misuari and Hashim-wanted men in the Philippines-were in exile in Tripoli, Libya, where, with the support of Libyan leader Qadhafi, they constituted the “political front” of the MNLF, as opposed to its fighting arm in the Philippines, known as the *Bangsa Moro Army*. There, *Datu Abulkhayr Alonto*, a member of a prominent Maranao family in northern Mindanao, served as overall commander of military operations.

Civil War

Fighting erupted on October 24, 1972, the day before the deadline President Marcos had set for the turning in of all weapons. It quickly spread to most Muslim-populated areas of Mindanao and then Sulu, as Moro fighters, in accordance with an apparently well-coordinated plan, attacked government outposts and sought to take control of strategic positions vital for dominating the region. The government, somewhat surprised by the intensity of the uprising, sent thousands of troops south, and by late November fierce clashes were taking place throughout the south between government forces and the Moro separatists.⁴⁹⁸

With the advantage of aircraft, helicopters, troop carriers, superior troop strength and mobility, as well as heavy weapons, the Philippine Armed Forces (AFP) were able to beat back most rebel attacks that were increasingly coordinated by the MNLF and to wreak devastating damage on towns and villages believed to harbor rebel fighters. Despite the advantages of the AFP, it could not end the rebellion, which only escalated over the next three years before finally abating in 1976. At its peak between 1973 and 1975, the MNLF was estimated to be able to field 30,000 fighters, while the Philippine military deployed 70 to 80 percent of its strength to contain the rebellion.⁴⁹⁹ The destruction caused in the Moro areas by both sides, but especially by the AFP, was massive. The war was estimated to have produced 50,000 deaths and a refugee population of over one million.⁵⁰⁰

Philippine government determination to crush the rebellion and to preempt the MNLF-led effort to establish an independent *Bangsa Moro* produced many outrages, such as the virtual destruction of the city of Jolo, the capital of Sulu and former seat of the

⁴⁹⁸ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 156.

⁴⁹⁹ General Fortunato U. Abat, *The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao: The CEM-CON Story*, 3rd ed. (Manila: FCA Publishers, 1999), 165–166.

⁵⁰⁰ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 291; Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 38.

Sultanate of Sulu, in February 1974.⁵⁰¹ With each new report of even greater suffering of the Philippine Muslims, international Islamic world pressure, which previously had been exerted on the Marcos government to be more active in ameliorating the conflict, now began to be exerted even more forcibly to achieve a diplomatic settlement. The Marcos government was highly subject to this pressure, because 40 percent of its oil imports came from these countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose influence in international affairs after the 1974 oil crisis had been substantially augmented.⁵⁰²

International Intervention

The Islamic Conference Organization (OIC) and more particularly its Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) were the principal agents for exerting this pressure. An important difficulty was that the MNLF, whose leaders were perceived as wanted criminals by the Philippine government, was increasingly gaining the support of member countries of the OIC as the only representative with whom the Marcos regime could negotiate an end to the conflict. Complicating this difficulty was the demand of MNLF leader Nur Misauri that total Moro independence, which he was unable to win by force, was the only possible outcome of such a diplomatic settlement. For the Philippine government, much more able to effect its will on the ground militarily, the MNLF position was totally unacceptable, and no recognition of the MNLF was possible until it abandoned it.

⁵⁰¹ On February 6, 1974, about 1,000 MNLF fighters attacked the Jolo airport and various army positions in the area of Jolo in an effort to retake control of the town. Government forces retaliated the following day, making use of tanks, aircraft and heavy offshore naval shelling, as well as a large number of ground troops. The city center was virtually destroyed before government forces could reclaim control over it several days later. The battle exacted heavy casualties on all sides, but especially among the civilian population of Jolo, while surviving MNLF fighters retreated and dispersed back into the countryside surrounding the town. Occurring just before a meeting of the OIC in Lahore, the Jolo "massacre" had a strong effect on the Conference delegates who supported a Conference resolution condemning the Philippine Army. Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 66; Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 150. The Sulu archipelago emerged to be a critical theater of the Moro insurgency. Never as heavily impacted by Christian Filipino migration, its overwhelming Muslim majority (80 percent) was more strongly positioned to resist efforts of the government to maintain control. In addition, as a crossroads in the MNLF arms trafficking program from Sabah, control of Sulu was of vital importance to both sides. The Tausug inhabitants of Sulu did little to diminish their historic reputation as the fiercest warriors in the Philippines. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 188.

⁵⁰² One important country that abstained from such interference was Suharto's Indonesia, which never lent support to the MNLF and remained consistently as a voice within OIC councils recommending caution about intervening in the internal affairs of other states. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 141–142.

The Tripoli Agreement

Negotiations between OIC representatives and Philippine government officials during 1973-74 proved tortuous and unproductive. A breakthrough was finally achieved when Marcos agreed to permit a Philippine delegation to meet representatives of the MNLF in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, in January 1975. Such a meeting was possible, however, only after Misauri had agreed to negotiate on the basis of “autonomy” for the Moro areas instead of “independence.”⁵⁰³ Although the Philippine government did not at this time agree to the concept of autonomy, it nevertheless had finally recognized the MNLF as an interlocutor with whom it had to deal, and this step made further negotiations possible. Delaying tactics by Marcos and the glacial pace of the OIC deliberative process, however, meant that progress was slow, and it was not until December 23, 1976, that a final “autonomy” agreement and general cease-fire were reached between the government and MNLF representatives in Tripoli, Libya.⁵⁰⁴

Reaching an autonomy agreement was one thing; successfully implementing it was another. Continuing conflict between the government and Muslim rebels since has been primarily over differences of interpretation of the Tripoli Agreement or perceptions of non-compliance by one party or the other. By the time the agreement was struck, the Marcos government had gained the upper hand over the MNLF, and the President appears to have been determined to implement its terms by fiat rather than by further negotiations between the two signing parties.

Weakening of the MNLF

In the years prior to the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF, despite the continuing general support of the OIC, had found its position deteriorating. In 1974, due in part to a vigorous Philippine diplomatic campaign, the government of Malaysia officially changed its policy from support of Moro independence to that of supporting autonomy.⁵⁰⁵ Such a shift of policy made it difficult for Misuari to sustain the MNLF’s insistence that independence was the only solution for the Moro problem. Then, the electoral defeat in April 1976 of Sabah governor Tun Mustafa deprived the MNLF of the transit facility through which it had been able to maintain a supply of arms and

⁵⁰³ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 68–69.

⁵⁰⁴ Text of the Tripoli Agreement is found in Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 120–125. A major offshore earthquake and *tsunami* tidal wave that caused terrible destruction in western Mindanao in August 1976 brought a temporary end to the fighting, as Muslims, Christians, government troops and humanitarian organizations cooperated to bring assistance to the victims of the disaster. The occurrence of the *tsunami* may have contributed to the finally successful negotiations in Tripoli in December. The conjunction of events is eerily similar to the potential connection between the December 2004 *tsunami* off the coast of Sumatra and the August 2005 settlement between Aceh and Indonesia in Helsinki, Finland. Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 72.

⁵⁰⁵ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 38.

ammunition to the fighters in Moroland.⁵⁰⁶ The high civilian casualty rate also had a negative impact on popular support for the war, a trend Marcos sought to exploit by emphasizing the “communist” nature of the MNLF from whom all “good” Muslims ought to dissociate themselves. At the same time, he announced a general amnesty for rebel commanders who surrendered with their men, offering them cash or business incentives and positions in the government or the army if they did so. Many, especially those associated with *datu* families, did so.⁵⁰⁷ In July 1975, Marcos invited about two hundred former rebel leaders to a conference in Zamboanga that was billed as “peace talks” between the government and the “true voice” of the Moro people. Although this effort to discredit the MNLF did not succeed in altering OIC support for it and for Misuari’s leadership, it did highlight a deterioration of the organization’s authority, particularly in Mindanao.⁵⁰⁸

Meanwhile, even while pursuing a robust military campaign, President Marcos embarked on “a two-pronged campaign to convince Muslims in the Philippines and, more importantly, heads of Muslim states abroad, of his sincere desire to solve the “Moro problem.”⁵⁰⁹ On one hand, he inaugurated a major reconstruction campaign to rebuild the economic infrastructure in the south that was being destroyed by the war. Although most of the projects undertaken—airports, roads, and harbor improvements—actually served the needs of the military more than the general population of the region, the impression of commitment had a certain impact. On the other hand, he sought to demonstrate increased sensitivity to Islam by providing funds to build a large mosque in the center of Manila, permitting the establishment of an Islamic bank (Amanah Bank), establishing an Islamic Studies Institute at the University of the Philippines, officially recognizing Muslim holy days as government holidays, building statues and memorials to historic Moro cultural heroes, and encouraging the writing of a code of Muslim personal laws to be applied specifically for Muslims.⁵¹⁰

Revival of the Traditional *Sultans*

A part of this strategy was to revive and reinvigorate the old *datu* system that the MNLF was seeking to undermine. In July 1974, a few months after the destruction of Jolo, Marcos formally recognized Datu Mahakutta Kiram as Sultan of Sulu.⁵¹¹ Although other members of the royal family contested this decision, the new *sultan*

⁵⁰⁶ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 140.

⁵⁰⁷ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 167.

⁵⁰⁸ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 71.

⁵⁰⁹ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 166.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 78–80.

⁵¹¹ When Sultan Jamal al-Kiram II, who had surrendered all claims to temporal authority to the United States (Gowing, *Filipino Muslims*, 50), finally died in 1936, the Commonwealth government declared that the office ceased to exist. Although the inhabitants of Sulu failed to recognize this government decision and continued to choose one or several members of the royal family as rival claimants to the office, the function remained only ceremonial and in fact continued to remain so after being revived by Marcos. Gowing, *Filipino Muslims*, 56.

was the man with whom the government would henceforth deal. About the same time, Marcos also gave formal recognition to fifteen *sultans* among the Maranaos and three among the Magindanaons of Mindanao. Above them all he recognized former Congressman Rashid Lucman of Bayang as “Paramount *Sultan* of the Nineteen Royal Houses of Mindanao and Sulu.”⁵¹² Such was the reward to this *datu* cofounder with Nur Misuari of the MNLF, when he chose to break with the resistance and return to cooperation with the government.

The impact of all these actions was that by the time of the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in December 1976, the MNLF had been significantly split and weakened. It remained primarily the continued support of external Islamic countries, embodied in the OIC, that enabled Misuari and the MNLF to remain a party to the agreement. But the agreement had a significant benefit to the MNLF leadership, in that they were no longer criminal elements in the eyes of the government and technically were able to return to the Philippines and play political roles in the new autonomous structure of the thirteen provinces identified as having this status in the Tripoli Agreement.⁵¹³

The MNLF was even further weakened as a result of the peace agreement with the government. If the threat of martial law and the perceived assault on the last vestiges of Moro independence was the great unifying factor enabling the MNLF as the dominant force leading the Moro revolt, peace proved to be an even greater threat to the continuing unity and solidarity of the organization. The split that emerged constituted basically a three-way break—(1) the original MNLF that remained loyal to Misuari, centered increasingly on his fellow Tausugs of Sulu, and largely led by secularly educated Muslims like himself with a fundamentally secular, nationalist agenda for the autonomous region defined by the Tripoli Agreement; (2) the MILF, a more religiously oriented organization, led (until 2003) by Salamat Hashim, formerly deputy leader of the MNLF until his break with Misuari in 1977, centered mainly on his fellow Maguindanaos of Cotabato and Maguindanao, and largely led by an emerging non-*datu*-connected *ulama* class educated mainly abroad at various colleges and universities in the wider Islamic world; and (3) the BMLO (*Bangsa Moro* Liberation Organization—later the MNLF-Reformed Group (RG)), headed at first by Rashid Lucman, now “Paramount *Sultan* of the Nineteen Royal Houses of Mindanao and Sulu,” and led mainly by *datu*s among the Maranaos of northern Mindanao, also Islamist in orientation, but more in tune with the traditional *datu*-dominated Islam of the past and positive about reconciliation with the government.⁵¹⁴ The split represented geographical and regional as well as ideological differences within

⁵¹² Gowing, *Filipino Muslims*, 56–57. See also Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 125.

⁵¹³ Namely Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi Tawi, and Palawan. Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 73.

⁵¹⁴ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 84–90. The author notes the existence of two other minor factions that split from the MNLF—the BMLO that stressed the need to spread Islam to all of the Philippines, but by *dawa* (proselytizing) rather than by violence; and the MORO, a Muslim revolutionary party associated with the Communist Party of the Philippines.

the MNLF and became apparent almost immediately after the cease-fire mandated by the Tripoli Agreement that came into effect on January 20, 1977. When MNLF-Philippine government talks resumed in Tripoli in early March to refine the details of the Agreement, the BMLO, supported by Marcos, presented itself as the “true voice” of the MNLF. The OIC continued to recognize the leadership of Nur Misuari, however.⁵¹⁵

Implementation of the Tripoli Agreement

The primary issue at stake in the follow-up talks in Tripoli was the definition of “autonomy.” The Tripoli Agreement had stated only that autonomy would be established in the thirteen provinces so designated. As he made clear in the second round of talks, Misauri’s vision of autonomy was the designation of the thirteen provinces as a single, autonomous region, presumably under the leadership of the MNLF. Government representatives resisted this demand, however, on the grounds that the Philippine Constitution required any such change to be subject to a local plebiscite in all thirteen provinces affected. There being a significant majority of Christians in several of these provinces, and a slight majority of Christians in all of them combined, as well as clearly growing opposition to Misuari’s leadership of the MNLF, a number of the provinces would likely vote against unification, and a single autonomous region would not come into being. Misauri, accordingly, opposed the idea of the plebiscite on the grounds that the Tripoli Agreement made no provision for it. The disagreement provoked an impasse that caused the talks to break down, never to be resumed until Corazon Aquino replaced Marcos as President in 1986. MNLF-sponsored insurgent activity soon resumed in the southern Philippines, although never again at the levels that the region had known between 1973 and 1975.

