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**THESIS**

**THE CAUSES AND PROSPECT OF THE SOUTHERN  
PHILIPPINES SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT**

by

Ricardo A. David Jr.

December 2003

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Gaye Christoffersen  
H. Lyman Miller

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**THE CAUSES AND PROSPECT OF THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES  
SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT**

Ricardo A. David Jr.  
Colonel, Philippine Army  
B.S., Philippine Military Academy, 1977

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**December 2003**

Author: Ricardo A. David Jr.

Approved by: Gaye Christoffersen  
Thesis Advisor

H. Lyman Miller  
Second Reader

James J. Wirtz  
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Southern Philippines secessionist movement has developed once again into a major security concern of the Republic of the Philippines. The hostilities have taken a heavy toll on the nation's human and physical resources and have hurt the nation's economy. Likewise, the rebellion has afflicted both regional and global security because of the reported linkages of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf with the Islamic militant groups. The United States has already directly intervened in the Philippine counter-terrorism campaign by providing military assistance and deploying American combat troops in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.

Peace remains elusive. Various administrations have used combinations of military, political, diplomatic and socio-economic instruments to resolve the conflict but the violence persists. The presidential regime of Fidel Ramos appeared to have achieved a breakthrough in finding a lasting solution by assiduously instituting the policies of decentralization and regional autonomy. Although the government has settled the dispute with the MNLF, other equally dangerous groups, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf have emerged espousing independence from the Republic of the Philippines.

This thesis will analyze the issues and prospects surrounding the Muslim secessionist movements in the Philippines and will examine the responses to resolve the grievances of the Muslim Filipinos.

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Map 1. South-East Asia.

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Map 2. The Philippines.  
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Map 3. Mindanao.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. BACKGROUND

The Southern Philippine secessionist movement has escalated once again into a major security concern of the Republic of the Philippines. The hostilities have exacted a heavy toll on the nation's human and physical resources and have brought adverse consequences to the nation's economy. In addition, the rebellion has afflicted both regional and global security because of the links to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf Group with international terrorist groups, particularly Al Qaeda. The United States has already directly intervened to assist the Philippine counter-terrorism campaign by sending American troops and providing military aid.

The conflict in Mindanao is the result of several factors: historical politicization of Moro identity, general underdevelopment of the area, unequal wealth distribution and the inadequate effort of the Manila government to integrate the Moros into the political and institutional fabric of the nation. The wealth of the region has provided a strong incentive to both the government and the Moros to continue the armed struggle, which started in the late 1960s.

## B. PURPOSE

This thesis will attempt to determine and analyze the drivers of violent conflict in Mindanao<sup>1</sup> and formulate policies and strategies to settle the dispute. I will tackle the following questions: a) How did the conflict evolve and what are the underlying causes of the conflict? b) What are the underlying effects and consequences of the Spanish and American colonialization? c) How did the Philippine central government respond to each stage of the conflict? d) Why does the fighting continue even though the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) brokered the Peace Agreement in 1996 between the Government of the Republic

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<sup>1</sup> The Philippines consists of 7107 islands in Southeast Asia, with only 2000 of them inhabited. To its north is Taiwan, while on its Southwest is Eastern Malaysia and Brunei, and Indonesia is to its south. The two principal islands of the Luzon are Luzon in the north, occupying 40,420 square miles (104,688 square kilometers), and Mindanao in the south, occupying 36,537 square miles (94,630 square kilometers). Together, Luzon and Mindanao account for 65% of the land mass. The Archipelago's land area is 115,860 square miles (300,076 square kilometers).

of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)? e) What policies and strategies should be undertaken by the government to escape the conflict trap?

I will review the history of the Muslim Filipinos within the contextual framework of events that politicized and radicalized the Moro identity and which led to the violent conflict. I will examine the factors leading to the 1996 peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and its eventual collapse. Specifically, this paper will identify the root of the conflict and determine the various factors for the continuing civil war in the Philippines.

### **C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT**

The Muslim Filipinos are the most dominant among the cultural minorities in Philippine society. They comprise about five percent of the nation's population. They mostly live on the southern islands of Mindanao and Sulu<sup>2</sup>. They are an ethnic and religious community. As a people, their history is marked by a hostility towards the colonial or the central Philippine government. This has brought the Moros into conflict with the latter for the last three hundred years.<sup>3</sup> They are united by a common religious belief, Islam, but the Moros speak multiple languages or dialects. Mindanao today, as it was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is a land in violent conflict. Unlike the Muslim struggle during the colonial era, today's movements against the Philippine government are better organized under the banners of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group.

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<sup>2</sup> Present day Mindanao consists of 25 provinces, as follows, in alphabetical order: Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Basilan, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Compostela Valley, Cotabato, Maguindanao, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Davao, Davao Oriental, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Davao del Sur, Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay Sarangani

<sup>3</sup> Cesar Adib Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," in eds., Remo Guidieri et. al, *Ethnicities and Nations: Processes of Interethnic Relations in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific* (Houston:Rothko Chapel, 1988), 362.

The root causes of the strife in the Southern Philippines, or Mindanao, began as an ethnic problem associated with state building.<sup>4</sup> This internecine conflict can be traced back to the Spanish and American colonial periods, when the Moros resisted subjugation, intrusion into their lands, and the destruction of their communities.<sup>5</sup> For over three centuries (1565-1898), Spain attempted to incorporate Mindanao into what would have become a Christian Philippine colony. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, armed with the sword and cross, Spanish influence in the country resulted in the massive conversion of natives in Luzon and the Visayas and the new converts fought as proxies in the Spaniard's war against the Muslims. Due to the failure of Spain to colonize Mindanao, the Southern Philippines was not transformed. However, the Muslims gained a foothold in the Philippine socio-political system.<sup>6</sup> In the succeeding period, the Philippines was ceded to the United States under the 1898 treaty of Paris and the American pacification campaign succeeded in neutralizing the Moro resistance by placing Mindanao under direct military rule for about a decade (1899 - 1913) while the rest of the country was administered by the civilian government.<sup>7</sup> The Americans successfully crushed Moro armed resistance by 1913 and then embarked on a series of resettlement programs that led to the migration of Christian settlers.<sup>8</sup> During the Commonwealth era, thousands of Christian Filipinos from the northern part of the country were encouraged to migrate to Mindanao, which was viewed as the "land of promise." When the Philippines gained independence in 1946, the Philippine government, under Filipino leadership, continued these colonial policies and programs.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, most Moros could not identify themselves

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<sup>4</sup> Federico V. Magdalena, "The Peace Process in Mindanao: Problems and Prospects," *The Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1997, 245-259.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Options in the Pursuit of a Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in the Southern Philippines," *Asian Survey*, Volume 41, Number 2, March-April 2001, 271-289.

<sup>6</sup> Magdalena, 246.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>8</sup> Mirriam Coronel Ferrer, "Framework for Autonomy in Southeast Asia's Societies," Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, May 2001, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Merliza M. Makinano and Alfredo Lubang, "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: The Mindanao Experience," Prepared for the International Security Research and Outreach Programme International Security Bureau, February 2001, 8.

with the new republic because the laws were biased towards Catholic moral values and the educational system was geared towards Westernization. The resentment further deepened with the continued influx of Christian settlers into the Muslim territories, which has significantly transformed the demographic picture of Mindanao completely. The Muslim inhabitants were reduced from about 75 percent at the turn of the century to about 25 percent in the late 1960s<sup>10</sup> and less than 19 percent in 1990.<sup>11</sup>

The colonial rule and the accompanying demographic transformation also resulted in the inequitable distribution of resources. In addition, the Muslims have felt greatly discontented by the failure of government to adequately provide the basic needs of their community. Muslim areas are among the most impoverished communities in the Philippines<sup>12</sup> and the social indicators (health, education) are among the lowest in the country.<sup>13</sup>

After a long restive co-existence between the Christian and Muslims, Mindanao was agitated following the 1968 Jabidah massacre when 28 Moro army recruits were killed at a secret training camp on the island of Corregidor allegedly while undergoing training to infiltrate the Malaysian state of Sabah. This incident triggered widespread Muslim indignation. Following this incident, Governor Udtog Matalam of the Cotabato province organized and led the Mindanao Independent Movement (MIM) and hundreds of young members of MIM underwent military training in Malaysia. This group became the nucleus of the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF). The movement obtained popular support after violence broke out in Cotabato and in nearby areas in 1969-1971 in retaliation for the declaration of martial law by then President Ferdinand Marcos

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<sup>10</sup> Macapado A. Muslim and Rufa Cagoco-Guiam, "Mindanao: Land of Promise," Accord No. 6 (1999), 13, available at [<http://www.c-r.org/accord/min/accord6/muslim.shtml>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>11</sup> In 1913, the estimated population of Mindanao was the following: 324,816 Moros; 193,882 non-Moros. The Moro people constituted a 76% majority. Twenty-six years later, in 1939, the Moro population was only 34% of the total Mindanao population; of 14,269,45; see Jubair, pp. 130-131, using 1990 Census of Population and Housing.

<sup>12</sup> Two predominantly Muslim provinces, Sulu and Maguindanao, are the poorest in the entire country, and the three other predominantly Muslim provinces – Basilan, Lanao del Sur, and Tawi-Tawi – are also listed among the poorest.

<sup>13</sup> Quimpo, 275.



in 1972.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1970s, the problem escalated into a violent confrontation with the MNLF and the Philippine Government, which continued sporadically for more than two decades. Since then, Moros and Christian Filipinos have been embroiled in the politics of secession and assimilation.

In 1976, under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Philippine government and the MNLF signed an agreement in Tripoli providing for Moro autonomy in the Southern Philippines, but it was not until 1990 that the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)<sup>15</sup> was granted partial autonomy. Muslim grievances persisted, and unrest and violence continued through the 1990s.

On 2 September 1996, the MNLF and the Philippine Government signed an internationally brokered peace agreement but this did not end the war because two splinter rebel groups, MILF and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), opposed to this peace agreement. The MILF and ASG vowed to establish an Islamic state in Mindanao with Islamic law (shariah). Following the referendum in East Timor, the MILF have engaged in on and off negotiations with the Philippine government. Meanwhile, the ASG engaged in kidnapping and high profile attacks on civilian targets triggering major military actions in late 2000-2003 which prompted the United States to extend its global war on terrorism to the Philippines.<sup>16</sup>

The Peace talks with the MILF have been stalled since 2001, but most recently, the Philippine Government and the MILF agreed to resume formal peace negotiations on 15 October 2003 in Malaysia.<sup>17</sup> There are brighter

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<sup>14</sup> John Gershman, "Self-Determination Regional Conflict Profile: Moros in the Philippines," *Foreign Policy in Focus - Self-Determination - Regional Overview*, revised October 2001; available at [fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines\\_body.html](http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines_body.html); accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Consists of the Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Basilan and Marawi City.

<sup>16</sup> Ted Robert Gurr and Monty G. Marshall, "Peace and Conflict 2003: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy," *The University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM)*, 11 February 2003 and 01 January 2001, 23; available at [<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/PC01Web.pdf>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>17</sup> "Gov't, MILF agree to resume peace talks in October," *Manila Bulletin*, 8 September 2003.

prospects for the resolution of the conflict with the offer by United Nations Secretary Kofi Annan to help the Philippine government in its peace initiatives with the MILF.

#### **D. METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES**

The thesis will concentrate on three main questions: 1) What are the causes of the conflict? 2) Why does the violent conflict continue despite the 1996 peace agreement between the MNLF and GRP? 3) What are the policy and strategy options to settle the conflict?

Basically, I will examine and identify the sources of grievances commencing from the colonialization period to the current Macapagal administration. Using a conflict analysis framework, I will identify the variables that drive the conflict and determine its root causes. I will then evaluate and assess campaigns initiated by each administration under the Philippine Republic to determine their level of success and failure in resolving and addressing the conflict. I will analyze and evaluate the strengths and deficiencies of the 1996 peace agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Republic of the Philippines which many believe will end the dispute. Having identified the variables propelling the conflict, I will propose policy and strategy options to be undertaken by the Philippine government to mitigate if not totally end the dispute.

I will discuss the costs and benefits on the power redistribution of actors relative to the conflict resolution strategy. In this regard, the main argument underlying the conflict resolutions in Mindanao is the degree of political autonomy that could be arranged which is acceptable and beneficial to both warring parties. Many politicians and scholars advocate a federal system of government for the country, but the opposition believes that full autonomy will further divide the segmented society. The rebels, on the other hand, insist on the full implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, at the minimum, and espouse the establishment of an Islamic state. These proposals have been the core of the controversies and have been rejected by the Christian inhabitants of Mindanao who compose 75% of the island's population.

## **E. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER SUMMARY**

To provide the readers an adequate understanding of the security problem in the Southern Philippines, this paper is organized into the following chapters.

Chapter II is the literature overview. The chapter is a comprehensive review of the available literature including published works and research of scholars and other written articles on the Theory of Conflict Revolution, and those relating to the Southern Philippines. The chapter will analyze the various theories and models on conflict revolution and their relevance to the setting of the conflict in the Southern Philippines. The applicable policy option and strategy to end the conflict shall be derived from the applicable model or theory, or combination theory.

Chapter III provides a deeper understanding of the problem by presenting the historical factors that shaped the Moro grievances starting from the arrival of Islam in the Philippines until the early years of the new Republic. It reviews the various programs undertaken by the previous colonial regimes, as well as the administrations under the Republic. In particular, I will investigate the effects of the integration and assimilation campaigns of the Muslim community into the Philippine society. I will cite incidents from the Moro wars and illustrate how the military campaigns in the colonial period brought harmful imprints into the Philippine polity.

Chapter IV analyzes the various variables that led to the contemporary violent conflict in the Southern Philippines. I will discuss the development of the different Muslim secessionist movements in the era of the Philippine Republic. The effect of the external support from the Organization of Islamic Conference and shall likewise be examined.

Chapter V evaluates the various counter-secessionist campaigns from the Marcos administration to the Macapagal regime. In particular, I will examine the political, socio-economic and cultural reforms launched to resolve the conflict. It will identify and analyze the various policies and strategies implemented by different regimes from 1965 to present. In this chapter, I will discuss the current

activities of the new separatist groups, and analyze the current Philippine government response and programs to mitigate the conflict

Chapter VI summarizes the discussions and offers a cogent strategy to resolve the conflict.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to review articles and published works of scholars and researchers on the broad subjects of the causes of war and conflict, the theories and frameworks of conflict resolutions, the history and other written materials about the Southern Philippines. I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various models and theories. I will examine the prevailing economic theories on the causes of conflict and determine their correlation and significance in Mindanao. I will also analyze and evaluate various post-conflict policies and programs with the objective of resolving the violent conflict in Mindanao and promoting political and economic development.

### **B. CAUSES OF CONFLICT**

To end conflict, we need to analyze its causes. An understanding of the roots of the Muslim rebellion and the failure of the 1996 peace agreement will generate an understanding of the nature of the conflict in the Southern Philippines. This rebellion has caused untold human suffering and physical destruction in the Muslim and Christian communities alike. In over three decades of violent conflict, more than 100,000 people have been killed, about one million persons rendered homeless and destitute, and between 200,000 to 300,000 Filipino Muslims have been forced to seek refuge in Sabah<sup>18</sup>. In 1996, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front negotiated an end to hostilities, but peace in the region has remained elusive. Two radical groups emerged after 1996 espousing extremist objectives, including the call for an independent Islamic state of Mindanao.

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<sup>18</sup> Many displaced Filipinos returned home in 2002, but tens of thousands have also been uprooted in military operations to fight terrorism in the southern island of Mindanao, says the Global IDP Project in a new report. Some 90,000 villagers have been displaced in Mindanao this year while the Government and United States launched joint military operations in IDP News (Dec. 02), available at [<http://www.hrea.org/lists/refugee-rights/markup/msg00213.html>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

Most people argue that the grounds for ethnic and internal conflict are simple and straightforward<sup>19</sup>. That is, the key driver for violent conflict in Mindanao is the *hatred* between Christians and Muslims. Although religion provided the backdrop for the conflict in Mindanao, I contend it is not the real driver of conflict.

Michael E. Brown in his work, *Ethnic and Internal Conflict: Causes and Implications*, identifies the four underlying causes why certain settings are more prone to violence than others. These factors are: structural factors, political factors, economic/social factors and cultural perceptions.<sup>20</sup> He argues that under economic/social factors, the potential sources of ethnic and internal conflict could be any or a combination of the following: economic problems, discriminatory economic systems, and the trials and tribulations of economic development and modernization. Brown further argues that the steps undertaken by the elite determine the direction of a political conflict on whether to pursue a peaceful or violent approach for resolution. Correlatively, two very vital ingredients extremely appealing to the masses to rebel are: the presence of antagonistic histories and mounting economic problems.

Collier, on the other hand, identifies three conditions that could predict the likelihood of civil war: dependence upon primary commodity exports, low average incomes and slow growth.<sup>21</sup> Further, he also believes that history is an important factor in determining the risk of war, although in a different context. He concludes that a country that has just recently undergone civil conflict has a greater likelihood of falling back into war. Empirical data, he cites, reveal that there is a 40% probability that war will reoccur after the end of hostility. He advances the thesis that the level of literacy and population growth also matters in determining the risk of war. Collier also points out that ethnic and religious composition are

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<sup>19</sup> Michael E. Brown, "Ethnic and Internal Conflicts: Causes and Implications," in ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, *Turbulent Peace the Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, (Washington, D.C.: United Institute of Peace Press) 2001, 211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-226

<sup>21</sup> Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy," World Bank, June 15, 2000, 1-23; available at [<http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/civilconflict.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

relevant in predicting conflict. In particular, he elaborates that, “if there is one dominant ethnic group which constitutes between 45% and 90% of the population, - enough to give it control, but not enough to make discrimination against a minority pointless- the risk of conflict doubles.” Objective grievances and hatreds originating from inequality, political repression, and ethnic and religious divisions could not possibly trigger violent conflict. Moreover, he claims that post-conflict societies’ chances of conflict reoccurring are high, because of the legacy of induced polarizing grievance.

As popularly perceived, civil war is an acute political battle, propelled by grievances, which are so intense to have destroyed normal political channels. Thus, common understanding is that rebellion is the apex of the protest movements, their leaders and cadres possessing the noble virtue of self-sacrificing heroes and martyrs fighting for oppression. Collier says that most rebellions are not endowed with the nationalistic and heroic fervor. According to him, when the major grievances – inequality, political expression, and ethnic and religious discords – are gauged objectively, they cannot predict the likelihood of a rebellion. These objective grievances and hatred may induce intense political conflict but such conflict may not be heightened into war. On the hand, the economic factors – dependence on primary commodity exports, low average incomes, slow growth, and large diasporas-are all excellent and powerful predictors of civil war.

Collier et. al attempted to establish whether wars are fueled by greed or grievances, which they seem to equate with economic against political aspects. Collier and Hoeffler identified three objective grievances: inter-group hatred, political exclusion and vengeance. They categorized the three grievances by ethno-linguistic fractionalization; democracy, ethnic dominance, income and land inequalities; and the period of conflict respectively. According to Brinkman, these earlier models are quite simplistic and derogate the complexities of conflict and the different elements that cause, propel, prolong and end the conflict. He argues

that the later model of Collier and Hoeffler<sup>22</sup> is somewhat more developed as they analyze some interactions and feedback mechanisms among the various factors. Moreover, Paul Collier also cites that the costs of rebellion are associated with the opportunity cost of the rebel labor and the economic damages caused by war. The geographical economic disparity is a logical ground for the rebels to ask for separation.

Collier and associates claim that insurgency is instigated by a combination of altruistic desire to correct the grievances of a group, and a selfish desire to loot the resources of the other. The objective of rebellion is rational as rebels balanced the benefit and cost of the rebellion. Their study tested whether selfless motivation may be covered by greed, or alternatively, whether looting may only be a crucial means by which altruistic motives are supported. They concluded the two motives for rebellion are empirically evident because looting-rebellions are influenced by the endowment of lootable resources, while justice-seeking rebellions are influenced by grievances. However, the risk of conflict will not increase by the intensity of objective grievances. They claim that justice-seeking rebellions seem to be affected by the difficulty of overcoming collective action. The risk of conflict is drastically diminished if the collective action is reduced, although grievances increased.<sup>23</sup>

The common argument about civil conflict is that that they are irrational, but S. Mansoob Murshed asserts that conflict is the consequence of a rational decision, “even if it is only of a bounded or myopic rational choice-choice variety.”<sup>24</sup> Conflict is created by any or a combination of factors such as ethnicity, religion, region or social class. The triggering elements for violent conflict are competition over economic opportunities and political and civil rights. The

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievances in Civil War,” Policy Research Working Paper, no 2355, Washington D.C., The World Bank, May 2000; available at [<http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/greed.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Justice-seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil War,” Draft: 17 February 1999, 15 available at [<http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/paulnew2.pdf>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>24</sup> S. Mansoob Murshed, “Conflict, Civil War and Underdevelopment: An Introduction,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 2002, 387-393,



genuine grievances<sup>25</sup> generating violent conflict could be traced from the “systematic economic discrimination against groups based on ethno-linguistic or religious differences, he explains.” Likewise, Murshed argues that ethnic identification provides security and support whenever government fails to deliver public goods such as economic and social services. The struggle over the possession of land is a condition for violence. Murshed maintains that although there is an array of grievances, violent strife could be restrained if there is a viable and effective social contract. Nations experiencing violent conflict have weak social contracts. “A single ethnic group (or a subset) often assumed power in the immediate post independence era (the 1960s), subjugating others and concentrating the fruits of state power - public employment, other public spending and resource rents - into its own hands, ”<sup>26</sup> he opines. Likewise, he recognizes the critical role played by external countries in conflict.