Despite the breakdown of the talks and the cease-fire, Marcos pressed ahead with his own unilateral vision of autonomy. On March 25, 1977, he issued Proclamation Number 1628,⁵¹⁶ in which he announced the formation of four regions into which the thirteen provinces were to be grouped.⁵¹⁷ Although under martial law he perhaps did not need to do so, Marcos insisted that his proclamation be subject to a plebiscite in the thirteen provinces, which was held on April 17, 1977. The MNLF demand for a unified autonomous province was included in the referendum. As expected, the MNLF program was rejected in favor of that expressed in the Presidential proclamation, and Marcos was able to assert that he had met the terms of the Tripoli Agreement.

⁵¹⁵ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 85–90.

⁵¹⁶ Text in Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 126–128.

⁵¹⁷ Region 4 (Palawan) Region 9 (Tawi Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte) Region 11 (Davao del Sur, South Cotabato) Region 12 (Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat) Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 127.

SPLIT IN THE MNLF

Emergence of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

Misuari rejected this effort by Marcos to “dictate” the terms of autonomy in the Tripoli Agreement, called it instead a violation of the Agreement, and resumed his campaign for full Moro independence and secession.⁵¹⁸ His intransigence, however, provoked an even deeper split with the MNLF, which became public and apparent later in the year at a meeting of the MNLF Central Committee in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in December. There, his deputy, Salamat Hashim, arguing that Misuari was wrong to abandon the Tripoli Agreement and revive the campaign for independence, challenged his leadership of the MNLF. When the OIC and World Muslim League (*Rabit al-Islami al-Alami*), meeting in Mecca at the same time, refused to accept his leadership challenge, Misuari expelled Hashim and 57 of his supporters from the organization. Hashim accordingly removed himself and his supporters from MNLF headquarters in Tripoli to Cairo and then later to Lahore, Pakistan.⁵¹⁹ Salamat did not formally announce the formation of his rival Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) until 1984. Nevertheless, the core of his new organization went with him, and his loss gravely weakened the MNLF, especially in the Cotabato region of western Mindanao.⁵²⁰

Rise of Salamat Hashim

Born in 1942 in Pagalungan, near Cotabato, Mindanao (Maguindanao Province), Salamat Hashim was to emerge, like many of those who followed his leadership, as a member of a new *ulama* in the southern Philippines, trained and educated abroad. Although a minor *datu* himself, and related to some of Mindanao’s most distinguished Muslim political figures, he found on his return from Cairo in 1967 that these connections were of no personal use to him.⁵²¹ Accordingly, he was drawn to the more radical separatist cause represented by the MNLF. A member of the fourth cohort of

⁵¹⁸ In October 1977, Misuari gave a blistering speech before the International Congress on Cultural Imperialism at the Palais des Nations in Algiers, in which he again accused the Philippine government of “cultural genocide” because of its brutal resistance to Moro efforts to achieve independence. Regardless of the merits of the analysis presented in the speech, it represents a profound articulation of the challenge faced by the Muslims of the Philippines to retain their identity as Muslims in the face of a non-Muslim government’s determination to control their cultural destiny. Full text of the speech in Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 134–142.

⁵¹⁹ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 292. Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 39. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 207. International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 4.

⁵²⁰ Even more serious was the defection in early 1980 of Salamat’s regional commander, Amelil Malaguok (aka Commander Ronnie), with a number of his field commanders to the government in exchange for being appointed the first governor of the newly created autonomous region XII, which encompassed western Mindanao. Although this was a blow to the MNLF, it was a blow to Hashim as well, although he was able to slowly rebuild his position in the region, thanks largely to the loyalty and effectiveness of Commander Ronnie’s successor, Haj Ali Murad. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 208.

⁵²¹ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 144.

Muslim students from Cotabato to receive scholarships to attend al-Azhar University, he departed for Cairo in 1959 and returned to the Philippines only after graduating in 1967 to assume a minor position as a provincial librarian.

His years in Cairo coincided with those of certain Afghan students-Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and probably others-later to emerge as leaders of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of their country, who were also studying at al-Azhar at that time.⁵²² Although no evidence exists to confirm interaction during their student years in Cairo, Salamat's decision to settle in Pakistan after his split with Misuari and his rapid involvement with the Afghan resistance suggests that his decision may have been influenced by going to a place where he knew he would be welcome.

A noted figure in any case as deputy leader of the MNLF to which he had rallied after the declaration of martial law by President Marcos in 1972, he, like most other leaders of the MNLF Central Committee, spent the years of the civil war residing in Tripoli, Libya, having personal recognizance over military operations in his native area of western Mindanao. A Philippine government document listing all ten meetings between various government representatives and the MNLF from June 1975 to April 1979 demonstrates that Salamat was often the chief negotiator for the MNLF in lower-level meetings and was usually present when Misuari was leading the MNLF delegation.⁵²³

Hashim's Islamic Vision

As the 1977 split between Salamat and Misuari made clear, however, the two had different visions on the role of the MNLF and how it should deal with the government. Whereas Misuari insisted on independence and the formation of a secular, nationalist state in which the traditional "feudal" *datu* order would have no place, Salamat, a religious scholar and a minor *datu* himself who nevertheless considered the *datu* system antiquated, saw the movement more in religious terms. The quality that distinguished the Moros from other Filipinos was religious; they were Muslims, and other Filipinos were not. Whether Muslims achieved an independent state or only an autonomous region, where they were "free" to be Muslims, was not the point. What was necessary was for the Muslims of the southern Philippines to claim their rights as Muslims, and for this they required an Islamic political order that likely might be more possible under the autonomy agreement reached in Tripoli than under the political order envisioned by Misuari.

⁵²² Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 70.

⁵²³ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 143–144.

The Role of the Afghanistan Jihad

Salamat's Islamic vision was strengthened and given greater clarity as a result of his experiences in Pakistan between 1982 and 1987. He quickly became involved with the Pakistani ISI's (Inter-Service Intelligence Directorate) and Saudi-funded effort to recruit Muslims from around the world to assist the Afghan *mujahidin* in their struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Administered in large part by Usama bin Ladin, a son of the wealthy and powerfully connected bin Ladin family in Saudi Arabia, the program is said to have brought 35,000 potential fighters from different Muslim countries during the years 1982–1992, 17,000 from Saudi Arabia alone.⁵²⁴ The Philippine contribution to this effort, organized and coordinated by Hashim Salamat, is estimated to have been 500–700.⁵²⁵ These generally arrived in small groups, either directly from the Philippines, generally Mindanao, where they had been recruited by Salamat's local commanders, or indirectly from the large Filipino expatriate community living as workers abroad, especially in the Persian Gulf region.⁵²⁶ Among those who arrived in 1986 was Abdurajak Janjalani from Basilan, later head of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group that became active in the Philippines in the 1990s. He reportedly had been engaged in studies in the Middle East, when he was drawn to participate in the *jihad* in Afghanistan.⁵²⁷

Unbeknownst to, or perhaps just not understood at the time by, Western supporters of the Afghan resistance, whose focus was on the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq's long-term policy for Afghanistan was to replace the Soviet-supported Communist government in Kabul with a regime that would constitute an "Islamic" government. For this reason, of the six resistance groups supported by the Pakistani ISI during the conflict, only those three with clear Islamic political agendas received the bulk of Pakistani and U.S. support.⁵²⁸ Perhaps the Pakistani President was also engaged in a divide-and-rule strategy. For its part, Saudi Arabia preferred to distribute nearly all of its support through a group called *Ittihad-i Islami* (Islamic Union), headed by Abd al-Rasul Sayyaf, whose studies had been in Saudi Arabia, who spoke Arabic fluently, and whose views on Islam closely paralleled those of the Saudi Wahhabi clerics among whom he had studied.⁵²⁹ Sayyaf, therefore, formed a seventh resistance faction supporting military resistance in Afghanistan, and it was primarily from his organization that the foreign fighters joining the resistance, including those

⁵²⁴ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 10.

⁵²⁵ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 91.

⁵²⁶ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 4.

⁵²⁷ Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., "Bearers of the Sword: Radical Islam, Philippines Insurgency, and Regional Stability," *Military Review* (March–April 2002). URL: <http://www.leavenworth.srmy.mil/milrev/English/MarApr02/turbiville.htm>. Accessed June 6, 2005.

⁵²⁸ These groups were Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's *Hizb-i Islami*, Burhanuddin Rabbani's *Jamiat-i Islami*, and Younes Khaless's faction of *Hizb-i Islami*. Supported, but at a much lower level, were Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi's *Harakat-e Inqelab Islami*, Sibghatullah Mojadeddi's *Jebh-i Nejat-i Milli*, and Pir Sayyid Gilani's *Mahaz-e Milli Islami*. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 119–121.

⁵²⁹ Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 123, 135–137, 212.

from the Philippines, received their training, lodging, and sustenance, primarily at Sayyaf's *mujahidin* training school at Camp Saddah in Parachinar, Kurram Agency, Pakistan.⁵³⁰ For this reason, too, later Philippine terrorist leader Abdurazak Janjalani called his group Abu Sayyaf, after his former mentor in Afghanistan.

Establishment of the MILF

For Salamat Hashim, his role in Pakistan produced a new opportunity; he was now able to replace the MNLF training center in Sabah that had been closed in 1976, but now for the purpose of his own organization, the MILF, which he formally established in 1984. Many of the Philippine fighters receiving training in Pakistan, such as Janjalani, stayed on to fight with the Afghan *mujahidin*. Others, however, filtered back home to join the resistance there and to become trainers for new recruits being raised locally. A feature of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and cease-fire had been the designation of several bivouac areas in remote locations as safe areas for MNLF fighters. In Mindanao, at least seven of these areas had been transformed into regular military camps — Camps Abu Bakar, Basrah, Ali, Omar, Khalid, Othman, and Salman-by 1985, now belonging to the MILF, under the leadership of Hashim's local commander, Haj Ali Murad.⁵³¹ To these camps the Filipino trainees returned, as did Hashim himself in 1987, following the fall of the Marcos government.

Another feature of the Pakistani experience for all those involved was association with Muslim resistance fighters from other parts of the Islamic world. In the case of Salamat and other MILF fighters, this meant not only a link with bin Ladin, but also compatriots from neighboring Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Much of the training at Sayyaf's Camp Saddeh in Pakistan, the Filipinos learned, was carried out by Indonesians claiming to be part of the *Darul Islam* movement in their country.⁵³² All these contacts would have later significance when, after the formation of the *Jemaah Islamiyah* in 1992, *al-Qa'ida* training of MILF personnel moved from Pakistan to Mindanao.

Continuing Resistance in Moroland

Although Moro resistance to Philippine government authority continued after the breakdown of the cease-fire in 1977, it never again reached the levels of violence of the early 1970s, prior to the Tripoli Agreement. Sporadic attacks on Army posts or government facilities kept the Army on alert, periodically retaliating with massive dragnets aimed at capturing and/or killing wanted fugitives and/or terrorists, often with significant "collateral damage."⁵³³ The omnipresence of the Army in Muslim

⁵³⁰ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 14.

⁵³¹ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 5.

⁵³² International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 14.

⁵³³ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 180–181.

areas made it clear that the new Autonomous Muslim Regions were still under military occupation.

Nevertheless, Marcos persisted in implementing the autonomy scheme he had proclaimed and which had been approved by the plebiscite of April 1977. In January 1981 the new Autonomous Regions were formally established; Muslims, mostly *datus* and former MNLF commanders who had defected back to the government, were appointed to newly established regional government offices; and martial law was repealed, restoring constitutional government and paving the way for the restoration of electoral politics.⁵³⁴ The illusion of a cease-fire was also maintained, for as long as MNLF/MILF fighters remained in their remote camps (MILF Liberated Zones, as they later came to be called), the government did not bother them; only outside of the camps did they become wanted fugitives and terrorists.

The hollowness of the “autonomous” regional governments was apparent to all. They had no legislative or tax collection authority, nor any independent operating budget. All decisions continued to be made in Manila, and although the new regional governments soon employed a number of college-educated Muslims, the terror produced by the Philippine Army as it tried to master the continuing insurgency against its presence was the stark reality for most Filipino Muslims.⁵³⁵

In a letter to the OIC announcing his establishment of the MILF in 1984, Salamat Hashim noted that “The MILF operates as a parallel government vis-à-vis the enemy government within its area of responsibility and exercises influence extensively among the Bangsamoro masses in a degree more effective and binding than that of the enemy administration.”⁵³⁶ American anthropologist Thomas McKenna, in his field research conducted in Mindanao in 1985–86, observed that such a “shadow government” did in fact exist in the particular areas that he studied. Although he noted that its impact was difficult to measure with any precision, his conclusion was that the MILF was more influential in most matters than the “enemy administration.”⁵³⁷

The MILF as the “Shadow Government” of Mindanao

A characteristic of the new “shadow government” gradually coming into being in the Cotabato area of Mindanao in the early 1980s, of which the MILF was to emerge as the symbolic authority, was the key role played by a new *ʿulama* (called *ustadzes*⁵³⁸ in Mindanao) establishment that had not been apparent in earlier years. Most members

⁵³⁴ Majul, *Contemporary Muslim Movement*, 99–100.

⁵³⁵ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 195.

⁵³⁶ Datu Michael O. Mastura, *The Crisis in the MNLF Leadership and the Dilemma of the Muslim Autonomy Movement*, Collected Papers of the Conference on the Tripoli Agreement: Problems and Prospects, September 13–14, 1985 (Manila: International Studies Institute, University of the Philippines, 1985), 18.

⁵³⁷ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 209.

⁵³⁸ In Arabic, *ustadh*—professor, teacher.

of this new *ʿulama*, like Salamat Hashim himself, were products of the scholarship educations many Mindanao Muslims had received in various Middle Eastern countries, particularly Egypt, beginning in the 1950s. As McKenna notes, however, “while their origins may be traced to the early 1950s, it is not accurate to speak of the *ulama* as a significant religious force before 1980.”⁵³⁹ By 1980 their numbers appear to have reached a critical mass. The impact of the 1979 *ʿulama*-led Islamic revolution in Iran had an inspirational impact, as did also the growing jihadist campaign against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, in which several hundred Muslim Filipinos would ultimately be engaged. Most importantly, however, the new *ustadz*es were increasingly supported by salaries paid by various Islamic world donors as part of the humanitarian assistance and reconstruction financing provided to relieve the plight of the dispossessed and suffering Muslim refugees of the Philippines.⁵⁴⁰ Unlike the clandestine MILF, the new *ustadz*es were public figures who stressed the egalitarian nature of Islam, the necessity of political leadership to represent the rights of the poor and oppressed, the need to live pure Islamic lives, and the importance of achieving Islamic unity in the face of the threats posed to their community. During the 1980s, the *ustadz*es rapidly emerged as a “counter-elite” that challenged the authority of the historic *datus* that were tending to collaborate with the “enemy administration,” and were influential in mobilizing popular support for the MILF.⁵⁴¹

THE POST-MARCOS ERA

Fall of the Marcos Regime

The cronyism, corruption, high-handed authoritarianism, militarism, and brutality of the Marcos regime finally came to an abrupt end in February 1986, as a result of the popular People’s Power movement that garnered the support of millions of Filipinos to demand the ouster of the President and his replacement by Corazon Aquino. She was the widow of the assassinated Benigno Aquino, Marcos’ leading political opponent and critic who had strongly disagreed with Marcos about policy toward the southern Philippines. Beset by an even greater threat posed to the government by the communist-inspired New People’s Army (NPA) that controlled large remote areas in the northern Philippines, the new President moved quickly in an effort to resolve the long-festering conflict with the Philippine Moros.

The Jiddah Accord

In an unprecedented move, President Aquino in September 1986 paid an official visit to MNLF leader Nur Misuari in his hometown of Maimbung on Sulu Island. There the two leaders agreed in principle to hold further talks that would result in

⁵³⁹ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 205.

⁵⁴⁰ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 204–205.

⁵⁴¹ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 213–214.

an end to hostilities, Aquino accepting Misuari's demand for a single Autonomous Region rather than four, and Misuari accepting the government's demand for autonomy rather than secession.⁵⁴² Such an agreement was struck on January 4, 1987, in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, during final talks between Misuari and the Philippine government, represented by the President's brother-in-law, Agapito Aquino.⁵⁴³ The promised unified Autonomous Region would have its own elected governor and unicameral legislature and would have full control over its internal affairs, except for foreign affairs and national security.

Although the Jiddah Accord amounted to the first diplomatic breakthrough since the Tripoli Accord of December 1976, it immediately ran into trouble on two counts. First, because it was negotiated only by Misuari as the sole spokesman of the Muslim peoples of the Philippines, the agreement was rejected by the MILF and was not well received by the traditional *datu* class that had been drawn into collaboration with the Marcos government. Within a week of its signing, MILF fighters on January 13, 1987, launched a series of attacks on government facilities and infrastructure in Cotabato City and other parts of southwestern Mindanao.⁵⁴⁴ Non-plused, Aquino immediately made plans to meet MILF military chief Haj Ali Murad in Cotabato City, which she did on January 18. Although the meeting resulted in a temporary cease-fire, it did not result in MILF acceptance of Misuari's leadership of the new Autonomous Region.

Secondly, the perceived softness of the new President toward the Moro rebels, as well as the NPA with whom she was also negotiating, added to her alleged general "incompetence," led a number in the Army leadership that she had inherited from the Marcos era to attempt a *coup d'état* against her in late January 1987.⁵⁴⁵ Although the *coup* failed, as did subsequent rebellions culminating in the large and well-organized *coup* attempt in December 1989 that required U.S. air support to save the regime, the turmoil highlighted the weakness of her government and the chaotic politics that characterized the Philippines in the immediate post-Marcos period. Such weakness emboldened Moros still committed to independence rather than autonomy to reopen their struggle.

Return of Salamat Hashim to the Philippines

The new political situation in the Philippines led Salamat Hashim to return to Mindanao from Pakistan in 1987 along with a number of his Philippine Afghan veterans.⁵⁴⁶ Although Janjalani and a number of others are reported to have remained in Pakistan/Afghanistan until after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, Filipino support to the Afghan resistance basically ended in 1987, when Salamat

⁵⁴² McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 98.

⁵⁴³ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 217.

⁵⁴⁴ McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, 246.

⁵⁴⁵ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 212.

⁵⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 4.

decided that the changed political circumstances in the Philippines required his presence there. Upon his return, he established himself at Camp Abu Bakar, located in remote mountainous and jungle terrain north of Cotabato City, which was now MILF headquarters on Mindanao. Among his first tasks was to establish in Camp Abu Bakar a military training “academy,” probably modeled on Sayyaf’s Camp Saddah in Pakistan, which was given the name Abdul-Rahman Badis Memorial Academy. Making use of his “Afghan alumni” to transmit the lessons they had learned on the Afghan frontier, a reported 122,000 MILF supporters received some sort of military training at Camp Abu Bakar, and a permanent force of some 10,000-15,000 armed regulars had been raised by 1990.⁵⁴⁷

Connections with *al-Qa'ida*

A role in supporting this effort financially appears to have been played by Usama bin Ladin and perhaps also the government of Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴⁸ In 1988, bin Ladin had established his *al-Qa'ida* organization, and in the same year he dispatched his brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, to Manila to take charge of the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) office there. The IIRO, a Saudi-based charitable organization, had been established in 1978 as a mechanism for providing humanitarian assistance to distressed Muslim populations, including those in the Philippines. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it had been transformed into a major conduit for providing Saudi, U.S., and Gulf state funding to the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan.

Prior to being dispatched to Manila, Khalifa, a Lebanese Muslim, had from 1985 to 1987 been director of the Muslim World League (*Rabit al-Alam al-Islami*) office in Peshawar, where he no doubt had been active in cooperation with bin Ladin in coordinating the activities of the various Islamic world *mujahidin* that had descended on Pakistan. The IIRO office in Manila was a regional office with subordinate offices in Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan, as well as other subordinate offices in the southern Philippines.⁵⁴⁹ Although no specific evidence demonstrates that Khalifa’s IIRO was instrumental in helping to finance the growing strength of the MILF in the late 1980s,

⁵⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 4. Abdul-Rahman Ben Badis, for whom the Academy was named, was a notable leader of the Algerian *‘ulama* during the 1930s who led a powerful movement opposing French control of Algeria, suggesting that Hashim perceived the situation of the Moros in the Philippines as analogous to that of the Algerians under the French.

⁵⁴⁸ It should be recalled that bin Ladin was not at this time the notorious figure he later became. In 1989, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, bin Ladin returned home to a hero’s welcome in Saudi Arabia. It was only after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the royal family’s decision to admit U.S. and other Western forces into the Kingdom to counter the Iraqi action that he broke with the regime and began his independent campaign to oppose Saudi rule and facilitate *jihad* against Western influence throughout the Islamic world. See Adam Robinson, *Bin Ladin: Behind the Mask of the Terrorist* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 123–130. Also Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama Bin Ladin, Radical Islam and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, Inc., 2002), 112–115.

⁵⁴⁹ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 92–93.

its subsequent role in underwriting the establishment and training of the Abu Sayyaf Group after 1992 suggests an earlier role in providing financial support to the MILF as well.

MILF Assumes Leadership of the Resistance

With the signing of the Jiddah Accord in January 1987, it was now Misuari's MNLF, based in Sulu, that was working in collaboration with the government and Hashim's MILF, based in Camp Abu Bakar, that had become the principal opposition. Despite the opposition, President Aquino, like Marcos before her, pressed on in implementing the Jiddah Accord as she understood it. On November 19, 1989, in accordance with the Philippine Constitution, voters in the thirteen provinces designated in the Tripoli Accord participated in another plebiscite to decide whether to join a new united Autonomous Region formally titled the "Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao" (ARMM). As Misuari had feared in 1977, but now accepted, only four provinces—Tawi Tawi, Sulu, Maguindanao, and Lanao del Sur—elected to join the new Region. Even Cotabato City, the pre-designated capital of the united Region, voted not to join, requiring the designation of another capital city instead.⁵⁵⁰ Nevertheless, President Aquino, moving forward to fully implement the Jiddah Accord, traveled south on November 6, 1990, to formally inaugurate the ARMM.

As sincere an effort as it may have been to create a fully autonomous ARMM, it left many problems unresolved. Many Muslims in the nine provinces that had voted not to join the ARMM, mainly because Christian voters carried the day, now found themselves vulnerable minorities in these provinces. The MILF camps were now both inside and outside the ARMM in relatively remote jungle locations. Left alone, beyond government control, they represented an even more autonomous, even independent, Muslim presence in the Philippines that seemed to mock the autonomy achieved in the four provinces of the ARMM. More Islamically-oriented than the secularly-oriented, MNLF-dominated ARMM, the MILF represented the continuing struggle of the Moros to achieve independence rather than the acquiescence of the MNLF. The continuing threat posed by the MILF, moreover, kept sizable numbers of the Philippine Army deployed in the south, especially Mindanao. Despite the Jiddah Accord and the ARMM, the Muslim areas of Mindanao in particular remained lands under military occupation, making something of a mockery of the concept of autonomy.

EMERGENCE OF ABU SAYYAF

As noted previously, sometime between April and December 1991, following his break with the Saudi royal family, Usama bin Ladin spent time in Pakistan/Afghanistan, where he recalled certain of his former associates to meet with him. Among those who joined him at this time included the Indonesians (though based in Malaysia) Abdullah

⁵⁵⁰ *Philippines: A Country Study*, 211.

Sungkar, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, and Hambali, who returned to Malaysia to establish the *Jemaah Islamiyah* organization in 1992/93. Yet another who came was the Filipino Muslim Abdurazak Janjalani. When Janjalani returned to the Philippines in late 1991, he was accompanied by Ramzi Yousef, who later would be involved as principal organizer of the first World Trade Center bombing in New York in February 1993.

Part of the agreement struck at this time was use of the MILF camps in Mindanao to train *Jemaah Islamiyah* recruits from southeast Asia, rather than to continue bringing them to the Pakistan/Afghanistan border area. For his part, bin Ladin appears to have agreed to provide financial support and *al-Qa'ida* trainers. His brother-in-law, Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, and the IIRO, and perhaps other humanitarian assistance groups would serve as the conduit for financial support. Ramzi Yousef and perhaps others accompanied Janjalani back to the Philippines to assist in training. Whether Salamat Hashim and Haj Ali Murad were party to this initial agreement or their cooperation was assumed is not certain. A final part of the agreement seems to have been a commitment by Janjalani to establish an independent organization, the Abu Sayyaf Group, (ASG)⁵⁵¹ which he began to do immediately upon his return to the Philippines.

Early Steps

Janjalani's home was Basilan Island, one of the nine provinces that had not voted to join the ARMM, and it was here, in a remote jungle area on Mount Kapayawan they called Camp Madina, that the ASG was established and headquartered. Other *al-Qa'ida* associates who joined Yousef at this time were Abdul-Hakim Murad and Wali Khan Amin Shah.⁵⁵² Apparently with the concurrence of the MILF leadership, another camp for Abu Sayyaf recruits, Camp Shafi'ie, was established on Mindanao near the northern city of Marawi, which trained both ASG and MILF trainees in equal numbers-about 50 per year over a three-year period before 1995. Among those who matriculated through this program was Janjalani's younger brother, Kadaffy Janjalani, who later replaced his elder brother as leader of the ASG after the former's death in a shoot-out with police in 1998. Salamat's cooperation with this program may have been due to its funding support being entirely from Khalifa's IIRO.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ The Abu Sayyaf Group is an offshoot of another group, *al-Harakat al-Islamiyah* (The Islamic Movement), established on Basilan Island by a local Egyptian-trained (al-Azhar) *ustadz*, Wahab Akbar, in the late 1980s after Nur Misuari's Jiddah Agreement with Philippine President Corazon Aquino. The two are often conflated, and the distinction between the two is not clear. Fe B. Zaman, "Al Harakatul al-Islamiya: The Beginnings of Abu Sayyaf," *INQ7 Specials/Inside the Abu Sayyaf*. URL: http://www.inq7.net/specials/inside_abusayyaf/2001/features/formative_years.htm. Accessed September 3, 2005.

⁵⁵² It was at this time that Yousef was given the nickname "The Chemist," because of his knowledge and ability to construct a wide variety of bombs. Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 178.

⁵⁵³ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 22.

Janjalani quickly announced the presence of the ASG by taking credit for two bomb attacks in Zamboanga City and Davao City in early 1992, also demonstrating that the new group's scope of operations included the whole of Mindanao and not just Basilan Island.⁵⁵⁴ From these first attacks until 1996, the ASG was credited with "67 terrorist attacks, more than half of which were indiscriminant bombings. All led to the death of fifty-eight people and 398 injuries."⁵⁵⁵ Whereas MILF targets were typically Philippine Army outposts or government infrastructure facilities, what characterized the ASG attacks was that they generally aimed at the Christian presence on Basilan or Mindanao—either Christian symbols (e.g., churches), foreign or Filipino missionaries, or Christian towns, such as the southern Mindanao town of Ipil, which the ASG attacked and burned on April 4, 1995, leaving 53 people dead and many others wounded.