In his investigation, Nadir A. L. Mohammed, found that 75 percent of the least developed countries in the world have waged major civil wars.<sup>27</sup> He lists several notable economic causes responsible for the likelihood of the occurrence of civil wars as follows: “sluggish economic growth, increased poverty and skewed income distribution, lack of basic infrastructure and social services, wide regional differences, lack of access to agricultural land, and depletion of natural resources. Paraphrasing Homer-Dixon, he states that the struggle over limited natural resources and environmental stress generate adverse social effects namely, a decrease in economic output, changes in agricultural output, displacement of the population, and a breakdown of the institution and disruption of the patterns of social behavior. These conditions breed three categories of conflict i.e., frustration, group identity and structural conflicts. He affirms that civil wars result in an economic decline with tremendous social costs and traumas as well as severe destruction of the environment. Most obvious is the extravagant

<sup>25</sup> Paul Collier & Anke Hoefler distinguish *grievance* as a motivation based on a sense of injustice and *greed* as acquisitive desire, in their article entitled “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” World Bank, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Murshed, 390.

<sup>27</sup> Nadir A. L. Mohammed, “Civil Wars and Military Expenditures: A Note,” World Bank, Washington D.C., 1999, 1-22; available at [<http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/civil.pdf>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

waste of precious human and material resources. Civil wars also reduce the state's capacity to provide social services because of the "crowding effect" of war spending. Economic activities are hampered in areas of combat. Violent conflict damages the infrastructure and other physical capital, consequently reducing the level of production if not halting it altogether. The labor supply dwindles in combat areas, and consequently, income dwindles. Paraphrasing the work of Collier, he cites that during the period of violent conflict, the GDP per capita recedes at 2.2 % annually.<sup>28</sup> Collier, (1997) examines the effects of ethnic diversity on economic performance and the risk of violent conflict. There appears to be a relationship between ethnic diversity and the risk of violent conflict. Diversity tends to adversely affect economic performance. Highly diverse societies appear to be more secure than homogeneous countries, if the diverse societies are democratic. Overall economic growth is not dependent on the diversity of the society but on the political climate. Democracy effectively discards the potentially adverse effects of ethnic diversity on economic growth, while high diversity makes the society even safer from violent conflict than homogeneous societies. Thus, both income levels and political rights are determinants of the likelihood of violent conflict and the escalation of war. However, Collier argues that once a country entered into a full conflict, the balance of the determinants changes. Collier concludes that,

the persistence of conflict and the sustainability of a settlement are more dependent on ethnic composition and less dependent on income and political rights than are the initiation and escalation of violence. Hence, some peace settlements may need to change borders so as to increase (or reduce) the ethnic diversity of the state.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, political scholars like Fearon and Laitin observe that the root causes of contemporary insurgencies in many countries has been ethnic nationalism. They claim that the risk of civil war among countries is not

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Collier, "On Economic Consequences of Civil War," Working Paper 97:18 Center for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University, June 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Collier, "The Political Economy of Ethnicity," Paper Prepared for the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington, D.C., 20-21 April 1998, 1-22.

attributable to ethnic or religious characteristics but to conditions that favor insurgency. Specifically, they assert that the predictors of conflict are poverty and slow growth, financially and bureaucratically weak states including unfavorable geography and a large population.<sup>30</sup>

Political scientists have emphasized the significance of inequalities in fueling political violence like the relative deprivation theory and of distributive justice. The study of inequality in whatever field is relevant in the study of conflict. The importance of inequalities was confirmed in studies relating to complex humanitarian emergencies and in several cases of violence. Particularly, horizontal political and socio-economic inequality between groups, tribes in the case of the Philippines, whether defined by region, ethnicity, class or religion, has been recognized as one of the significant root causes of civil war. Again, the difference in income, resources and access to public services and employment are vital variables propelling conflict.

A sociologist like Stein asserts that the “enemy images” play a vital role in sustaining and intensifying conflict. He argues that in the continuing ethnic conflicts, interests are formed by images, and consequently cast by identity. Thus, when identities are threatened, conflict tends to rise. He suggests that in resolving conflict effectively, parties should secure identity such as mutual recognition coupled with political separation. Another method of securing identities entails creating interdependent, multi-ethnic coalitions. In both approaches, the keys are the senior leaders’ willingness to acknowledge, respect, and welcome various identities and to share political power. He maintains that there is a promise of such acknowledgement and accommodation because identities are socially constructed, and hence, open to reconstruction and reinterpretation over time.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 75-86.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Gross Stein, “Images and Conflict Resolution,” in eds., Chester Croker, Fen Hampson and Pamela Aall, *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, D.C.: United Institute of Peace Press, 1996) 105.

### C. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Nicole Ball's *The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies*<sup>32</sup> describes the characteristics of post conflict societies<sup>33</sup> and provides a model mapping out the peace processes. She recommends priority peace building tasks and stresses the significance of governance for post conflict rehabilitation and development and particularly good governance in the security sector. The first stage of the peace process is the cessation of peace, the purpose of which is to reach an agreement on fundamental issues, so that fighting can be stopped and political and socio-economic construction can begin. The next stage is peace building, which is composed of two stage-transitions and consolidation. The objectives during transition are to create a government with a sufficient degree of legitimacy to function effectively and to execute the provisions of the agreement. During the consolidation phase, she admonishes the necessity to intensify the reform process to enable fundamental political, economic and social grievances to be addressed. The fundamental component of governance is the creation of an institutional framework that supports equitable economic and political development. Some of the tasks are accountability, transparency, comprehensiveness, commitment to equity and the acceptance of the rule of law. She further suggests the disbanding and disarming of informal security forces and demobilization of some members of the regular forces, and at a certain level, the police force and the judicial system must be developed and reformed. The security forces should operate according to democratic principles meaning accepting civilian supremacy and respect of the rule of law. She concludes by

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<sup>32</sup> Nicole Ball, "The Challenge of Rebuilding War-Torn Societies," in ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall, *Turbulent Peace the Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: United Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 719 –736.

<sup>33</sup> The experience of prolonged strife produces important similarities in the nature and function of civil institutions and political life, the economy and the security sector in the post conflict environment. He summarized these characteristics in a table and he cautioned that every country that experiences violent inter-group conflict will not necessarily exhibits all these characteristics. He groups the characteristics of war-torn societies into three: institutional - weak political and administrative institutions, non-participatory political system, etc.; economic and social -extensive damage to or decay of economic and social infrastructure, conflicts over the ownership of land, environmental degradation, weakened social fabric, poor social indicators etc.; security – bloated security forces, armed opposition, paramilitary forces, overabundance of small arms, political role of security forces, history of human rights abuses perpetrated by security forces, etc.

stating that high caliber, experienced individuals are critical to the success of peace building. By employing the right individual, the institutional and the organizational deficits can be substantially overcome.<sup>34</sup>

Roland Paris differs in opinion on the issue of democratization in peace conflict building. He asserts that democratization and marketization imperil the domestic peace of states that are surfacing from civil wars and to reduce the dangers, he suggests pursuing a strategy of “institutionalization before liberalization,” restricting political and economic freedom and political activity in the process of building effective institutions. Peace builders should first lay the groundwork for a smoother and secure transition to market economy and democracy and this will ultimately bring sustainable peace. He affirms that unless the governors assume a firmer hand in the immediate post conflict period, the recurrence of the conflict could be imminent.<sup>35</sup>

Lederach urges that an infrastructure is necessary for maintaining the dynamic transformation of conflict and the construction of peace. That infrastructure is a process-structure consisting of systems that are dynamic, flexible and adaptable. The process-structure for peacebuilding converts a war-system into a peace-system capable finding nonviolent mechanisms for expressing and handling conflict. At the societal level, the infrastructure is composed of a “web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought.” The object of the process-structure is towards inter-dependence and reconciliation that focuses on redefining and restoring broken relationships. He says that peacebuilding by means of constructive transformation is both a visionary and context-responsive approach.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 733.

<sup>35</sup> *Wilson's Ghost: The Faulty Assumptions of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, available in [<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~wehr/parismay15.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>36</sup> John Paul Lederach, “Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies,” (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press), 1997.

Collier and Hoeffler in their earlier study conclude that previous wars had no major influence on the overall level of risk. Thus, they suggest that post-conflict societies are not more of a risk simply as a result of their experience with civil war. They say, however, that conflicts raise the risk of further conflict by changing the values of their causal variables. Since civil wars shrink income, post-conflict countries will have a reduced opportunity cost of rebellion.

#### **D. THE EVIDENCE IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

Do the foregoing discussions on the causes of war relate appropriately to the current conflict in Mindanao? The prevailing theories appear to adequately explain the origin, violence, and the possible avenue for the cessation of the Moro conflict. An examination on the scarcity of resources, particularly land, supports the argument of Brown's discriminatory economic system. Likewise, Bertrand asserts that the Muslim grievances could be traced back several centuries since the Spanish conquest of the Philippines. The Muslims have been fighting to protect their territory and identity against a foreign power and domination.<sup>37</sup> During the Commonwealth period, Mindanao was considered a "land of promise," intended for resettlement, and the government program concentrated on its exploitation and economic development. Accordingly, the previous administrations encouraged Christian settlers from the Visayas and Luzon to migrate to Mindanao.<sup>38</sup> "This led to the beginning of 'legalized land grabbing' in Mindanao."<sup>39</sup> After the country's independence in 1946, the Philippine Government continued colonial policies and programs. The feelings of marginalization and insecurity developed among Muslims. Muslim Filipinos owned most of the land in Mindanao before colonization but this decreased to 30 percent by 1972. Also, by 1982, Muslim ownership further declined to 17 percent.