Kidnapping for ransom also became an important method of operation of the ASG. Although demands for money later became a major motive for such kidnappings, it does not appear to have been necessarily so at first. In April 1993, the ASG kidnapped a young five-year-old Christian boy, Luis "Ton-Ton" Biel, on Basilan Island. The demands for his release included three requirements: (1) removal of all Catholic symbols in Muslim communities, (2) banning of all foreign fishing vessels in the Sulu and Basilan seas, and (3) bringing the *ulama* into the peace negotiation process with the Philippine government.⁵⁵⁶

Following the Biel kidnapping, the Philippine Armed Forces mounted a major operation to close down the ASG Camp Madina. They succeeded temporarily, but Janjalani and most of his followers managed to escape to Sulu Island, where they found refuge in jungle camps there. The flight to Sulu in fact resulted in a strengthening of the ASG, for the group soon was able to find new recruits and to continue its operations without interruption.⁵⁵⁷

Abu Sayyaf Linked to *Al-Qa'ida*

The appearance of the ASG and the violence associated with it gravely compromised President Corazon Aquino's efforts to implement the 1987 Jiddah Accord and the fully autonomous ARMM it had brought into being. After the settlement, the violence associated with the "Moro problem" was greater than before and was now characterized by pure acts of terrorism. At the time it was not clear if the ASG had an affiliation

⁵⁵⁴ Many sources date the first ASG attack as occurring in 1991, when a military checkpoint on Basilan Island was attacked by *al-Harakat al-Islamiya* supporters, led by Wahab Akbar, who subsequently fled to Malaysia. Zamora, "The Beginnings of Abu Sayyaf." Although it may be an exercise in splitting hairs, this first attack appears to have been a pre-ASG operation undertaken while Janjalani was in Pakistan/Afghanistan meeting with bin Ladin.

⁵⁵⁵ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 101.

⁵⁵⁶ Zamora, "The Beginnings of Abu Sayyaf."

⁵⁵⁷ Zamora, "The Beginnings of Abu Sayyaf."

with the MILF, was a secret arm of the MNLF, or was simply acting alone.⁵⁵⁸ What was known of Janjalani from those who had observed him was that “in his white flowing robe, [he] was a vision of serenity [and] like a human magnet, attracting young Muslim scholars newly returned from studies in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Pakistan and Egypt, and local Muslims disillusioned with Misuari’s change of heart.”⁵⁵⁹ One affiliation became clear to Philippine authorities in December 1994, however, when after a bomb explosion on a Philippines Airline flight from Cebu to Tokyo, *al-Qa’ida* operative Ramzi Yousef, the actual planter of the bomb, called the Associated Press in Manila and claimed responsibility for the explosion on behalf of the ASG.⁵⁶⁰

The subsequent arrest in early January 1995 of Yousef associate Abdul-Hakim Murad, in Manila, the discovery of Yousef’s laptop computer containing plans to blow up eleven U.S. airliners over the Pacific, and finally the arrest in February 1995 of Yousef himself by authorities in Pakistan, led the Philippine government to draw a clear connection—for the first time—between the ASG and bin Ladin’s emerging *al-Qa’ida* organization. Although it probably was not directly connected with the *al-Qa’ida* conspiracy in Manila known as Operation Bojinka, the alleged association of the ASG with an act of international terrorism forced Philippine government authorities to begin thinking about it in an entirely different light.

RAMOS AND THE MORO PROBLEM

Retired General Fidel Ramos had replaced Corazon Aquino as President of the Philippines in June 1992, and it was he who faced the new challenge seemingly posed by the ASG. Throughout the years of martial law until the overthrow of Marcos (1972-1986), Ramos, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, had been chief of the Philippine Constabulary, the bureau of the government having primary responsibility for law and order throughout the country, including the south. Long a Marcos loyalist, he switched sides to join the People’s Power movement in 1986, bringing significant military support with him. Upon Ramos assuming the Presidency, a grateful Aquino appointed him Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces during the first two years of her six-year term, and then Secretary of National Defense during her final

⁵⁵⁸ There later even arose suspicions that the ASG may have been a clandestine Philippine Army operation aimed at discrediting the Moro insurgency. In February 1995, Ibrahim Yakub, one of the original ASG cadre of 30, “came in from the cold,” and it was subsequently learned that his real name was Edwin Angeles and he had been working as a government agent within the ASG. As operations officer for the ASG, he had been in charge of every ASG operation, including the Biel kidnapping, the concept for which was said to have originated with him. After his return to government service, he continued to assist by identifying his former ASG colleagues as they were caught by government authorities. In January 1999, he was assassinated outside a mosque in Basilan. Whether the ASG or Philippine government services were behind the assassination is not clear. Where his true loyalties lay was also unclear. “Edwin Angeles: The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,” *INQ7 Exclusive*. URL: http://www.inq7.net/specials/inside_abusayyaf/2001/features/spy-turns-bandit.htm. Accessed September 3, 2005.

⁵⁵⁹ Zamora, “The Beginnings of Abu Sayyaf.”

⁵⁶⁰ Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Ladin and the Future of Terrorism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 80.

four years in office. Now the twelfth President of the Philippine Republic and with great experience with the long Moro rebellion, Ramos sought to move decisively to reach a final resolution of the problem of the Moro south.⁵⁶¹

Animated, like most Filipino leaders, by the view that economic deprivation was the primary factor underlying Moro dissatisfaction rather than cultural uniqueness and a strong sense on the part of the Moros, although articulated many times, that they were not Filipinos, Ramos placed great stress on economic development programs and a policy of reaching a formal peace agreement between his government and that of the ARMM. In 1993, strongly supported by the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia, he opened talks with MNLF leader Nur Misuari, who was still recognized by the OIC as the official representative of the Bangsamoro people, despite the fact that the first elected governor of the ARMM had been Linding Pangandangan. Gradually, Jakarta emerged as the principal venue for continuing talks and the site of the final agreement reached between the Ramos government and the MNLF on August 30, 1996.

The Jakarta Agreement

Formally called the “Final Agreement on the Implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front with the Participation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Ministerial Committee of Six and the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference,” or more simply the “Jakarta Agreement,” it was officially signed by President Ramos and MNLF leader Misuari in the Malacanang Presidential Palace in Manila on September 2, 1996.⁵⁶²

Among other things, although the 1989 plebiscite had resulted in the grouping of only four Muslim provinces into the ARMM, the new Agreement recognized 14 provinces (13 plus a newly created province of Sarangani) and nine cities as part of the Autonomous Region. Although another plebiscite would have to be held to confirm this part of the Agreement, such language was not part of the Agreement, and Ramos made no effort to hold one during the course of his administration. Another provision of the Agreement was for MNLF fighters to be integrated into the Philippine Constabulary and the Armed Forces, with primary responsibility for enforcing law and order in the ARMM.⁵⁶³ Within a week of signing the Agreement, on September 9, 1996, new elections resulted in Nur Misuari, with the full backing of the Ramos administration, being chosen as the new governor of the ARMM as well as Chairman of a newly formed Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD)

⁵⁶¹ Data on Ramos drawn largely from “President Fidel Ramos,” *Neofinoy.Info*. URL: <http://www.neofinoy.info/The%20RP%20Presidents/ramos.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2005.

⁵⁶² McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 99.

⁵⁶³ As a result of the Jakarta Agreement, 5,070 MNLF fighters laid down their arms, and 2,200 were integrated into the Philippine Army or police. Others, however, rallied to the MILF or ASG or simply remained outlaws. Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42.

that was also created by the Jakarta Agreement. Yet another provision of the Agreement was the establishment of an Office of Muslim Affairs, a central Philippine government agency tasked with assessing and responding to the needs of the Philippine Muslim community.

Misuari Again in Charge

Under the terms of the Jakarta Agreement, and following his election as Governor of the ARMM, Nur Misuari assumed the role of principal peace broker in the southern Philippines on behalf of the government, with primary responsibility for dealing with and neutralizing the continuing opposition of the MILF and the ASG. With funds made available to him as Chairman of the SPCPD and still maintaining significant moral authority over MNLF fighters being integrated into the Army and police, Misuari finally was being vested with significant powers to resolve the long-festering problem of the southern Philippines. The only price was acceptance of autonomy rather than independence for the Bangsamoro people, which Misuari now seemed committed to doing.

For President Ramos, the linchpin of his policy was the SPCPD, through which he proposed to channel much needed government funds to promote the economic development especially of the resource-rich, but war-ravaged, island of Mindanao.⁵⁶⁴ Moreover, through the Jakarta Agreement, he had gained OIC promises of support for the economic development of the ARMM, Malaysia and Indonesia being especially enthusiastic to play a positive role in promoting investments in the region.

During the Ramos years, at least until the Asian financial crisis that hit all of southeast Asia in July 1997, the Philippine economy that had languished during the latter Marcos years and remained hostage to the political instability that marked the years of the Aquino administration finally began to experience the “Asian miracle” of rapid economic growth that characterized the entire southeast Asian region during the 1980s and 1990s until the 1997 collapse. In part, this was due to the President’s own strong hand in implementing reforms designed to open up the once closed national economy, to encourage private investment, and to reduce corruption.⁵⁶⁵ Moreover, this economic growth was being felt in the south. Although per capita income in the southern Philippines was estimated to be only two-thirds of that in the rest of the country, it was growing at a more rapid rate than elsewhere in the country during the Ramos years.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ For a listing of proposed economic projects for the ARMM after the Jakarta Agreement, see the ARMM website. URL: <http://park.org/Philippines/government/armm.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2005.

⁵⁶⁵ “President Fidel Ramos.”

⁵⁶⁶ See “The Autonomous Region in Mindanao.” URL: <http://www.mindanao.org/mindanao/overview/muslim1.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2005.

General Success of the Ramos Policy

The Ramos policy and the Jakarta Agreement did have a positive short-term impact on conditions in the south, as MILF- and ASG-sponsored violence diminished significantly over the next several years.⁵⁶⁷ Possibly the uncovering of the *al-Qa'ida* Operation Bojinka plot in early 1995 led Filipino militants associated with the perpetrators to lay low for a period of time. An absence of violent resistance did not mean acceptance of the provisions of the Jakarta Agreement by either the MILF or Abu Sayyaf, however. In late 1996, Salamat Hashim convened a Bangsamoro Consultative Assembly at Camp Abu Bakar in which 200,000 people from throughout Mindanao were reported to have attended. There, the Assembly strongly expressed its opposition to the Jakarta Agreement, calling instead for an independent state.⁵⁶⁸

Cease-fire with the MILF

Undaunted, the Ramos administration pressed its agenda of low-profile meetings with MILF representatives in provincial towns around Mindanao, finally reaching a 3-year cease-fire agreement between the government and the MILF on July 18, 1997.⁵⁶⁹ A part of this agreement was government acceptance of the various MILF camps in Mindanao, or “liberated zones,” as Hashim preferred to call them, as secure areas that the Army would not attack if not provoked. Ramos’ clear strategy was to buy time for economic development projects to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of the region, which he believed was a precondition to a peaceful settlement. Accordingly, “in addition to projects in the ARMM, the government began to implant other projects in MILF-held territories, including the Narcisso Ramos Highway linking Cotabato to Marawi, including a 15-km road to the MILF headquarters at Camp Abu Bakar; a water system for 10,000 people; an irrigation system for 2,500 people; and the Malmar Dam.”⁵⁷⁰

The “Shadow Government” Emerges

The new circumstances seemed to embolden Salamat Hashim’s confidence. “In December 1997, the MILF held its 15th general assembly, and was so assured of his hold [on its territories] that the assembly was all but public knowledge.” And Salamat closed the assembly by holding a public press conference for the first time.⁵⁷¹ “Like all unjust, oppressive and corrupt governments,” he said, “the Manila government will collapse...when this happens, the Bangsamoro Islamic government will automatically

⁵⁶⁷ Larry Niksch, *Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippines—U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation*, CRS Report for Congress RL31265 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 25, 2002), 3.

⁵⁶⁸ Rigoberto Tiglio, “Moro Reprise,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 26, 1996.

⁵⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 6.

⁵⁷⁰ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 45.

⁵⁷¹ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 45.

arise.”⁵⁷² His confidence was perhaps based on the idea that, under the terms of the cease-fire, he was in fact operating a government in the “liberated zones” under his control as a virtually independent state, certainly more independent than the ARMM. And in his view, it was an Islamic government, operated and supported by the *ulama* throughout Mindanao, and governed by the *shari`a* administered by Islamic courts.⁵⁷³ The authority of the MILF’s “shadow government” in the rest of Mindanao also engendered confidence. Time, in his view, was on the side of the MILF, not the Philippine government.

Connections Between MILF and al-Qa’ida

Hashim’s confidence was also no doubt bolstered by the secret relationship that was emerging between the MILF and bin Ladin’s *al-Qa’ida* organization. In 1994, after having agreed a year earlier to establish Camp Shafi`i for the training of Abu Sayyaf and his own MILF fighters, he made an agreement to host a new *Jemaah Islamiyah* training facility at Camp Hudaibayah, a remote location within the larger Camp Abu Bakar. To supervise this effort, *al-Qa’ida* leader Abu Zubayda in October of that year appointed from Afghanistan Omar al-Farouk whom, with several other *al-Qa’ida* and *Jemaah Islamiyah* operatives, he sent to the Philippines to establish and oversee the new camp.⁵⁷⁴ Funded by *al-Qa’ida*, the primary mission of Camp Hudaibiyah was “to conduct *jihadist* training” for *Jemaah Islamiyah* recruits, primarily Indonesians, of whom more than one thousand were reported to have received training in Mindanao during the years 1996-98.⁵⁷⁵ Initially, the *al-Qa’ida* trainers appear to have been mainly Arabs from camps in Afghanistan, but soon Indonesians were very involved in the training as well. Maintaining the security of this clandestine *Jemaah Islamiyah* training may well have been a key reason behind Hashim’s acceptance of the new cease-fire.

From the *Jemaah Islamiyah* perspective, the Philippines was part of Mantiqi 3, which included all of Borneo (including the Malaysian provinces of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as independent Brunei) and the eastern Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The mission of Mantiqi 3 was almost purely training, whereas the mission of Mantiqi 1 (peninsular Malaysia, southern Thailand, and Singapore) was primarily to serve as a headquarters, transit point, banking center, and safe haven for planning. In general, military operations in these regions were avoided in order to maintain the security of the primary mission. The primary long-term target of *Jemaah Islamiyah* operations

⁵⁷² Cited in Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of al-Qaeda’s Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 128.