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Bertrand, "Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement is Fragile," *Pacific Affairs* 73:1 (Spring 2000), 43.

<sup>38</sup> Cesar Adib Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," in Guideri et al. (eds.) *Ethnicities & Nations*, (University of Texas Press, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> Syed Serjul Islam, "The Islamic Independence Movement in Patani of Thailand and Mindanao of the Philippines," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, I-5 (May 1998), 441-456.

The frequency appears to support Murshed's observation that immediately after independence, the majority group assumes power and concentrates the fruit of state power into their hands.

Much has been published about the root causes of the Muslim secessionist movement, the motivations, the scope and problems accompanying the struggle. Noble states that the Muslim separatism had centuries old historical roots, but was also propelled by a specific grievance accumulated during the 1960's<sup>40</sup>. She affirms that the northern influx to Mindanao influenced all sectors of society because it disturbed both the traditional socio-economic patterns and the political system that reflected and perpetuated them.

On the other hand, Joel de los Santos lists the various causes encompassing political, socio-economic and cultural issues:

disgruntled politicians, pushed by their lust of power; ambitious people who saw the movement as a vehicle for the launching of successful careers; displaced farmers who wanted to get their lands back from the Christian settlers; victims of army and police abuses who regarded the movement as an instrument of revenge; religious leaders who welcomed the movement as a chance to construct an Islamic theocratic state; idealistic students who were moved by a social duty; impatient and adventurous young men who wanted to test their fighting prowess; and others who joined because their friends and relatives were members of the movement. The leadership of the movement was initially provided by two groups—students and intellectuals, and the disgruntled politicians.<sup>41</sup>

Among the early works, Wernstedt and Simkins in their study on the role of migration in the settlement of Mindanao, observed that the increasing migration by Christians into the Southern Philippines has produced considerable social unrest. The primary source of tension has been over the ownership of land. The Muslims viewed the lands in their areas as traditional and ancestral lands, and hence, the property belongs to them. The Christians settled in these

<sup>40</sup> Lela Noble, "Muslim Separatism in the Philippines, 1972-1981: The Making of a Stalemate," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, Is. 11, November 1981, 1097-1114.

<sup>41</sup> R. Joel Jalal-ud-din De Los Santos, "Towards a Solution of the Moro Problem," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Singapore, 1978, p. 211. Also see, Noble's "Muslim Separatism in the Philippines," 1972-1981: The Making of a Stalemate.

so-called traditional lands. Usually, the better educated migrant has been able to present stronger arguments in courts, and decisions have often been in the Christian's favor, while the Muslim litigants have been considered as obstructionists and anachronisms. They concluded that with Christians migration, it seems inevitable that Muslims will be increasingly assimilated in the Christian society and economy.<sup>42</sup>

Costello identifies the four elements that influence the Moro separatist movement. The first is the fear among the Muslims that their religious, cultural, and political institutions will decline or perish by conceived assimilation into a Catholic dominated nation. The second is the bitterness over in-migration of the Christians from Luzon and Visayas. The transmigration has dual implications: Muslims have been dislocated in what they considered ancient and communal land which has changed the demography of the island and thus reducing the proportion of the Muslim population to a minority status in their homeland. The third is the frustration over the failure of the central government to introduce decent development in the area.<sup>43</sup> The fourth is the embedded practice of warlordism, banditry, and blood feuds.<sup>44</sup>

Nicholas Tarling insists that it is impossible to seclude changing religious practices, in this context of violent conflict, from the socio-economic and political strains of relations between poor Muslim southerners and relatively rich northern patronage powers. The policies of the Marcos Regime led to the founding of the Philippine Muslim Nationalist League in 1967, that became the More National Liberation Front (MNLF), the military arm, which grew rapidly during the 1970s.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Frederick L. Wernstedt and Paul D. Simkins, "Migrations and Settlement of Mindanao," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, Issue 1, November 1965, 83-103.

<sup>43</sup> Currently, 15 of the Philippines' poorest provinces are located in the south, which additionally has the country's lowest literacy rate by 75 percent and life expectancy by 57 years in Peter Chalk, "The Davao Consensus: A Panacea for the Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1997, 80-83.

<sup>44</sup> Micheal Costello, *Muslim Separatist in the Philippines and Thailand* available at [[http://www.efreedomnews.com/pdfFiles/Muslim SeperatistsPhilippines\\_RAND.pdf](http://www.efreedomnews.com/pdfFiles/Muslim%20SeperatistsPhilippines_RAND.pdf)]; accessed 14 June 2003

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 228.



The insurgency in the Southern Philippines is the effect of a general underdevelopment of the region, unequal distribution of income, and the inadequate effort of the government to integrate the Moros into the political institutions of the nation. The rich economic potential of Mindanao has provided strong motivation for the government to fight the rebellion since the 1970s.

The socio-economic inequity is evident in the possession of the land, where state policies and programs favor Christian settlers. The migratory policy reduced the Moro population from about 75% from the turn of the century to 25% in the late 1960s and in the 1990 to about 18%.<sup>46</sup> Using Collier's thesis, this decline appears to support the theory that the probability of conflict in Mindanao increased in this period.

Nathan Quimpo argues that the central government neglected Muslim Mindanao and the Moros felt the government neglected to provide their basic needs adequately or at least to uplift their socio-economic conditions to be on par with the Christian majority.<sup>47</sup> These conditions for conflict were identified by Mohammed who called them frustration, group identity and structural conflicts.

Finding a common cause, the Muslims became politicized and began to organize. In 1968, the insurgents formed the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) and later a more radical organization, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which achieved prominence and command. The MNLF's goal was to establish an independent state, protect Muslim practices and culture, and an end to subjugation and the return of the lands taken away by Christians.<sup>48</sup> Although the battle cry is along ethnic and religious lines, the clear grievance was socio-economic deprivations.

Thus, Brown, Collier, Mansoob, Murshed, and Mohamed appear to be correct in their assertion that social and economic factors are significant drivers

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<sup>46</sup> Rudy Rodil, "The Tri-People Relationship and the Peace Process in Mindanao" (Lecture delivered at Inahan sa Kinabuhi Diocesan College Seminary, Iligan City, Philippines, March 1998) available at [<http://mindanao.com/kalinaw/dev/tri-people.htm>]; accessed 26 December 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Options in the Pursuit of a Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in the Southern Philippines," *Asian Survey*, 41:2, April/March 2001, 271-289.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

for civil conflict that brought the Philippines to a civil war as in the case of Mindanao. Although most of the economic literature on the subject of economy and conflict concentrate on the study of the civil wars in Africa, the Philippine case in Mindanao has similar roots. However, there is a major element identified by Collier that differentiates the various cases in Africa and the Philippines. The Philippines is not dependent upon a prime commodity for exports, which rebels and government forces may struggle to control.

Murshed hypothesizes the critical role of external players as in the case of the Muslim separatist rebellion. The rebels received monetary aid and support from various Muslim states and from the Organization of the Islamic States. In fact, the Philippines had been threatened by Arab oil producers with the stoppage of the oil supply in the country should the Philippines continue armed repression.<sup>49</sup>

Magdalena sees the conflict in Mindanao as more of a cultural and political issue. The conflict in Mindanao began as an ethnic problem associated with nation-building. He says that as a result of colonial rule, the north-south divide<sup>50</sup> became apparent.<sup>51</sup> Colonial imposition abolished the old social institutions like the feudal system based on the sultanate as well as slavery. The ethnic resurgence in Mindanao signified Muslim resistance to the government agenda of “integration” which the Muslims perceive as absorption into the dominant Christian community. In the Philippines, the unitary version of nationality has been questioned because, to the Muslims, it is an objectionable element. The Moros detest the unavoidable dissipation of their identity into the mainstream. This resistance, carried out in a militant way, had resulted in violent

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas M. Mckenna, “Muslim Separatism in the Philippines: Meaningful Autonomy or Endless War?” available in [[http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna\\_rebellion.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna_rebellion.cfm)]; accessed 14 July 2003.

<sup>50</sup> The north-south phenomenon reflects the Philippines religious demography. Most of the Christians live in the north of the archipelago while the Muslims are concentrated in Mindanao, although today the south is composed of 80 percent Christians. The historical thesis is that Moro identity was politicized by the Spanish and American colonizers and later by the independent Philippine Government. The Spanish colonialization established a geographically oriented north-south divide between Muslims and Christians, and the American rule concretized the boundary through migrations and land grants to Christians.

<sup>51</sup> Federico V. Magdalena, “The Peace Process in Mindanao: Problems and Prospects,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 1997, 245-259.

opposition. In the 1970s, the Moros began asserting their Islamic identity to prevent further erosion of their Islamic roots. Accordingly, they demanded Muslim autonomy or total independence from the Philippine government to defend their Muslim identity.

The peace agreement signed in 1996 between the MNLF and the government of the Philippines ended more than 20 years of violent confrontation and allowed some degree of local political and economic control. Accordingly, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was established comprising four provinces of the Southern Philippines. The peace agreement, which ended more than two decades of hostilities, addressed some of the most important grievances of the MNLF.

Bertrand observes that despite hopes and optimism, peace in the Southern Philippines remains fragile. He points out several reasons for the failure of the peace accord; mismanagement and corruption of the autonomous government, insignificant support from other Mindanao groups other than the MNLF, failure to address the land issue and to generate the expected benefits. He notes that the achievements of the accord are not adequate to rally the support of the Christians, Lumad (indigenous people of Mindanao), and even the Muslims. Many elements have caused the deterioration of the peace process. First, the transitional structures of the autonomy failed to provide a model for future autonomous institutions because of mismanagement and corruption. Second, the regional government obtained insufficient support from groups other than the MNLF. There is a lack of support from other groups including non-Muslims as well as Muslims, such as the supporters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Third, the peace accord did not settle the issue of land rights. Fourth, the agreement has not brought many of its expected deliverables or benefits, especially regarding the promotion of social welfare and raising their standards of living. By the end of 1998, the peace agreement had been severely weakened.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bertrand, 37-56.

McKenna criticizes the peace agreement for not providing adequate local political power and resources. Hence, poverty alleviation, employment and the provisions for basic services were barely addressed.<sup>53</sup> An example of this is the National Steel Company, the Philippines' largest in the industry at which almost all the 4,000 employees are Christian Visayans. Despite the official line that local hiring was the policy, no Maranao, a native in the periphery, could be found on the union list. And how many Muslims work in the company? About five or ten! Not percent, but five or ten out of the 4,000 workers. Fred Hill observes that the local Muslims are not educated, and hence, do not qualify to be employed in the steel mill.<sup>54</sup>

Macapado A. Muslim considers the following as hindrances for the full implementation of the peace accord; SPCPD's<sup>55</sup> inadequate capability in development management, weak support from the national government, lack of peace building focus on development administration, SPCPD's inadequate power in peacekeeping, and the MNLF member's unrealistic expectations and impatience.<sup>56</sup>

Peter Chalk examines the significant reactions of the extremist groups regarding the 1996 peace accord, citing that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) vigorously reject the peace process for these reasons; "failure to respect the letter of the Tripoli Agreement,<sup>57</sup> and failure

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<sup>53</sup> McKenna, available at [[http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna\\_peace.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna_peace.cfm). 3]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Hill, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCD), an agency purportedly designed to manage peace and development in 14 of Mindanao's 24 provinces.

<sup>56</sup> Macapado A. Muslim, "The GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement: A preliminary Assessment of its Implementation," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 43 Nos. 3 & 4, (July – October 1999), 245-266.

<sup>57</sup> The Tripoli Agreement provided among other things the creation of autonomous Muslim region in the Southern Philippines consisting of the 13 provinces and 9 cities of Mindanao. This Agreement failed because of the opposition of the Christian population to be included in the Muslim region.

to include provision for a fully independent Islamic state.”<sup>58</sup> On other hand, the extreme Christians consider the peace agreement as an unacceptable concession.<sup>59</sup>

With the exemption of Chalk, Bertrand, McKenna and Muslim categorically recognize that the apparent failure of either the ARMM or the central government was a result of not adequately addressing the poverty issue. The ARMM leadership has been accused of mismanagement and corruption, which led to the mismanagement of the delivery of the basic needs of the people. On the other hand, ARMM blames the national government for insufficient financial support. I agree with Bertrand’s astute observation that corruption is the prime culprit in the failure of the ARMM to bring economic amelioration in the region.

These frustrations increased armed clashes between the rebels and the government forces. To sustain the movement, the MILF and Abu Sayyaf and Al Qaeda provided financial and logistical aid. “The links between the MILF and Al Qaeda are well established. There is ample evidence that during the 1990s the MILF received funding and training from the Al Qaeda operatives,”<sup>60</sup> says Abuza.

Colonial aggression was a significant variable in Muslim apprehension, but the lasting effect was the politicization of the Muslim identity as a separate nation. Magdalena cites a government study done in 1955 which attributed Moro rebellions to a feeling of alienation from the Filipino nation as a whole. Based upon historical data, Muslim grievances over land distribution and the lack of political representation were the result of the colonial era policies and strategies of integration. Land issues have been the most fundamental Muslim concern and important factor fueling the conflict. Private property, as understood by the

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Chalk, “The Davao Consensus: a Panacea for the Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao?,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer 1997) pp. 79-98.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Zachary Abuza, “Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda’s Southeast Asian Network,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 24, Number 3, December 2000, 427-465.

Christians, does not exist in the minds of the Moro lower class as a rule. The Muslim thinks of land as belonging to the clan while to the Christian it is a matter of individual ownership.<sup>61</sup>

#### **E. STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR THE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT**

Magdalena advises that in order to strengthen peace and to mitigate the prospect of renewed war and escalation of violence, the warring forces must mutually discuss the problem rather than threaten intimidation. Violence is a cycle because it perpetuates itself with counter violence. Thus, the belligerent parties must renounce the use of force and agree to demobilize and disarm. Magdalena advances that the party, which has the greater capacity to wage war, should lead and willingly renounce the use of force. The state must not flex its might against the will of its citizens particularly when the employment of such power does not rest on justice and fairness.<sup>62</sup>

Collier argues that all the policies for conflict prevention could be applied in post conflict peace building, however, these are not adequate. He claims that several factors account for the substantial increase in the risk of the continuation of war such as logistical capability of the rebel, people's political polarization and the erosion of the people's norm to inhibition to violence.<sup>63</sup> What then is the appropriate course for a country that is in a conflict trap? The measures to be undertaken as suggested by Collier, first is to identify the structures of risks, then build the priorities of risk reduction. The next step is to reduce the largest risk.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, the Philippines should immediately focus on the management of ethnic dominance, and the strategy to increase the level of per capita income.

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<sup>61</sup> Chester I. Hunt, "Moslem and Christian in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 28, Issue 4, December 1955, 331-349.

<sup>62</sup> Magdalena, 257.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy," 17.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Collier, "Policy for Post-Conflict Societies: Reducing the Risks of Renewed Conflict," World Bank, Prepared for The Economics of political Violence Conference, 18-19 March 2000.

*The Civil War and Development Policy* is a document prepared by the World Bank. It discusses the policies and strategies that can mitigate the global incidence of civil wars. The paper proposes considerations on the “two groups of policies for restoring post-conflict societies: measures to revive the economy - notably, aid and policy reform, and military interventions – notably demobilization and external peacekeeping.”<sup>65</sup>

In the same paper, Quimpo advocates that the first step towards de-escalation of the conflict is for the contending parties to go back to the negotiating table, and he also proposes the inclusion of non-Muslim groups in the negotiation and the continuous participation of the Organization of Islamic Conference in the peace negotiation.<sup>66</sup>

According to McKenna with the Philippine government’s experiences of three decades of fighting, its “get tough” policy will produce the opposite outcome. He recommends that protection of the Muslim cultural heritage and improvement of the Moro livelihood and living conditions rather than empty autonomy arrangements or combat operations should be undertaken to resolve the conflict.<sup>67</sup>

I agree with these proposals, particularly those that will increase the level of income, generate growth and reduce social inequality. However, in order to realize these goals, immediate measures should be undertaken to improve the performance of the local bureaucracy and new institutions should be organized to raise resources. The government should institute strategies to prevent corruption.

Is the Moros demand to return these alleged ancestral lands reasonable and feasible? Magdalena admonishes that peaceful coexistence can be attained by recognizing that every citizen has the right to live in the defined area, or in other words, a shared “homeland.” Although most of the Mindanao inhabitants

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<sup>65</sup> “Civil War and Development Policy,” Discussion Draft – 7 February 2003, Policy Research Report, World Bank Group 1 – 148.

<sup>66</sup> Quimpo, 285 -289.

<sup>67</sup> McKenna, *Muslim Separatism in the Philippines: Meaningful Autonomy or Endless War?* available at [[http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna\\_crisis.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna_crisis.cfm). p.2]; accessed 14 November 2003.

are migrants, they have the same privileges and rights on the land where they earn a living. The demand of some Muslim leaders and intellectuals for the Christians to return to Luzon and Visayas is harsh and divisive. It is important that the Muslim's way of life should be afforded protection and their right to self-government should be recognized.

Christopher Hewitt warns that making concessions does not necessarily reduce violence. He points out that the governments of Spain and Great Britain tried to reduce opposition posed by separatists groups by making concessions but failed. Concessions were ineffective because people viewed them as tokens which should have been given earlier. Also, reforms instituted by both governments were seen as a sign of weaknesses. Once the establishment failed to repress dissent forcefully, Hewitt observes that people will be emboldened to ask for more<sup>68</sup>. Reforms are factors that affect the degree of violence, but they do so in a complex manner and authorities should anticipate that concessions from the position of weaknesses will increase violence.<sup>69</sup>

The conflict resolution strategy requires a multi-disciplinary approach. The government should focus on strengthening state capacity to enforce authority while at the same time empowering the Moros toward political and economic power. Moro self-determination should be allowed to prosper as part of the country's democratization process but stop short of secession. The international community, particularly the OIC, should play a vital role in persuading warring parties to make concessions without compromising Philippine sovereignty.

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher Hewitt, *The Effectiveness of Anti-Terrorist Policies*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 51.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.



### III. HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT (ARRIVAL OF ISLAM TO 1965)

The Muslim Filipinos or Moros<sup>70</sup> are geographically concentrated in the southern part of the country in Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan. The Moros are a collection of tribal groups and they have been traditionally composed of three major and ten minor ethno-linguistic<sup>71</sup> tribes and dispersed across the southern islands. The three largest aggregations are the Maguindanaons of the Pulangi River Basin of central Mindanao, the Maranaos of the Lanao Lake region of central Mindanao, and the Tausugs of Jolo Island in the Sulu archipelago. They are major factors in the local and domestic politics of present times. In some parts of their traditional territory, the Muslim inhabitants remain the majority. About 98 percent of the population of the Sulu archipelago is Muslim. In the entire Mindanao-Sulu region, however, Philippine Muslims make up about 17 percent of the population. This is due primarily to large scale Christian immigration from the Visayas and Luzon in the second half of the century.<sup>72</sup> Before the arrival of the colonizers, the Muslims had established different cultural, social and political institutions. They have distinct customary laws (*adat*), costumes, dances and art forms. Their community is organized around the datu system which is the local chief with both executive and military power. With the

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<sup>70</sup> "Moro" is referred here as Muslim Filipinos. This is a term first coined by the Spanish who thought the indigenous people of Mindanao resembled the "Moros" or Moors, their enemies from Mauritania and Morocco. The American colonizers who succeeded the Spaniards and eventually subdued Philippine Muslims in the early twentieth century by means of overwhelming force, continued the usage of "Moro" even though it had become an epithet among Christian Filipinos, denoting savages and pirates. In a bold semantic shift, Philippine Muslim separatists during the late 1960s appropriated the term "Moro" and transformed it into a positive symbol of collective identity-- one that denominated the citizens of their newly imagined nation.

<sup>71</sup> Smaller groups include the Yakans of Basilan Island, the Samals of the Tawi-Tawi island group in Sulu, the Iranuns of the Cotabato coast of Mindanao and the Palawini and Molbog of Palawan Island. Others are Jama Mapun, Kalagan, Kolibugan, Sangil, Badjao or Samal Laut, Muslim Subanun in Zamboanga and Bukidnons. Majul, p. 364. Also see, *Kalinaw Mindanao*, available at [<http://www.mindanao.com/kalinaw/studies/status-research.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas M. McKenna, "Muslim separatism in the Philippines: Meaningful Autonomy or Endless War?" available at [<http://www.asiasource.org/asip/mckenna.cfm>]; accessed 14 November 2003 and see also, Michael Costello, "Muslim Separatist in the Philippines and Thailand," available at [[http://www.efreedomnews.com/pdfFiles /Muslim SeperatistsPhilippines\\_RAND.pdf](http://www.efreedomnews.com/pdfFiles/Muslim%20SeparatistsPhilippines_RAND.pdf)]; accessed 14 November 2003.

introduction of Islam, the powerful datus eventually assumed the title of sultan. Today this system still exists in some areas albeit with diminished power and prerogatives.