⁵⁷³ Further details in Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 128, and Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 45, 136–137.

⁵⁷⁴ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 134. The first trainees that virtually built the new Camp Hudaibiyah were MILF recruits who used machetes to clear the jungle for the camp that was said to be up and running by April 1995, the same month the ASG attacked and destroyed the Christian town of Ipil. International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Background,” 14.

⁵⁷⁵ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, xv.

was clearly Mantiqi 2, the main islands of Indonesia. Although from the beginning *Jemaah Islamiyah* had a pan-Malay perspective and envisioned the eventual unity of all the Malay Muslim areas of Southeast Asia under a single Islamic government, the destabilization and eventual capture of Indonesia was clearly the short-term goal of *Jemaah Islamiyah* operations. The *Jemaah Islamiyah* leadership was Indonesian, as were most of its foot soldiers. The opportunity to launch such operations came only with the fall of the Suharto government in Indonesia in May 1998. In the meantime, its foot soldiers prepared, primarily in the MILF camps.

From the *al-Qa'ida* perspective, support for the *Jemaah Islamiyah* was part of its overall global strategy after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan to support militant Islamist movements throughout the Islamic world that were striving to put an end to the generally authoritarian secular regimes, most often supported by the Western powers, and especially the United States, which had come to dominate most Islamic states during the 20th century. A second aspect of *al-Qa'ida* strategy, at least at the beginning, appears to have been to make use of the linkages that had been created as a means of gaining access to the Philippines as a base from which to conduct global operations, particularly against the United States. The failed Operation Bojinka, directed by Ramzi Yousef and uncovered by Philippine authorities in January 1995, was evidence of this intent, but the failure appears to have ended *al-Qa'ida* efforts to make use of the Philippines for this purpose, at least temporarily.

That *al-Qa'ida* and the MILF did not always share the same objectives was demonstrated on October 14, 1997, when two Arab trainers from Camp Hudaibiyah-Muhammad Gharib Ibrahim Sayid Ahmad and Ragab al-Makki-conducted a suicide attack on a Philippine Army headquarters near Cotabato, killing six. Clearly designed to disrupt the 3-year cease-fire that had been signed between the MILF and the government of the Philippines in July, it failed to achieve its end, as President Ramos and Salamat Hisham both interpreted the action for what it was and agreed to maintain the peace. Although Abuza interpreted this event as an effort to bolster the morale of MILF fighters who had been disillusioned by Hashim's agreement to the cease-fire, a more likely interpretation is that *al-Qa'ida* disapproved of the cease-fire agreement and sought to disrupt it.

Following the bombing of the U.S. embassies in East Africa in August 1998, the *al-Qa'ida* training centers in the Philippines and elsewhere assumed increased importance, as U.S. and Pakistani authorities intensified efforts to make it more difficult for *al-Qa'ida* recruits to use Pakistan as a transit point for individuals to reach the training camps in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Salamat Hashim acceded to requests from the *al-Qa'ida* leadership to open two more camps in the MILF areas that came to be called Camps Vietnam and Palestine, to be used exclusively by Arab and other Middle Eastern personnel.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁶ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 7, 133.

How much Philippine authorities knew about the clandestine training occurring in MILF camps in Mindanao at this time is unclear. Most information about it emerged from later interrogations of arrested individuals after the resumption of fighting in 2000. While Ramos remained President, both he and Salamat exerted strong efforts to maintain the cease-fire and to overlook isolated incidents that could have led to a resumption of fighting. Despite the cease-fire with the MILF, the government had no such agreement with the Abu Sayyaf Group, however, and on December 18, 1998, early in the term of Ramos's successor, President Joseph Estrada, Philippine constabulary forces managed to locate and kill ASG founder Abdurazak Janjalani in a shootout in Lamitan on Basilan Island.⁵⁷⁷

Impact of the Death of Janjalani

The death of Janjalani had the impact of splintering the ASG into at least five groups, each claiming to be the real ASG, but in fact operating more or less independently. Of these, two major factions were those commanded by the founder's brother, Khaddafi Janjalani, on Basilan Island and by Galib Andang, alias Commander Robot, operating in the Sulu Archipelago.⁵⁷⁸ If the Philippine government believed it had resolved the problem of Abu Sayyaf by eliminating Janjalani, events soon proved it sadly mistaken. At best, Janjalani had played an important role in maintaining the ASG's cohesion, strategy, and tactics. With his death as a martyr to those who had followed him, the successor Abu Sayyaf groups emerged as not only vengeful, but more vicious and terrifying.⁵⁷⁹

A revived ASG, now headed by Khaddafi Janjalani, was heard from again when, on March 20, 2000, his group kidnapped more than 50 people from two elementary schools on Basilan Island, including a number of school children. Calling for release of three *al-Qa'ida*-linked prisoners held in United States prisons in exchange for the hostages, the incident clearly implied an international dimension that transcended the local Moro struggle in the Philippines. Although most of the school children were soon released in return for food and medicine, the kidnapping crisis went on for 44 days before the last hostages were released. In the meantime, the ASG kidnapers had murdered several of the hostages, including two by beheading, and others were killed by government forces while securing their release by force.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁷ Turbiville, "Bearers of the Sword," 6.

⁵⁷⁸ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 109.

⁵⁷⁹ Eusaquito P. Manalo, "The Philippine Response to Terrorism: The Abu Sayyaf Groups," unpublished master's degree thesis (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December 2004), 35–36.

⁵⁸⁰ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 109–110. The three *al-Qa'ida*-linked prisoners in the United States were the Egyptian Shaykh Omar Abd al-Rahman, imprisoned because of his alleged role in the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing, Ramzi Yousef, and Abu Haidal (Mir Aimal Kasi), imprisoned because of his role in killing two and wounding three CIA employees in northern Virginia in January 1993.

Not to be outdone, on April 23, 2000, Commander Robot's group of Abu Sayyaf in the Sulu Archipelago crossed over to Sipidan Island off the coast of Sabah in Malaysia and kidnapped 21 tourists from seven countries whom they brought back to Sulu as hostages. Although the kidnappers lectured the hostages about the ASG's struggle for an independent Islamic state, in the end all that was demanded for their release was \$20 million—\$1 million for each hostage—which was duly delivered in September by the government of Libya, allegedly under pressure from the affected European governments which were said to have reimbursed Libya for at least part of the ransom.⁵⁸¹

In the early stages of the crisis, ARMM governor Nur Misuari, who had access to the Abu Sayyaf kidnappers, was tasked by the Estrada government with resolving the crisis. On May 8, however, he was replaced by the former Libyan ambassador to the Philippines, Rajab Azzarouk, who in 1996 had played an important role in facilitating the Jakarta Agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF. European Union emissary Javier Solana also arrived in the Philippines to play a role.⁵⁸² The end result was the \$20 million ransom that finally secured the release of the hostages on September 9, 2000.

The \$20 million made the ASG incredibly rich. For a time, its contribution to the local economy far exceeded any government program, and recruits flocked to join the Abu Sayyaf Group. CNN journalist Marie Ressa argues that media interest in the kidnapping, which led journalists to pay handsome sums for guides and transportation and the right to interview individual hostages, not to mention the king's ransom at the end, transformed ASG terrorist operations into a virtual money-making industry that had benefits for many throughout the Philippine government, including perhaps even President Estrada himself. Some speculated that as much as half of the \$20 million went back to *al-Qa'ida*.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 112–116. The kidnapped hostages were from Finland (2), Germany (3), France (2), South Africa (2), Lebanon (1), Malaysia (7), and the Philippines (2). One of the Filipinos was never released and was believed to have joined the ASG.

⁵⁸² AIJAC (The Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council), "Asia Watch," in *The Review*, website of the AIJAC. URL: <http://www.aijac.org.au/review/2000/256/aw256.html>. Accessed September 13, 2005.

⁵⁸³ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 115.

THE DIFFERENT APPROACH OF JOSEPH ESTRADA

Although these Abu Sayyaf operations took place far from MILF areas of control, and MILF leaders distanced their organization from these terrorist operations, even issuing *fatwas* condemning kidnapping and the beheading of kidnapped hostages, the violence of the ASG provoked communal tensions throughout Mindanao. With the three-year cease-fire between the government and the MILF up for renewal in the summer of 2000, the increased tensions had both the Army and MILF fighters on high alert. A ferry bombing off Ozamis City in northern Mindanao on February 25, 2000, which killed 39 passengers, by terrorists whom the Army claimed had taken refuge in MILF Camp John Mack in Inudaran, Lanao del Norte, led to a military stand-off. Denying the presence of the perpetrators, the MILF camp found itself attacked by Philippine Armed Forces on March 17, just three days before the Abu Sayyaf attack on the two elementary schools on Basilan Island. Camp John Mack commander Abdullah Macaapar (Commander Bravo) responded by sending forces out of the camp to attack and occupy the nearby town of Kanswagan, a move that led to full-scale fighting between the two contending forces.⁵⁸⁴

President Joseph Estrada, elected to replace former President Fidel Ramos in June 1998, scorned his predecessor's policies of "coddling" the Muslims of the southern Philippines,⁵⁸⁵ although he took no overt steps to undermine the cease-fire with the MILF until it came up for renewal in 2000. A former popular movie actor-turned-politician who was soon to be constitutionally impeached and driven from office in January 2001 because of alleged massive corruption, Estrada believed the Philippine Army should defeat the MILF rather than coexist with it. Accordingly, on April 27, four days after the ASG Sipidan Island kidnapping, he declared an "all-out war" against the MILF and the ASG.⁵⁸⁶

Estrada Takes the Offensive

Although fighting was general throughout the south over the next several months, with many former MNLF fighters again taking up arms and joining the MILF, and upwards of 900,000 civilian refugees being created by the general violence, a particular strategic target was the 15-km road connecting Camp Abu Bakar with the main Cotabato-Marawi highway that recently had been constructed by the Ramos administration. Heavily fortified and guarded by the MILF, the road ultimately could not be defended, and Philippine Armed Forces succeeded in breaking through to Camp Abu Bakar on July 9, taking control of MILF headquarters.⁵⁸⁷ The MILF leadership, including Salamat Hashim, escaped, however, to the more remote *Jemaah Islamiyah*-controlled Camp Hudaibiyah, which continued to hold out against government forces

⁵⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 6.

⁵⁸⁵ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 46.

⁵⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 27.

⁵⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 6.

until April 2001. Unknown publicly at this time, the Indonesian *Jemaah Islamiyah* cadres training in Camp Hudaibiyah began vacating the camp and returning, mainly to Indonesia, to establish new camps there that within a year were receiving MILF recruits for training.⁵⁸⁸

MILF Reactions

Anticipating the outbreak of hostilities with the Philippine government, the MILF in 1999 had begun establishing a Special Operations Group (SOG) under the leadership of Afghan war veteran Mukhlis Yunos.⁵⁸⁹ In doing so, Yunos worked closely with Indonesian *Jemaah Islamiyah* figures, the most notable of which was another Afghan war veteran and explosives expert, Fathur Roman al-Ghozi.⁵⁹⁰ In April 2000, Salamat Hashim had responded to President Estrada's declaration of "all-out war" against the MILF (the independent Bangsamoro Islamic state, as Hashim preferred to conceptualize it) by labeling the emerging struggle as a *jihad* against the would-be occupiers of the MILF "liberated zones." Very quickly, on May 3, 2000, Yunos' SOG responded by setting off four bombs in General Santos City that killed three. This attack was followed by another bomb at the SM Megamall in Manila on May 21 that killed one, and six more bombs in General Santos City on June 24 that killed two.⁵⁹¹ These clearly terrorist operations against civilian targets marked a departure for the MILF that heretofore had adhered closely to conventional guerilla tactics of attacking military targets and government facilities within the Muslim-inhabited areas of the Philippines. They did not deter government operations, however, which continued on until the capture of Camp Abu Bakar on June 9.

The fall of Camp Abu Bakar and most other MILF camps produced a lull in the fighting, not because the Philippine Army had achieved victory, but because the MILF needed time to undertake a major reorganization, decentralizing what had become a quite centralized military force⁵⁹² and making it more capable of conducting guerrilla operations. That MILF retaliation against Philippine "aggression" would have a different dimension, however, became apparent on August 1, 2000, when a bomb exploded outside the residence of the Philippine ambassador to Indonesia, Leonides Caday, in Jakarta, seriously wounding the ambassador and killing two bystanders. Although not known until after his capture in Manila on January 15, 2002, this operation was carried out by Indonesian *Jemaah Islamiyah* operator Fathur Roman al-Ghozi and others, as a kind of "thank-you note," so some said, to the MILF for the training and assistance provided to the *Jemaah Islamiyah* in recent years.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 139.

⁵⁸⁹ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 98.

⁵⁹⁰ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 136.

⁵⁹¹ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 11, 27.

⁵⁹² International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 10, provides some detailed information about this reorganization.

⁵⁹³ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 97–98. For details, see International Crisis Group. "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 18.