The Moros battled bitterly against Spanish and American rule and the attempts to colonize the Muslims met with little success. The Americans continued the subjugation and the Moros fought the occupation troops in the futile hope of creating an independent sovereign nation. The Muslims objected to the inclusion of Mindanao and Sulu into the Republic of the Philippines for they wanted to be left alone.<sup>73</sup> The Moro resisted the authority of the new central government and they spawned insurgencies against the Manila government beginning in the late 1960s.

#### **A. ARRIVAL OF ISLAM**

In the era before the advent of the western colonizer, the Philippine archipelago was not a single political entity or nation, and Mindanao was virtually a separate state. Islam came to the Philippines via trade routes that emanated from Arabia overland through Central Asia and then overseas to India, China and thence into Southeast Asia.<sup>74</sup> During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Philippines provided a link in the trade routes between India and China, and thus giving rise to the Islamic settlement in the coastal areas of the Sulu archipelago. There is a strong indication that Arab ships, or at least ships commanded by Arabs, had reached China from the Philippines by the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>75</sup> Arab merchants and Islamic teachers or *sufis* introduced Islam in Mindanao to the Moros.

Although there is no sufficient evidence to precisely date the introduction of Islam in Mindanao and Sulu, a piece of archeological information may support the theory that Islam arrived much earlier than the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Graves and tombstones of Muslim colonies on the slope of Bud Dato were found

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<sup>73</sup> Majul, 385.

<sup>74</sup> Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin SDN BHD), 2.

<sup>75</sup> Cesar Abid Majul, "The Muslims in the Philippines: An Historical Perspective," in Peter G. Glowing and Robert D. McAmis, eds., *The Filipino Muslim* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 2.

indicating that Islam possibly arrived during this period.<sup>76</sup> As in the Malayan peninsula, Indonesia and Borneo, the first converts in Mindanao and Sulu were those living in trading posts or along the trade routes.<sup>77</sup> The economic and political benefit may have motivated the datos and other leaders to accept Islam.<sup>78</sup>

In Sulu, Islam was introduced in the Philippines in 1380 when an Arabian scholar by the name of Makhdum Karim began preaching the teachings of Mohammed,<sup>79</sup> and converted an enormous number of unbelievers into Islam. Makhdum, reverently called Sharif Awliya, founded the first mosque in the Philippines at Tubig-Indangan on Simunul Island.<sup>80</sup>

In 1390, Rajah Baguinda, a pretty ruler of Menengkaw, Sumatra arrived and continued the works of Makhdum Karim. By this time, a flourishing Muslim community in Sulu emerged and by the middle of the following century, the government began with the establishment of the Sultanate of Sulu. The first crowned sultan was Syed Abubakar, an Arab from South Arabia, who was believed to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Upon his ascension to the throne, Islam spread quickly to all parts of Sulu.<sup>81</sup>

In mainland Mindanao, during the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sharif Mohammed Kabungsuwan successfully introduced and firmly established Islam and founded the sultanate of Maguindanao. Kabungsuwan established his power in Maguindanao upon arrival at the mouth of the Pulangi River. He reformed the whole system of government among his converts.<sup>82</sup> Kabungsuwan was sired by a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed who emigrated from Hadramut (present

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>77</sup> Jubair, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," 370.

<sup>79</sup> Alunan Glang, *Muslim Secession or Integration* (Quezon City: R. P. Publishing Co., 1969), 42.

<sup>80</sup> Jubair, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Glang, 42.

<sup>82</sup> Lajeeb M. Saleeby, "The History of Maguindanao," in Peter G. Glowing and Robert D. McAmis, eds., *The Filipino Muslim* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 185.

day Yemen), southern Arabia, to Johore, Malay Peninsula.<sup>83</sup> Historical evidence records give the impression that the arrival of Kabungsuwan and the conversion of the inhabitants of Maguindanao to Islam were accomplished peacefully. He had received the submission of many chiefs, all of whom he converted to Islam.<sup>84</sup>

Another organized social and political system, which was established later, was the Sultanate of Buayan, Kabuntalan<sup>85</sup> and the *Pat- a- pangampong ko ranao*, meaning “Four States of Lanao.”<sup>86</sup> This “Four States” established a federal system of organization whereby the member states were linked together by an ancient rule, called *taritib*, which calls for peaceful and harmonious relations for the promotion of common welfare. Similarly, it is believed that Sharif Alawi, an early Muslim missionary, came possibly by way of Maguindanao to Lanao and converted the pagans in Lanao and the nearby areas.<sup>87</sup>

The primary political unit in the pre-Spanish Muslim era was the sultanate and the greatest and most powerful sultanates were those of Sulu and Maguindanao and they were believed to have been established by missionary rulers of Arabia. These governments pursued diplomatic and trade relations among themselves and with the neighboring countries of Southeast Asia. The sultanate, who is also the leading datu was founded and operated under Islamic or customary traditions and was considered a representative of the Prophet Muhammad. The Moro leaders, therefore, are not a rule of men, but of the Qur’an.

Islam caused a sense of community and brought about significant and dramatic transformations among the groups in the Philippines which have embraced it. Islamic doctrines introduced new laws, novel ethical standards, and a new outlook in the meaning and direction of life which influenced the individual

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>85</sup> Alunan C, Glang, “Modernizing the Muslims,” in Peter G. Glowing and Robert D. McAmis, eds., *The Filipino Muslim* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 281.

<sup>86</sup> Mamitua Saber, “Maranao Social and Cultural Transition,” in Peter G. Glowing and Robert D. McAmis, eds., *The Filipino Muslim* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 220.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 220.

converts. This Islamization of the island led to a sense of cultural identity that differentiated the Muslims from the non-believers elsewhere in the country. Muslims, thus, also began to raise their level of consciousness associating themselves with a wider community—one that extended from Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean to Malay lands in the South China Sea.<sup>88</sup>

Although most Muslim Filipinos have customarily lacked any degree of unity beyond tribe or clan, the Islamization of Mindanao and Sulu generated an ideological bond among the various ethnic tribes in the area that generated a new sense of ethnic identity that differentiates the Muslim from non-Muslim inhabitants. Thus, Islam emerged as a rallying religious, political, and historical strength that enabled the Muslims to violently resist the Spanish subjugation and later American colonialism. Islam and its survival remains the underlying factor of the current rift between Muslim and Christian Filipinos.<sup>89</sup>

#### **B. THE SPANISH COLONIAL ERA (1521-1898)**

The 16<sup>th</sup> century caused consequential change to the Filipinos. It shifted them from a life of freedom to a virtual state of captivity for the country became the subject of contention of foreign colonial powers. It made the society reliant upon events happening half way around the globe in Europe and America. Filipino culture, Asian in its roots and expressions, found itself facing the impact of an alien Western culture. The Spaniards were the first innovators and the agents of change in the Philippines. Their arrival belonged to that era in European history called the “Age of Geographical Discovery and Expansion,” when Europeans ventured to the East across waters yet unknown to them.

Demand for highly profitable spices and other products of the “Spice Islands” by the Europeans in the 14<sup>th</sup> century led to worldwide competition for colonies and trading bases in Asia. The long history of the Portuguese and the Spanish wars against the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula and in northern Africa had provoked a strong missionary spirit which led them to find lands for

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<sup>88</sup> Majul, “The Muslims in the Philippines...”, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Mariano A. Dumia, “The Moro National Liberation Front and the Organization of the Islamic Conference: Its Implications to National Security,” (Master’s Thesis, National Defense College of the Philippines, 1991), 39.

conversion to Christianity as a way of fighting the Muslims. In search of Oriental goods and new routes, the Portuguese found a way to India by sailing eastward from the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>90</sup>

When the Portuguese captured trading bases in the lower Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and the Spice Islands, King Charles V of Spain gave his consent and financed the expedition in 1519 of Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese, and promised the King the wealth of the orient.<sup>91</sup> From Spain on 20 September 1519, Magellan sailed westward from Spain around South America, discovering the Strait of Magellan, and across the Pacific. In March 1521, the Spaniards set foot on Philippine soils and the first meeting was friendly, indicating that the Filipinos were used to seeing foreigners.<sup>92</sup> In Cebu, the Spaniards baptized the chieftain along with several hundred other natives. Magellan later wished to subdue the nearby Island of Mactan, whose chieftain named Lapulapu was hostile to the Spaniards and refused to recognize the sovereignty of the King of Spain. Magellan was killed in the battle and only 18 survivors returned to Spain.<sup>93</sup> The Muslim Filipinos claimed this encounter as the first armed struggle against Spain.<sup>94</sup>

The failure of several Spanish expeditions to the Far East did not deter King Charles V's son and successor, Philip II, to order sending another expedition to the Philippines to colonize the Philippines and to christianize the natives. Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, the head of the expedition in Cebu in 1565, established the first permanent Spanish settlement in the Philippines.<sup>95</sup> When the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines, Islam was already developed among the people of the Southern Philippines, particularly in the Sultanates of Sulu,

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<sup>90</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo and O. M. Alfonso, *History of the Filipino People*. (Quezon City: Malaya Books, 1966), 27.

<sup>91</sup> Stanley Karmow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1998), 40.

<sup>92</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 80.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>94</sup> Jubair, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 83.