The major act of retaliation for the fall of Camp Abu Bakar was to come in Manila on Rizal Day, December 30, 2000, when the MILF SOG carried out five simultaneous bombings, striking a train, a bus, the airport, a park near the U.S. Embassy, and a gas station, killing 22 people and injuring more than 100. A dramatic event, Philippine authorities at this time had no idea that the bombings had an Indonesian connection.⁵⁹⁴ Again, unrealized until after the capture of al-Ghozi and also Mukhlis Yunos on May 25, 2003, the bombings were an MILF SOG operation in which al-Ghozi had been a principal advisor. *Jemaah Islamiyah* leader Hambali had come to Manila a few days earlier to examine the plan and give it his seal of approval, as well as funds (\$3,600) to Yunos to pay for his expenses.⁵⁹⁵ The confusion over the Rizal Day bombings was only complicated by the occurrence six days earlier, on Christmas Eve, of 30 nearly simultaneous bomb blasts in Christian churches across Indonesia, also orchestrated by Hanbali, which killed 19 and injured about 120 people.⁵⁹⁶

The Impeachment of Joseph Estrada

The year 2000 had not been a good year for the Philippines and, in January 2001, President Joseph Estrada faced impeachment proceedings on grounds of massive corruption while in office, including widely believed allegations that he had derived profit from the \$20 million ransom paid in September by the Libyan government to the ASG for release of the Sipidan hostages. Never formerly found guilty by the Philippine Senate, Estrada nevertheless was forced to step down from office only after the Supreme Court had declared the Presidency vacant and swore in his Vice President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, as his constitutional successor on January 20. Claiming that he never had been formally removed from office nor resigned, Estrada and his supporters continued to challenge the legitimacy of the Arroyo government in legal disputes likely to keep Philippine politics in turmoil for the foreseeable future.⁵⁹⁷

ARROYO RESTORES THE RAMOS POLICY

Formerly Vice President in the Estrada administration, Arroyo, the daughter of former Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal (1961-65) and a former professor of economics, was elected in her own right as President in June 2001. Meanwhile, she inherited the problems of the Estrada era, including the challenges of the MILF and the ASG in the south. Closely associated with former President Fidel Ramos, one of her principal supporters and advisors, her policies reflected continuity with his administration rather than the Estrada administration-toward the south as well as the rest of the country.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 19.

⁵⁹⁵ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 136-137.

⁵⁹⁶ Symonds, "Political Origins and Outlook of Jemaah Islamiyah," Part 3, 3.

⁵⁹⁷ The New Filipino Movement, "President Joseph Ejercito Estrada." *Neofinoy.info*. URL: <http://www.neofinoy.info/The%20RP%20Presidents/estrada.htm>. Accessed: September 5, 2005.

⁵⁹⁸ The New Filipino Movement, "President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo." *Neofinoy.info*. URL: <http://www.neofinoy.info/The%20RP%20Presidents/arroyo.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2005.

Briefly stated, her policies were (1) renewal of the peace process with the MILF, (2) a search for new leadership of the MNLF as a prelude to facilitating MILF/MNLF cooperation, and (3) “total war” against the ASG and ending the type of terrorism it represented.⁵⁹⁹ Soon after her installation as President she declared a unilateral cease-fire and initiated exploratory talks with the MILF aimed at renewing the former mutual cease-fire agreement originally made by President Ramos in 1997.⁶⁰⁰ Such an agreement was reached and signed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on March 24, 2001.⁶⁰¹ Further talks and agreements on various issues such as security, humanitarian assistance, and economic development continued throughout 2001 and into 2002. An MILF condition for these talks was that they be mediated by the OIC and that they be conducted in an OIC country. The Malaysian government of Mahathir Mohamed took an active role in facilitating this process, as did the Libyan government of Mu`ammar Qadhafi.⁶⁰² A final aspect of these talks was an agreement, signed in Kuala Lumpur in August 2001, between the MILF and MNLF stating their intention to reunify after a separation of nearly 20 years.

Another Arroyo initiative was to schedule the long-delayed plebiscite, required by the Philippine Constitution, to formalize the expanded ARMM agreed on in the 1996 Jakarta Agreement. This she put on the calendar for August 2001, three months prior to the scheduled gubernatorial elections for the ARMM in November 2001.⁶⁰³ One who opposed this process as well as the central role being played by the OIC in the talks between the government and the MILF was MNLF leader and ARMM governor Nur Misuari. Misuari’s opposition to the Arroyo peace process provoked a split within the 15-man MNLF Executive Council that Arroyo effectively managed to secure the ouster of Misuari as MNLF chairman in April 2001 and his replacement by Parouk Hussein. Hussein later won election in November as the new governor of the ARMM.⁶⁰⁴

The Demise of Nur Misuari

The eclipse of Misuari was complete. His ultimate success in emerging as the governor of the ARMM in 1996 had been in fact the beginning of his downfall. Although simultaneously serving as Chairman of the SPCPD that gave him oversight of the expenditure of large amounts of development funds for the southern Philippines, there was a widespread perception that many of these funds had been squandered on large “showcase” projects or support of Misuari’s own profligate lifestyle, and too little had been spent on health services, literacy, problems of malnutrition and infant mortality,

⁵⁹⁹ Manalo, “The Philippine Response to Terrorism,” 5.

⁶⁰⁰ United States Institute of Peace, “The Mindanao Peace Talks: Another Opportunity to Resolve the Moro Conflict in the Philippines,” *Special Report 131* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 2005), 6. Also Mel C. Labrador, “The Philippines in 2001: High Drama, a New President, and Setting the Stage for Recovery,” *Asian Survey*, XLII, 1 (January/February 2002), 146.

⁶⁰¹ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 32.

⁶⁰² USIP, “The Mindanao Peace Talks,” 6.

⁶⁰³ Manalo, “The Philippine Response to Terrorism,” 5.

⁶⁰⁴ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 43.

or in employment creation.⁶⁰⁵ Salamat Hashim's MILF, moreover, had long opposed Misuari's leadership, and the MILF had only grown stronger since 1996, especially in Mindanao, where the MILF assertion of independence against Misuari's acceptance of autonomy led many to accuse the latter of having sold out to the Philippine regime for his own personal benefit. The rallying of many Misuari followers, including some who had been integrated into the Philippine security services under the terms of the Jakarta Agreement, to the MILF during the 2000 fighting while Misuari remained loyal to the government also had weakened his degree of support. Finally, his failure or inability to deal effectively with the Abu Sayyaf threat, particularly in Sulu, his own territory, where the Sipidan Island hostages had been held, caused Arroyo and perhaps even the Malaysian government, whose seven hostages he had been unable to liberate, to lose confidence in him.

Ousted from the leadership of the MNLF, Misuari soon went into opposition, formally denouncing the Arroyo administration in late October 2001, a month prior to the ARMM elections, and threatening to take up arms again.⁶⁰⁶ Coming as it did shortly after the September 11, 2001, *al-Qa'ida* attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States, and at a time when the Arroyo administration was seeking to cooperate with the United States in its rapidly emerging "global war on terrorism," Misuari's stance could not have been more ill-timed. A bombing in Zamboanga City that killed five on October 28, 2001, attributed to the ASG, just at the moment Misuari was expressing his opposition to the Arroyo government, also seriously undermined his credibility.

Undeterred, Misuari succeeded in raising 400–600 loyalists who on November 19 attacked several military posts in Jolo in an effort to halt the gubernatorial election scheduled for November 26. President Arroyo ordered "full force" to be employed in suppressing the Misuari rebellion, and in a week of fighting nearly 1,300 were estimated to have been killed prior to the election. A court order for his arrest having been issued, Misuari finally fled the country, but was detained by Malaysian authorities as he tried to land in Sabah and later extradited to Manila to stand trial.⁶⁰⁷ His long run as the favored leader of the Moro resistance movement by the OIC had come to an end. Despite the violence, elections were held as scheduled on November 26, and new MNLF leader Parouk Hussein, with the full support of the Arroyo administration, was duly chosen as the new governor of the ARMM.

Abu Sayyaf Again

Misuari's cause probably was not helped by yet another major ASG kidnapping and hostage crisis that had emerged earlier in the year. As reported by CNN correspondent Maria Ressa,

⁶⁰⁵ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42.

⁶⁰⁶ Turbiville, "Bearers of the Sword," 7.

⁶⁰⁷ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 43.

On May 27, 2001...Khadaffy Janjalani's group [on Basilan Island] used one of the high-speed boats bought by the Sipidan ransom money to get to the southern Philippine Island of Palawan...In the middle of the night, armed men stormed the rooms by the ocean of the Dos Palmas resort, pulling out twenty people, including three Americans...By June 1, the groups had landed on the island of Basilan and kidnapped still more hostages from the Golden Harvest plantation. Pursued by the Philippine military, the Abu Sayyaf and their hostages fled to a hospital and church compound in the town of Lamitan, where a day-long siege ended in a fiasco that spotlighted either the incompetence of the Philippine military or collusion and corruption on a massive scale.⁶⁰⁸

Totally surrounded by more than 1,000 soldiers, Ressa goes on to say, a back entrance of the church was left unguarded after dusk, enabling the apparently informed kidnappers and their hostages to simply walk out of the compound and disappear into the jungle.

The hostage crisis that ensued ended more than a year later, on June 7, 2002, when a Philippine Army operation, supported by U.S. soldiers who now were providing intelligence and training to the Philippine units, managed to rescue the one remaining living hostage, an American, Gracia Burnham, whose husband, Martin Burnham, along with a Filipina nurse, Edilborah Yap, were killed in the course of the operation.⁶⁰⁹ In the meantime, the crisis provoked severe recriminations within the Philippine Army and government as well as among the public, especially when an investigation into the church escape fiasco held no one accountable.⁶¹⁰ Unable to negotiate a ransom agreement with either the Philippine or American government, as their colleagues had done with the Sipidan hostages a year before, the ASG kidnappers embarked on a killing spree, attacking a number of Christian villages on Basilan Island and gradually killing several of their hostages, often by cruel torture, and releasing others until only the three were left that the Philippine Army tried to rescue in June 2002. The Zamboanga City bombing of October 28, 2001, that so compromised Misuari's campaign of opposition against the government was also probably a part of this regime of terror.

The Plebiscite of August 2001

Despite the crisis provoked by the ASG kidnapping, Arroyo proceeded with the August 14, 2001, plebiscite on expansion of the ARMM. In Senate Bill 2129, passed in January, just after her assumption of the Presidency, the government had expanded the potential ARMM to 15 provinces and 14 cities in a gerrymandering effort to increase the

⁶⁰⁸ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 116–117.

⁶⁰⁹ The complete story is told in Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 104–123.

⁶¹⁰ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 118.

likelihood that most of the Muslim region would fall under the ARMM—a step deemed necessary to comply most effectively with the spirit of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Jakarta Agreement. Although Arroyo campaigned in 11 provinces and 14 cities for their inclusion in the ARMM, the results proved disappointing to both the President as well as to Muslim leaders in that only Basilan Island (excluding the municipality of Isabela) and Marawi City voted to be included together with the four provinces previously included in the ARMM in 1989.⁶¹¹ Christian majorities and/or Muslims disgruntled with the MNFL or MILF in the remaining ten provinces simply opposed becoming part of an autonomous Moro Muslim state as envisioned by the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, which the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had now accepted.

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Such was the situation in the Philippine Muslim south when, after the September 11, 2001, *al-Qaeda* attacks in the United States, President Arroyo was asked for Philippine help in supporting the U.S.-led global war on terrorism. Arroyo was eager to cooperate with the United States, and in fact was the first Asian leader to have called U.S. President Bush in the wake of the attacks, but a return of U.S. forces to the Philippines after their departure from Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Station in 1992 was a difficult political issue for the new President. Too, although she was pleased to receive help in combating the ASG organization, she at the same time did not want a renewed relationship with the United States to complicate her concerted effort to negotiate a final settlement of the long-standing Moro problem in the south that she felt was now in sight. For his part, MILF leader Salamat Hashim articulated the right words, when on October 8, 2001, the day after the first U.S. strikes in Afghanistan aimed at dislodging the Taliban government and destroying the *al-Qaeda* organization, he rejected Usama bin Ladin's call for a general Muslim *jihād* against the United States and its allies and stated that the MILF continued to respect the cease-fire agreement with the government of the Philippines and looked forward to peace talks with the government in Kuala Lumpur scheduled for October 15.⁶¹²

Renewed Relations with the United States

In November 2001, during her first state visit to the United States to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Republic of the Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty, Bush and Arroyo issued a joint statement in which the two leaders “agreed that the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group or ASG (which now hold both Filipino and American hostages in the southern Philippines) underscore the urgency of ensuring that the two countries

⁶¹¹ Labrador, “The Philippines in 2001,” 147.

⁶¹² Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 99.

maintain a robust defense partnership into the 21st century.”⁶¹³ Bush had promised both military and economic assistance and help “in any way she suggests in getting rid of the Abu Sayyaf.”⁶¹⁴ Arroyo herself was elated at her reception in the U.S. capital, telling reporters after one of her meetings in Washington that she was “at \$4 billion and counting.”⁶¹⁵

The details remained to be worked out but became apparent in December, when Manila began allowing U.S. forces to overfly Philippine airspace and use airfields as transit points in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan. In return, the United States agreed to provide antiterrorism training and advice to Philippine military forces engaged in combat operations against the ASG.⁶¹⁶ The agreement gave rise to a joint exercise called Balikatan (Shoulder-to-Shoulder) 02–01, which brought U.S. troops to Zamboanga and Basilan Island during the period February–July 2002. Initially composed of 660 troops, including 200 members of the U.S. Special Forces, the group later grew to nearly 1,000 soldiers by the end of the exercise. Despite speculation that “shoulder-to-shoulder” meant that U.S. soldiers would accompany Philippine Army units on their patrols in search of ASG fighters, the U.S. role remained confined to training, advising, and intelligence support based on aerial reconnaissance of Basilan Island and surrounding regions. Indeed, the mission of the U.S. forces was very narrowly circumscribed in order not to violate provisions of the Philippine Constitution that prohibited the stationing of foreign forces on Philippine soil.⁶¹⁷ In January 2002, moreover, prior to the deployment of the U.S. forces, the United States, Arroyo’s government, and the MILF had signed a trilateral agreement that U.S. forces would not enter MILF-controlled territories on Basilan or elsewhere in the Philippines in pursuit of ASG fighters, much to the chagrin of some in both the U.S. and Philippine armed forces.⁶¹⁸

Confined to Basilan Island, Operation Balikatan 02–01 had some success in capturing or killing a number of ASG fighters and in bringing an end to the Dos Palmos kidnapping crisis, when on June 7, 2002, the Philippine Army was able to deliver to U.S. forces the one remaining American hostage, Gracia Burnham. Most ASG members, including Khaddafy Janjalani, managed to elude the search and destroy mission organized against them and escape, mainly to Sulu, but also into safe havens in Mindanao, where U.S. forces, by the terms of reference of their presence in

⁶¹³ The White House, “U.S.-Philippine Joint Statement on Defense Alliance.” November 20, 2001. URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011120.html>. Accessed: September 5, 2005.