Maguindanao, and Buayan as well as the several small sultanates and their respective areas of jurisdiction. However, in other places of the archipelago, like Manila, Southern Luzon and in the Visayan Islands, Islam was still in its early stages of development.<sup>96</sup>

By means of the sword and the cross, the Spaniards accomplished the colonization of Luzon and the Visayas islands and converted the natives to the Christian faith, but similar attempts to establish Christianity in the Southern Philippines met stiff and bloody encounters from the very beginning.<sup>97</sup> Violent conflict between the Spaniards and the Muslims Filipinos flamed into the so-called Moro Wars—a series of bitter wars of attrition that lasted for more than three centuries from 1569 to 1898. Christian converts from Luzon and Visayan Islands aided these fierce confrontations between the Muslims and the Spaniards. These bitter wars implanted the seeds of the Moro angst, which have persistently grown in modern times.<sup>98</sup> These historic incidents had molded the Moro attitudes and relations to all non-Muslim foreigners as well as to non-Muslim Filipinos.<sup>99</sup>

The earliest clash of struggle was fought over the political and commercial supremacy in the Philippines between Spain and Brunei. In the confrontations, not only was Spain able to secure a foothold in the Philippines, but also managed to destroy the Manila settlement and fort that was governed by a Bornean aristocracy and eliminate Bornean traders from the Visayas and northern Mindanao. Spain gained full control of Manila with the defeat of Rajah Sulayman, Rajah Matanda and Rajah Lakandula. The Brunei influence in the archipelago virtually became nil with the attack of the Brunei Sultanate in 1578.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Allan R. Luga, "Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao, Philippines" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2002), 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>98</sup> John D. Harber, "Conflict and Compromise in the Southern Philippines: The Case of Moro Identity" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, 1998), 20.

<sup>99</sup> Majul, "The Muslim in the Philippines..." 6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

After the fall of Manila, the Spaniards caused the conquest and settlement of some provinces in Luzon and Visayas. The lack of unity among the *barangays*<sup>101</sup> which were separate and independent from one another facilitated most of the conquest of the Philippines.<sup>102</sup>

After the Brunei expedition, Spanish colonial expansion focused on Mindanao and Sulu. In 1578, the first Spanish military expedition to Mindanao and Sulu was sent on the orders of Governor General Francisco de Sande to Captain Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa, the commander of the expeditions, to subdue the pagan inhabitants, to curb piracy against Spanish shipping, and end Moro raids on Christian settlements in Visayas and Luzon. He was also obligated to colonize and to christianize the Moros in similar fashion with respect to other Filipino groups.<sup>103</sup> Spanish policy on christianization certainly is one of the root causes of the conflict and animosity between the Muslims and Spaniards and their Christian Filipino allies."<sup>104</sup> Captain Figueroa's expedition cost him his life during a fierce battle in Maguindanao.

In 1599, the Moros had decided to change their strategy by bringing the war over into enemy territory and staged counterattacks, instead of the defensive engagement with the Spaniards on their territory. The Moros conducted year round raids and overwhelmed the natives in the Spanish-protected territories which inflicted fear, despair and anxiety. The Muslim raiders successfully penetrated and conducted punitive raids deep into the Christian territories in Luzon and the Visayas resulting in the depopulation of many towns due to deaths and captivity of Christians.<sup>105</sup> Slavery was used to weaken the non-Muslim's resolve to ally themselves with the Spaniards. The slaves were used as boat

<sup>101</sup> The barangay was the typical community in the entire archipelago. It was the basic independent political and economic unit. The barangay is a unit of government and consisting of between 30 to 100 families and a small territory. Each barangay was independent and was headed by a chieftain called the rajah or datu. The chieftain had wide powers, for he exercised all the functions of government. He was the executive, legislator, and the judge, He was, naturally, the supreme commander in times of war, see Agoncillo, 46.

<sup>102</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 84.

<sup>103</sup> Dumia, 43

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>105</sup> Jubair, 42-43.



rowers to bolster the Moro war machine.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, Muslim raiders sold thousands of captive Filipino men, women and children at slave markets in Makassar and Batavia (now Jakarta).<sup>107</sup>

The Spaniards were determined to conquer the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. Military campaigns launched by the Spaniards enlisted the natives they previously conquered and christianized, thus, the converts were made to fight the Muslims for the glory of Spain and Christianity. Like the Moros, the Spaniards adopted the policy of depopulating the Muslim areas. Accordingly, the Spaniards resorted to burning settlements, plantations, fields, and orchards as well as enslaving captured Muslims for service in the galleys.<sup>108</sup>

The crucial point in Moro history took place in 1619 when Sultan Qudarat ascended the throne of the Maguindanao sultanate. He consolidated the most powerful alliance ever assembled against Spain. The sultanate's range of influence include, aside from his traditional dominion over the whole of Cotabato, Lanao, Davao, Misamis, Bukidnon and Zamboanga, was so extensive that he was able to collect tributes as far as the coast of Borneo and some parts of Basilan and the Visayas. During his reign, he held Spain at bay for half a century and outlasted about eight governor generals. The Spaniards considered him the single greatest obstacle in the colonization efforts of Mindanao.

Relentless military operations launched by the Spaniards led to the fall of the Sultan Qudarat's capital of Lamitan, Basilan in 1637. The Sultan and his people retired to the interior and adopted a policy of minimum confrontation with the Spaniards to prevent the extermination of the Maguindanaos as a people. The following year the Sultan of Sulu's strong hold in Jolo was conquered. For similar reasons, the people of Sulu also retired to the interior or moved to other islands. Although the Spaniards captured the strongholds of the two sultanates,

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<sup>106</sup> Majul, "The Muslim in the Philippines," 8.

<sup>107</sup> F. Delor Angeles, "The Moro Wars," in Peter G. Glowing and Robert D. McAmis, eds., *The Filipino Muslim* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), 28.

<sup>108</sup> Majul, "The Muslim in the Philippines," 8.

the possibility of Muslim retaliation led them to make peace with the Maguindanao in 1645. The treaty with the Sulus in 1646 covered the departure of the Spaniards from the island of Jolo.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, in the face of the Dutch victories in the Moluccas and the Koxinga's invasion threat, the Spaniards found it essential to consolidate their home defense. Spanish troops deployed in various Mindanao stations were recalled to defend Manila. In 1663, the main fort in Zamboanga was also abandoned.<sup>110</sup>

In 1718, when the twin threats abated and with 50 years of relative peace, the Spaniards re-fortified their abandoned garrison in Zamboanga. In an attempt to reduce the Muslims to vassalage, the Spaniards devised a plan to convert the sultans of Sulu and Maguindanao, and thereafter, to effect the eventual conversion of the datus and other followers. The Moros reacted by conducting devastating raids on the northern and central islands of the Philippines, causing widespread disruption of the economic life in the areas under Spanish control. In response to the Spanish policy to enslave captured Muslims and destroy settlements, the Moros struck back by taking thousands of captives from the Visayas.<sup>111</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Sulu archipelago became the focus of European competition. In 1843, the French were interested in establishing a naval station in Basilan while the British sought to review their trade agreement with Sulu. Alarmed by these developments, Spain sent an expedition to Sulu in 1851, on the pretext that the island is a haven of "piracy," which resulted in the capture of Jolo. A treaty was signed by the sultan and it claimed Sulu as a Spanish protectorate. Not trusting Sulu, the Spaniards made a more serious attempt to conquer and establish permanent garrisons on the island. The use of modern navy-steamboats equipped with heavy artillery in the campaign, gave the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>110</sup> Jubair, 46.

<sup>111</sup> Majul, "The Muslim in the Philippines," 9.

invader an advantage and in 1876 Jolo was captured by assault. The Sultan retired to the interior of the island, but Spanish control over the island was never complete.

### **C. THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION OF 1896**

Nationalistic awakenings, fueled by colonial injustices, racial degradation and discrimination, particularly in clerical appointments and flagrant agrarian exploitation by the religious orders, resulted in numerous regional uprisings against the Spanish colonial administration. The resentment against the colonial master reached its peak in the 1890s and the call for independence was inspired by Jose Rizal<sup>112</sup> and other propagandists who penned numerous articles and published in the newspaper *La Solidaridad* whose objective was to raise the national spirit and restore the dignity of their countrymen.

On 23 August 1896, in the spirit of nationalism and as a protest against the abuses and injustices of the colonial master, Filipinos, led by Andres Bonifacio, took to the field against the Spaniards in Manila. Unlike the members of the middle class, Bonifacio and his plebian followers were not only fighting for reforms but were interested in securing the independence and freedom of the Philippines by force of arms.<sup>113</sup>

General Emilio Aguinaldo was elected President by Filipino revolutionaries in the convention of Tejeros, Cavite in March 1897. He launched periodic military operations against the Spaniards but suffered heavy losses prompting him to accept an agreement, *The Truce of Biyak-na-Bato*, with the Spanish Governor General. Aguinaldo was paid the amount of Php 800,000 on the condition that he and the revolutionary government go into exile in Hong Kong. Aguinaldo met the American consul at Hong Kong, Rounseville Wildham. The latter advanced that upon returning to the Philippines, Aguinaldo should establish a dictatorial

<sup>112</sup> Jose Rizal is the Philippines' National hero. He called for reforms of Spanish rule and political freedom for Filipinos. 1896, at the age of 35, Spanish authorities arrested Rizal, and tried him on charges of treason and complicity with the revolution. These charges were absolutely baseless. The court found him guilty, and sentenced him to die by musketry on December 30, 1896. His execution would spark the nationalist feelings of many Filipinos and brought about calls for revolution. In his famous novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), Rizal called on the government to correct abuses. In his second novel, *El Filibusterismo* (1891), a disillusioned and bitter Rizal has his hero advocate total freedom for the Filipinos.

<sup>113</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 180.

government during the war against Spain. Aguinaldo also met Admiral George Dewey, commander of the U.S. Navy's Asiatic squadron to seek support for the Philippine revolution and also pushed for alliances between the two countries should war occur between the United States and Spain.<sup>114</sup> The war did break out, but no formal agreement was adopted, and Aguinaldo had to rely on the good intentions of the United States.<sup>115</sup>

President Aguinaldo sought the participation and support of the Moros in the struggle against Spain by sending a proposal claiming that he is empowered to "negotiate with the Muslims Sulu and Mindanao to establish national solidarity on the basis of a real federation absolute respect for their beliefs and traditions."<sup>116</sup>

The Moro wars were significant factors in the development of the Philippine revolution although the Muslim Filipino never sympathized with the Christian Filipino revolution of 1896-99. The energies and resources that were employed in Moroland created a favorable condition for a revolutionary movement. The Spanish authorities failed to protect the Christian communities under their protection despite the exorbitant tax and the forced labor to support the campaign.<sup>117</sup>

#### **D. THE AMERICAN COLONIAL ERA (1898-1946)**

Under the Treaty of Paris (1898), the United States ceded the entire Spanish colony and the Americans inherited the Muslim problem from Spain.<sup>118</sup> The Philippines again became a colony of a powerful nation. On 21 December

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 229-231.

<sup>115</sup> Aguinaldo alleged that in his conference with Dewey aboard the latter's flagship, *Olympia*, he was told that the United States needed no colonies that there was no doubt that the United States would recognize Philippine independence. Dewey, however, denied he made such a statement to Aguinaldo and asserted that he acted towards the Filipino General in a personal manner without committing the government of the United States.