⁶¹⁴ Sonya Ross, “Bush Promises Help Against Philippine Terrorists,” *Honolulu Advertiser*, November 21, 2001.

⁶¹⁵ James Hookway, “Manila Proves Key U.S. Ally in Terrorism War–Bush Responds with Aid, but There are Limits to Philippine Support.,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 20, 2001.

⁶¹⁶ Angel Rabasa, “Political Islam in Southeast Asia: Moderates, Radicals and Terrorists,” *Adelphi Papers* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, July 1, 2003), URL: http://www3.oup.co.uk/adelph/hdb/volume_358/Issue_011.

⁶¹⁷ Michael J. Montesano, “The Philippines in 2002: Playing Politics, Facing Deficits, and Embracing Uncle Sam,” *Asian Survey*, XLIII, 1 (January/February 2003), 161–162.

⁶¹⁸ Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 48.

the Philippines, were unable to go. The ASG retaliation was fierce, however, as strings of urban bombings occurred with regularity throughout the southern Philippines and also in Manila throughout 2002 and into 2003, including one on October 2, 2002, in Zamboanga City, in which a U.S. serviceman was killed. Later evidence collected from captured terrorists determined that various Indonesian members of *Jemaah Islamiyah* had actively collaborated with the ASG in perpetrating these bombings,⁶¹⁹ although the campaign appeared to have been directed by Khaddafy Janjalani.⁶²⁰ Despite MILF denials of any connection with these terrorist attacks and indeed formal condemnation of them, mounting evidence of established relations between the MILF and various *Jemaah Islamiyah* fighters operating in the Philippines kept the MILF on the defensive.

The overall lack of success of Operation Balikatan 02-01 led the United States and the government of the Philippines to undertake Operation Balikatan 03-01 the following year, this time with the focus on Jolo and the Sulu Archipelago, where about 350 U.S. Special Forces personnel were deployed in February 2003 along with approximately 1,000 U.S. Marines positioned on ships offshore. During this campaign, U.S. forces reportedly had been quietly authorized by the Arroyo government to engage in combat operations against ASG forces, despite the fact that such an authorization would technically be in violation of the Philippine Constitution.⁶²¹

Who Is In Charge?

Growing disarray in the Arroyo administration was evident in early 2003. The last week of 2002 had seen a series of murderous attacks in civilian targets in several provinces of Mindanao that the Army high command blamed on the MILF, despite adamant denials from Salamat Hashim and other MILF leaders. Meanwhile, since mid-October 2002, Arroyo, who on December 31, 2002, formally announced that she would not be a candidate in the next Presidential elections scheduled for May 2004, was engaged in peace talks with the MILF in Malaysia that she deemed to be proceeding well. She also continued successfully to urge the United States not to add

⁶¹⁹ The continuing violence in the southern Philippines was overshadowed by the August 12, 2002, bombing of the Sari nightclub in Denpasar, Bali, in neighboring Indonesia that killed 202, including 88 Australian tourists. The Bali bombing was the world's deadliest terrorist incident since the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington. Largely overlooked at the time were the almost simultaneous bombings that same evening of the U.S. consulate in Bali and the Philippine consulate in Manado, the Indonesian city closest to the Philippines. The Bali bombing was immediately understood to be the work of *Jemaah Islamiyah*, and the simultaneity of the other two bombings suggests they were part of the same operation. Later arrests of nearly 30 individuals believed to be associated with the bombings brought to light the fact that many had trained in MILF camps in Mindanao. Although the MILF may have only "hosted" their training, the only reasonable analytical conclusion was that linkages existed between the MILF and the *Jemaah Islamiyah* that conjoined their respective struggles as parts of a common cause or were simply separate manifestations of the same cause. Montesano, "The Philippines in 2002," 135.

⁶²⁰ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 22–24.

⁶²¹ Michael J. Montesano, "The Philippines in 2003: Troubles, None of Them New," *Asian Survey*, XLIV, 1 (January/February 2004), 100.

the MILF to the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations,⁶²² while in February 2003, concurrent with the redeployment of U.S. forces to Sulu for Operation Balikatan 03-01, she presented the Army command with a three-month deadline to “break the back of the ASG.”⁶²³

Apparently without specific Presidential authorization, but acting on these general orders, on February 11, 2003, the Army launched a multi-battalion assault on the “Buliok Complex,” a series of towns in the Liguasan Marsh near Pikit, the hometown of Salamat Hashim, southeast of Cotabato City, where the MILF had reestablished its headquarters after the loss of Camp Abu Bakar in 2002.⁶²⁴ Hardly had the operation begun, however, when President Arroyo issued orders for the military to halt the attack, because the government had approved the final draft of a comprehensive peace agreement with the MILF. On the following day, the President suddenly reversed her decision and ordered the Army to capture and occupy the Buliok Complex-but only to capture the Pentagon Gang, an independent and particularly brutal ASG-like terrorist group that the Army insisted was being given refuge there.⁶²⁵

The Pentagon Gang continued to operate in 2005, meaning that the Army did not succeed in its stated mission, but it did succeed in occupying the Buliok Complex-probably the real intent of the operation-over which the Philippine flag was raised on February 14 after the dispersal of an estimated 1,500 MILF fighters and about 40,000 civilian refugees.⁶²⁶ Following the fall of the Buliok Complex, Mindanao was struck with a series of violent terrorist attacks, the most notable of which were the bombings of Davao International Airport on March 4, 2003, and the Davao wharf at Sasa on April 2, 2003, in which 38 were killed and over 200 wounded.⁶²⁷ The Army adamantly argued that the MILF was behind these attacks, whereas the “MILF consistently and vociferously denied complicity” in any of these attacks.⁶²⁸ The situation was admittedly confused by the reported arrival in Mindanao at this time of ASG leader Khaddafy Janjalani and many of his fighters who were escaping growing pressure on them from Operation Balikatan 03-01 in Sulu.⁶²⁹

Clearly frustrated by the contradiction between her policy of trying to negotiate with the MILF and that of the Army to pursue the organization as aggressively as possible,

⁶²² Michael J. Montesano, “The Philippines in 2002,” 165–166.

⁶²³ Anthony Davis, “Resilient Abu Sayyaf Resist Military Pressure,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 15, 9 (September 2003), 14.

⁶²⁴ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 7.

⁶²⁵ Ressa, *Seeds of Terror*, 141.

⁶²⁶ Anthony Davis, “Philippine Army Prevents MILF Reorganization,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 15, 3 (March 2003), 16.

⁶²⁷ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 23.

⁶²⁸ Anthony Davis, “Fragile Ceasefire Holds Out in the Philippines,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 16, 1 (January 2004), 16.

⁶²⁹ Anthony Davis, “Philippines Fears New Wave of Attacks by Abu Sayyaf Group” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 17, 5 (May 2005), 11.

on May 7, 2003, on the eve of her departure for her second state visit to Washington, Arroyo called on the MILF to “renounce all terrorist ties” or risk designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States.⁶³⁰ Salamat and other MILF spokesmen quickly did so, noting that “the MILF, as a liberation organization, has repeatedly renounced terrorism publicly as a means of obtaining political ends.” Arroyo’s visit to the United States at this time was closely linked to U.S. efforts to gain Philippine support for Bush administration policy in Iraq, which U.S. forces had occupied in March, and she was able to obtain a number of favorable concessions, including keeping the MILF off the Foreign Terrorist Organization list.⁶³¹ Soon after her return from Washington, Arroyo again met Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed in Tokyo, and on July 19, 2003, through the good offices of the government of Malaysia, a new Mutual Cessation of Hostilities agreement was signed between the MILF and the government.⁶³²

At this point, two key developments intervened. A military mutiny in Manila on July 27 called for Arroyo’s own resignation as well as that of her Defense Secretary, General Angelo Reyes, and the Armed Forces intelligence director, Victor Corpus. Accusing them of staging bombings in Mindanao for the purpose of securing increased American military and economic assistance and of selling arms to Muslim rebels for personal profit, the rebels asserted that they could no longer serve such a corrupt government at such low pay.⁶³³ Perceiving a plot within the Army to overthrow her, Arroyo moved adroitly to secure the resignations of both Reyes and Corpus in August.⁶³⁴ Widely perceived as a “hawk” over issues of war and peace in Mindanao, Reyes was replaced by another retired general, Eduardo Ermita, who previously had been serving as Arroyo’s point man in the peace process with the MILF and the communist New People’s Army (NPA). As chief negotiator with the MILF, Arroyo appointed Silvestre Afable, previously the head of her Presidential management staff, whom she believed the MILF respected and trusted.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁰ International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 7.

⁶³¹ Montesano, “The Philippines in 2003,” 100. Among the concessions received were designation of the Philippines as a “major non-NATO ally” of the US, creation of a new combat engineering unit and other counterterrorism support for the Philippines Armed Forces, twenty refurbished helicopters, development assistance for Mindanao and financial support for the Philippines-MILF peace process, improved processes for overseas workers’ remittances, aid for Filipino veterans of the U.S. military, and Generalized System of Preferences benefits for selected Philippine exports to the United States.

⁶³² International Crisis Group, “Southern Philippines Backgrounder,” 7.

⁶³³ The issues raised by the mutineers were clearly related to a new book that had appeared in the summer of 2003 by Gracia Burnham, *In the Presence of My Enemies* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). Ms. Burnham, who had been an Abu Sayyaf kidnapping victim for more than a year prior to her being freed by the Philippine Army on June 7, 2002, had written that certain Philippine Army members had connived with her ASG captors to divide millions of dollars the group had raised through their kidnapping operations. See Leslie Davis, “Philippines on Trial over Hostage Issue,” *Asian Times*, August 7, 2004. URL: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/FH07Ae05.html. Accessed September 22, 2005.

⁶³⁴ Montesano, “The Philippines in 2003,” 96–97.

⁶³⁵ Davis, “Fragile Ceasefire Holds Out in the Philippines,” 16.

Death of Salamat Hashim

The second development was the death (by heart attack) of MILF Chairman Salamat Hashim on July 13, 2003, nearly a week before the signing of the new Mutual Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Although announcement of his death was delayed until August 5, when it could be said that Haj Ali Murad had succeeded Hashim as Chairman of the MILF, the choice of Murad was positively received by the Arroyo administration. Long the MILF chief of military operations who had remained most of his life in Mindanao, he lacked the strong international connections possessed by Hashim, and was considered less a religious ideologue than his predecessor had been.⁶³⁶ Because Murad was considered an easier leader to deal with, despite his formidable talents as a military commander, Arroyo was optimistic, given the new team of Philippine negotiators she was putting in place, that a final settlement of the Moro problem could be readied.

Although the cease-fire with the MILF continued to hold up through 2005, further negotiations aimed at reaching a final settlement failed to occur quickly. First, there was the need for Haj Ali Murad to take charge of the organization he now headed. The refusal of the Army to withdraw from the Buliok Complex it had taken in February, a condition set by the MILF, also delayed the resumption of negotiations. So too did the MILF demand for charges to be dropped against 150 MILF leaders accused of organizing the terrorist attacks that had followed the Army's storming of the Buliok Complex. Yet another issue was an MILF demand that third-party cease-fire monitors from OIC countries, primarily Malaysia, be permitted to enter Mindanao prior to the start of negotiations. Although the Arroyo administration agreed to permit such a team to visit the MILF area on a temporary basis to assess the situation and make recommendations to the government, its position was that a permanent observation team could only be permitted after the conclusion of a final agreement, when its function would be to monitor implementation of the agreement.⁶³⁷

Government-MILF Talks Begin

These issues were finally resolved, and the first of six rounds of exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur during 2004 took place in February 2004. Further rounds of talks continued in February, April, and September 2005. Until this point, the talks remained "exploratory" only, and although both parties expressed the desire to enter formal negotiations to reach a final peace settlement, a variety of issues continued to intervene to retard the process. The question of OIC-sponsored multinational observers was addressed in the first meeting in February 2004, and the first team

⁶³⁶ International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Background," 9.

⁶³⁷ Davis, "Fragile Ceasefire Holds Out in the Philippines," 16–17.

consisting of Malaysian, Brunei, and Libyan observers/monitors arrived in Mindanao in October.⁶³⁸

A complicating issue was a United States initiative to become part of the peace process. During her May 2003 visit to Washington, President Arroyo had asked for and had received from U.S. President George W. Bush a promise of financial support for the Philippines-MILF peace process. Thirty million dollars were made available and provided to the Washington-based United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to help facilitate the peace process. Efforts to enter the peace talks in Kuala Lumpur, however, were rebuffed by the Malaysian government and the OIC. The high-level team put together by the USIP, consisting of former U.S. ambassadors to Manila and others, therefore, had to content itself with bilateral meetings with Philippine government and MILF representatives engaged in the peace talks as well as with individual Filipino scholars and civil society activists engaged in promoting peace.⁶³⁹ The Institute also sought to promote dialogue through research and the holding of seminars on key issues pertinent to the conflict. A major example was a two-day workshop on the thorny issue of ancestral domain held on May 24-27, 2005, in Davao City and attended by nearly 40 participants, including Philippine government and MILF representatives, Philippine scholars, and civil society activists.⁶⁴⁰

The Issues at Stake

Ancestral domain claims, along with security and the economic redevelopment of the southern Philippines after the conclusion of peace, emerged as the three major issues to be resolved in the exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur prior to moving into final peace talks.⁶⁴¹ Superficially, security seemed to be the easiest issue to resolve. Early in the talks, the two parties established a series of joint Coordinating Committees on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) to coordinate issues arising from the July 2003 cease-fire agreement and to react jointly to cease-fire violations, when they occurred. 71 cease-fire violations in 2004, as opposed to 559 in 2003, were dealt with in this manner.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁸ Temario C. Rivera, "The Philippines in 2004: New Mandate, Daunting Problems," *Asian Survey*, XLV, 1 (January/February 2005), 127.

⁶³⁹ Eugene Martin, "U.S. Interests in the Philippine Peace Process," *United States Institute of Peace* web page, February 8, 2005. URL: http://www.usip.org/Philippines/reports/mindanao_martin.html. Accessed September 22, 2005.

⁶⁴⁰ For the proceedings of the conference, see Astrid S. Tuminez, "Ancestral Domain in Comparative Perspective," Special Report 151, *United States Institute of Peace* web site. URL: <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr151.html>. Accessed September 22, 2005.

⁶⁴¹ Rivera, "The Philippines in 2004," 127.

⁶⁴² Embassy of the Philippines (Washington), "Status of the GRP-MILF Peace Process," *United States Institute of Peace* web site, February 5, 2005. URL: <http://www.usip.org/philippines/reports/rosario.pdf>. Accessed September 22, 2005.

Security. Although instances of terrorist violence were significantly reduced during this period, at least three major terrorist attacks, each eventually attributed to the ASG with JI support, marred the security environment. The first, on February 27, 2004, as the first government-MILF talks were getting underway in Kuala Lumpur, was the bombing of a superferry off Corregidor Island as it departed Manila for Davao City in Mindanao, killing over 100.⁶⁴³ The second, on February 14, 2005, again as talks were resuming in Kuala Lumpur, which an ASG spokesman called a “Valentine’s Day gift to Mrs. Arroyo,” consisted of virtually simultaneous bombings in the Makati financial district of Manila, General Santos City, and Davao City that claimed 12 killed and at least 140 wounded.⁶⁴⁴ The third, on August 28, 2005, was another bomb blast on a ferry, the *Doña Ramoña*, departing Lamitan on Basilan Island for Manila, wounding 30.⁶⁴⁵ These and lesser instances of violence continued to provoke Philippine government intervention and claims that the MILF continued to harbor terrorists, despite adamant MILF denials and continued cooperation with the government to uncover wanted individuals.

Increased government success in capturing or killing various ASG and JI fighters during the new cease-fire era was indicative of increased cooperation.⁶⁴⁶ Philippine government security operations remained intrusive, however, and MILF spokesmen often accused government forces of being in violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement more often than its own “renegade” commanders. Examples occurred on November 19, 2004, and January 27, 2005, when on both occasions Philippine military helicopter gunships and aircraft on the basis of “solid intelligence” attacked villages in MILF territories in which ASG leaders, including Janjalani, were alleged to be meeting with JI operatives from Indonesia to plan future operations. On both occasions, civilian villagers were killed, but the intended targets were not included

⁶⁴³ Sol Jose Varizi, “Abu Sayyaf: From Kidnap to Genuine Terror,” *Philippine Headline News Online*, August 26, 2004. URL: <http://www.newsflash.org/2004/02/22/hl/hl100913.htm>. Accessed September 22, 2005.

⁶⁴⁴ Anthony Davis, “Filipinos Fear New Wave,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 17, 5 (May 2005), 10. Also “New Abu Sayyaf,” *The Economist*, February 17, 2005. URL: http://www.economist.com/Printerfriendly.cfm?Story_ID=3675637. Accessed September 22, 2005. Also AFP, Manila, “Abu Sayyaf, Army Clash on Strife-torn Philippine Island,” *Taipei Times*, February 20, 2005. URL: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2005/02/20/200223815/print>. Accessed September 3, 2005.

⁶⁴⁵ Associated Press, “30 Wounded in Blast on Philippines Ferry,” *International Herald Tribune*, Asia-Pacific edition, August 29, 2005. URL: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2005/08/28/news/phil.php>. Accessed September 20, 2005.

⁶⁴⁶ Among those captured/killed were: Toufik Rifqi, Indonesian, captured October 2003; Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi, Indonesian, killed October 2003; Galib Andang (Commander Robot), ASG commander on Jolo Island, captured December 2003; Hamsiraji Sali, ASG leader in Basilan, killed with five of his men in April 2004; three Indonesians with ASG Filipino guide, captured December 2004; ASG operatives Gamal Baharan and Abu Khalil Trinidad, captured February 2005; ASG fighter Gappal Banna, arrested in March 2005; Indonesian JI operative Zaki, captured in March 2005; ASG bomber Alex Kahal, captured in August 2005; among others. In April 2005, more than 800 alleged militant Muslims, members of the ASG and others, were reported to be imprisoned in Bicutan military camp near Manila. Maulana Alonto, “Sulu Fighting Exposes Filipino Government Claims to Want Peace in Mindanao,” *Al-Jazeera.info*, April 5, 2005. URL: <http://www.maranao.com/articles/Sulu%20fighting%20exposes%20Filipino%20government%20claims.htm>. Accessed September 26, 2005.

among the casualties.⁶⁴⁷ Despite the agreements on security cooperation, the security situation in the south remained tense and the parties distrustful of one another.

Agreement on the OIC-sponsored International Monitoring Teams (IMT) that finally arrived in October 2004 was meant to interpose a third party, trusted by both sides, as a mechanism for ameliorating the distrust between the MILF and the Army. The teams were trusted by the MILF that had demanded their presence as a condition for entering exploratory talks with the government. At the same time, they were trusted by the Arroyo administration on the basis of the President's relations with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and, after October 2003, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The positive effect of the IMT was not immediately apparent in the months immediately after their deployment, however. Whether a third party could play such a role over the longer term remained to be seen.

One remaining difficulty with the OIC role was that, despite its efforts to facilitate talks between the government and the MILF, it still recognized the MNLF (if not Nur Misuari) as the official voice of the Bangsamoro people.⁶⁴⁸ Still technically the elected leadership of the ARMM, now under Parouk Hussein, Philippine government, OIC, and MNLF leadership policy was for the MILF ultimately to rejoin and become part of an enlarged MNLF. Meanwhile, the MNLF leadership was being challenged by a breakaway group (MNLF-BG), still loyal to Nur Misuari (who remained under house arrest in Santa Rosa) but headed by religious leader Habier Malik. This group engaged the Philippine Army in pitched battles on Jolo Island in February 2005.⁶⁴⁹ Despite the MILF-government agreement on security cooperation, security in the south remained tenuous in ways over which the MILF had no control.

Economic Redevelopment. On the second issue of economic redevelopment of the southern Philippines, the MILF and the government reached ready agreement in principle, although concerted efforts to spur reconstruction in the south necessarily awaited a final peace settlement. Early in the negotiations, agreement was struck on

⁶⁴⁷ Anthony Vargas, "AFP Checking Report Janjalani Killed in Air Raid," *The Manila Times*, December 21, 2004. URL: http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2004/dec/21/yehey/top_stories/20041221tops.html. Accessed September 20, 2005. Also Roel Pareña, "AFP Launches Airstrikes on Janjalani Meeting," *Star* (Manila), January 28, 2005. URL: <http://www.newsflash.org/2005/02/hl/hl101697.htm>. Accessed September 20, 2005. Also USIP, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 11.

⁶⁴⁸ USIP, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 10.

⁶⁴⁹ Davis, "Filipinos Fear New Wave," 10. AFP Manila, "Abu Sayyaf, Army Clash on Strife-torn Philippine Island," *Taipei Times*, February 20, 2005. URL: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2005/02/20/2003223815/print>. Accessed September 3, 2005.

the creation of a Mindanao Trust Fund (MTF).⁶⁵⁰ Under the terms of this agreement, a Joint Needs Assessment was conducted by the World Bank during August and September 2004 in which needs were assessed in four areas: human development, rural development, finance and private sector, and governance and institutions.⁶⁵¹ Also created was a Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), originally consisting of 135 personnel identified by the MILF to take the lead in managing development projects in the Bangsamoro area. A Malaysian Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP) was also established that provided training for the BDA personnel in 2005.⁶⁵²

Easy enough to agree on, perhaps harder to implement, the MTF concept was fraught with problems, even before the conclusion of the hypothetical peace settlement. Most funds provided by the donor countries were matching funds, meaning that they would be made available only to match appropriations by the Philippine government. The government, meanwhile, faced a looming fiscal crisis in 2005, brought on by a massive budget deficit and a ballooning public debt, all aggravated by widespread corruption throughout the government and society, plus the seemingly unending security problem associated with the Moro problem in the south as well as the continuing problem with the NPA in the north. The question of authority over the allocation and spending of available redevelopment funds, most of which were attached to specific projects identified by the World Bank, also loomed as a divisive issue. How authority between the World Bank, Philippine government ministries, and the newly established local BDA in Mindanao-created to provide a stronger sense of Moro self-determination and control of their own destiny-would be divided remained unresolved.

Ancestral Domain. The final issue, ancestral domain, on the table for the Kuala Lumpur meetings during 2005, promised to be an even thornier problem. Gradually driven from their ancestral lands by a hundred years of “colonization” by northern Christian Filipinos, and by more than 30 years of war since its outbreak in 1972, the “ancestral domains” of the Moros had all but been lost. Yet, through the MILF, the struggle for self-determination and independence continued, not strong enough to claim independence by force from the Philippine government, yet strong enough to make it impossible for the Philippine government to impose its will on the Moros of Mindanao. The MILF no longer claimed the whole of Mindanao, but negotiated in terms of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement that allocated 13 provinces as the designated homeland of the

⁶⁵⁰ Originally called the Multi-Donor Trust Fund, it was put together by the World Bank in cooperation with the government of the Philippines during the summer of 2003 for the purpose of consolidating donor funds from a variety of countries for the redevelopment of the southern Philippines after a final peace settlement had been reached. The Islamic Development Bank, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia were early contributors to the fund. Clearly aimed at wooing the MILF into peace talks with the Philippine government, President Arroyo advertised it as a “peace dividend” for Mindanao as soon as a peace agreement had been finalized. Rexcel Sorza, “Life in Mindanao Better Once Peace Talks Start: Manila,” *IslamOnline.net*, September 26, 2003. URL: <http://islamonline.net/English/News/2003-09/26/article07.shtml>. Accessed September 26, 2005.

⁶⁵¹ USIP, “The Mindanao Peace Talks,” 11.

⁶⁵² Embassy of the Philippines (Washington), “Status of the GRP-MILF Peace Process,” 3.

Moro people. Yet the Philippine constitutional requirement that such an entity could be created only by a popular plebiscite in each of the provinces so affected had thus far kept this provision of the Tripoli Agreement from being implemented in full. How this dilemma would be resolved remained unclear, although talks in September 2005, in which the adoption of a federal system for the Philippines was seriously addressed, gave hope to delegates from both sides that a final settlement between the government and the MILF might be in the offing.⁶⁵³

OUTLOOK

Still, the MILF had not abandoned its historic view that independence for the Bangsamoro Muslim people was its ultimate objective. Nor had the Philippine government backed away from its historic perspective that the south was an integral part of the Philippine state and that the rights of the Moro people had to be accommodated within the context of the right of all other minorities and indigenous peoples of the country. What appears to have become clear, at least to President Arroyo and the MILF leadership, was that after more than 30 years of war final victory for either side was not possible, and close observers of key actors on both sides affirmed that the desire for peace was authentic.⁶⁵⁴ Indeed, the desire for peace may be even stronger among the Muslim supporters of the MILF, whose cities and rural countryside have been ravaged by 30 years of war, with their inhabitants severely displaced, than for the government itself. For the government, however, the crisis in the south has involved a long and expensive military campaign that has not been effective and that it no longer can afford. Both sides appear sincere in their desire for a more or less permanent settlement, but on what terms?

The MILF may be content to live indefinitely with the current cease-fire, established in July 2003, that helps to keep the Philippine Armed Forces at arm's length. If so, then it may avoid reaching a final settlement that likely would define the Muslim south as something less than the independent Muslim state for which it has been fighting for many years. Meanwhile, it will continue to operate its shadow government in the south that will be more effective in commanding the allegiance of the Muslims of the south than the authorities representing the central government in Manila. Time, for the MILF, remains on its side as long as it is not confronted by serious violence. If the central government in Manila really wants a less problematic south, it must eventually understand that peace will come as a result of permitting a maximum degree of self-determination for the Bangsamoro people of the south.

⁶⁵³ Agence France-Presse, "RP-MILF Peace Talks in Malaysia Make Major Breakthrough," *ing7.net*, September 17, 2005. URL: https://news.inq7.net/breaking/index.php?index=1&story_id250494. Accessed September 22, 2005.

⁶⁵⁴ Zachary Abuza, "Crunchtime for the Mindanao Peace Process," *United States Institute of Peace* web site, February 8, 2005. URL: http://www.usip.org/philippines/reports/mindanao_abuza.html. Accessed September 5, 2005.

From the point of view of the government in Manila, however, especially under Arroyo, a final settlement that retains the south as a part of the Philippines is vital. Despite her astute management of the peace process up to this point, the problems faced by her administration are manifold and massive, and her hold on political power is precarious. Like her mentor, former President Fidel Ramos, she is accused by some, particularly in sectors of the military, of “coddling” the Muslims unnecessarily. There are “spoilers” on all sides—the ASG, elements of the MILF disgruntled with Murad’s leadership, military factions disgruntled with Arroyo’s leadership, and others—that could take some action designed to scuttle the current, very fragile peace process. Even if successful, a peace process that did not result in a high degree of perceived self-determination on the part of the Moro population will likely leave a restive Muslim population under Philippine government rule.