<sup>116</sup> Alunan Glang, *Muslim Session or Integration?*, Quezon City, R. P. Publishing Co. 1969, 10.

<sup>117</sup> Angeles, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Under the Treaty of Paris signed December 10, 1898 Spanish authorities ceded the Philippines to the Americans for US\$20 million and continued trade access. After approval by the United States Congress, the treaty formally converted the status of the Philippines from the Spanish possession to an American colony. See, John Funston, *Government and Politics in Southeast Asia*, 254.

1898, President William McKinley issued a definite statement of American policy in the Philippines. In his “benevolent assimilation” proclamation McKinley said that the Americans:

came not as invaders or conquerors, but as friends, to protect the natives in their homes, in their employment, and in their personal and religious rights... by assuring them in every possible way that measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of a free people, and by proving them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule.<sup>119</sup>

Like its predecessors, the United States pursued the policy of total control over the region and annexed Mindanao to the Philippine central government. However, unlike the Spanish who were concerned with religious assimilation, the Americans emphasized the idea of democracy to the natives.

Thus, the Americans implemented democratic institutions, laws and established schools.<sup>120</sup> To speed up the political integration of Mindanao, the Americans employed civil officials and clerks in the area. They also encouraged the migration of Christian farmers to settle in Mindanao to teach Muslim farmers modern agricultural techniques. The intention was altruistic but unwise as in the coming years, this policy brought the region into conflict and bloodshed.<sup>121</sup> Newcomers prospered, while the indigenous were dislocated and abandoned to poverty.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 274.

<sup>120</sup> President William McKinley in a message to the American Congress in 1899 defined the basic policy of the United States towards the Philippines: The Philippines are not ours to exploit, but to develop, to civilize, to educate, to train in the science of self-government. This is the path we must follow or be recreant to the mighty trust committed to us. This instruction for the country was also the particular mandate for Moroland. Peter G. Growing, “Muslim-American Relations in the Philippines, 1899-1920,” *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*. ed. Peter G. Growing and Robert D. McAmis, Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974, 33.

<sup>121</sup> Majul, “Ethnicity & Islam in the Philippines,” 382.

<sup>122</sup> Fred Hill, “Ethnic cleansing in Mindanao, Philippines,” in *Islamic Horizons*, 17 April 1996.

## 1. Indirect Rules and the Bates Treaty

The early Muslim-American contact and military occupation<sup>123</sup> in the Moroland began on May 1899 and the Americans found the Moros still in control of their lands.<sup>124</sup> The Americans sought Muslim neutrality and friendship in the Philippine-American War (1899-1901)<sup>125</sup> which was flaring in Luzon. Thus, the significant American concern was to obtain Muslim acknowledgement of United States sovereignty in Mindanao and Sulu. The Americans feared the eventual tactical alliance between the Filipino revolutionaries and the Moro warriors which would be too difficult to handle.

Thus, the Americans sent Brigadier General John Bates to Sulu to negotiate a treaty with Sultan Jamalul Kiram II. The agreement that was reached and signed on August 1899, acknowledged the sovereignty of the United States over the Sulu archipelago and its dependencies and agreed to suppress piracy. The United States pledged to respect the authority of the Sultan and his clan leaders, the *datus*, and not to interfere in the prevailing Moros' practice of their religion and their customs.<sup>126</sup> The Americans also guaranteed complete protection of the sultan and his followers from foreign powers and payment of the salaries of certain Sulu leaders from the government.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In May 1899, American troops landed in Jolo and on 30 October the Military District of Mindanao, Jolo and Palawan was constituted. On November 16, Zamboanga was occupied, and from December 1899 to January 1900, the southern coasts of Mindanao, including Cotabato, Davao, Mati, Polloc, Parang, and Banganga were garrisoned. In charge of this command was Brig. Gen. John C. Bates, but on 20 March 1900, Brig. Gen. William Kobbe took over.

<sup>124</sup> Sidney Glazer, "Moros as a Political Factor in Philippine Independence," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 14/1 1941, 78-90.

<sup>125</sup> General Emilio Aguinaldo, the elected Philippine President led the Filipino guerillas against US. forces. Greatly outnumbered and outgunned the Filipinos lost about 16,000 fighters, at least 200,000 civilians. 4,234 American soldiers were also killed. Aguinaldo was captured on 23 March 1901 and convinced to admit defeat. Most of the guerillas laid down their arms, though pockets of resistance continued until 1903.

<sup>126</sup> Glazer, 82.

<sup>127</sup> Peter G. Gowing, "Muslim-American Relations in the Philippines," in eds. Peter G. Gowing and Robert McAmis, *The Muslim Filipinos: Their History, Society and Contemporary Problems*, (Manila: Solidaridad, 1974), 34.

Initially, the Moros and the Americans were quite comfortable with the arrangement in the way that the treaty defined the relationship.<sup>128</sup> The occupation force did not interfere with the datu system and religious matters.<sup>129</sup> Within the limits of the noninterference policy, the Americans made modern medical care available and a few schools were opened with both soldiers and civilians as teachers. However, American officers were uncomfortable with the noninterference policy because certain features of the Moro culture – administration of justice, slavery, autocratic relationship of the chieftains and followers- offended their western sense of justice and good order.<sup>130</sup> After the Philippine-American War ended, more troops poured into Mindanao to occupy ports in the region. This development aroused the Moro's insecurity concerning their practice of religion and way of life. In 1903, the Americans imposed custom regulations, collected taxes, surveyed lands, conducted a census, and more importantly, forbade the time-honored Moro practice of slavery. Soon enough the uneasiness and suspicion exploded into violence. Some datos rose up and attacked American soldiers. The Muslim hostility was interpreted as a challenge to American sovereignty. As a result, the American governance shifted from noninterference to direct rule with the establishment of the Moro Province.<sup>131</sup>

The military occupation of the southern Philippines lasted from 1899 to 1903. Aside from the unhappiness of the American authorities, the passage of the Philippine Bill of 1902, which provides for the eventual granting of independence, prompted the American authorities to abandon the policy of indirect rule. Also, the new policy of direct rule was envisioned to prepare for the integration of the Moros into a modern political body<sup>132</sup> and the insistence of the Christian Filipino leaders that the Moroland was inseparable from Philippine territory. Under the new political arrangement, the American mandate was to

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<sup>128</sup> Jubair, 64

<sup>129</sup> Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," 381.

<sup>130</sup> Gowing, 34.

<sup>131</sup> Jubair, 65.

<sup>132</sup> Gowing, 36.

implement protection of the common people from the oppression of the sultans and datus, and the introduction of the American concept of justice.

In 1903, the Americans established the Moro province, which was patterned after the Spanish “politico-military district” system and the line of responsibility, stretched from the Provincial Governor in Zamboanga to the datu who served as the head of the tribal ward.<sup>133</sup> Under American stewardship, selected Muslim leaders were clothed with limited political authority. The reorganization of the region had directly challenged and threatened the authority of the traditional community leaders.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, a new legal system through the “tribal Ward Court” system was attempted to replace the *sharia* or Islamic law.

The Kiram-Bates Treaty, which clearly laid the guiding relationship of noninterference in the domestic affairs of the Moros, was the principal obstruction for the implementation of the direct rule.<sup>135</sup> On 2 March 1904, based on Major General Leonard Wood’s report citing the failure of the Sultan and his datus “to discharge the duties and fulfill the conditions imposed on them by said agreement”<sup>136</sup> the treaty was unilaterally abrogated.<sup>137</sup> On 21 March 1904, the Sultan was notified of the decision that also meant forfeiture of his annuities and he would now be subjected to the laws enacted for the Moro province.<sup>138</sup>

The American policy of direct rule unwittingly transgressed the social structure, customs and laws by which the Moros had lived for centuries. To the Muslims, the American policy in the Moroland to develop, civilize, educate, and train the Moros in the art of democratic governance were, in fact, an imposition of

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<sup>133</sup> Moro Province was under the direct supervision of the Civil Governor of the Philippine Islands and the Philippine Commission. The Civil Governors, with the concurrence of the Philippine Commissions appointed the provincial governor, secretary, treasurer, attorney, engineer and superintendent for the Moro Province. These six officials constituted the legislative council, which, subject to certain limitations, was the legislative body of the province. The Moro Province was divided into five districts: Sulu, Zamboanga, Lanao, Cotabato and Davao, which in turn were undivided into several subordinate local governments.

<sup>134</sup> Gowing, 36.

<sup>135</sup> Jubair, 65.

<sup>136</sup> Gowing, 36.

<sup>137</sup> Jubair, 65.

<sup>138</sup> Gavel Grunder and William Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), 141.



alien law and infidel customs. The American administrators failed to recognize or ignored that Muslim Filipinos saw no separation whatever between the sacred and the secular. The concept of the separation of the church and states was unknown to the Filipino Muslims for they believed that their laws and customs were in line with the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Thus, many Moros resisted to the death the fundamental changes of their beliefs and their traditions.<sup>139</sup>

Bloody resistance grew and the Moro province remained under military rule until 1913.<sup>140</sup> The American military governors led by Generals Woods, Bliss and Pershing relentlessly pursued military solution against "bandits and outlaws."<sup>141</sup> Similarly, the new political structure altered the Moro economic lifestyle which was based on the practice of slavery. This contributed to the erosion of the power of the sultanate. Many Muslims violently opposed the abolition of slavery, showing strong opposition that resulted in the massacres of Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak and many other uprisings.<sup>142</sup> The bloodiest encounter between the Americans and the Moros was the battle of Bud Dajo, Sulu, on March 1906. After two days of fierce fighting about 1,000 Moros, including women and children, were slaughtered. Only six survived, while the American forces suffered 21 killed and 73 wounded.<sup>143</sup> Another major military encounter was the battle of Bud Bagsak, Sulu, on 11-15 June 1913 over the issue of the disarmament policy which the Moros vigorously resisted for they would never surrender their firearms. Brigadier General John Pershing led the American troops and after five days of combat action, 500 Moros were annihilated against

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<sup>139</sup> Gowing, 33.

<sup>140</sup> Frederica M. Bung, *Philippines: A Country Study*, The U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1983, 74.

<sup>141</sup> Gowing, 37.

<sup>142</sup> Magdalena, 246.

<sup>143</sup> BudDajo is an extinct volcano six miles from Jolo. Fortified in the crater were over a thousand Moro men, women, and children armed only with *krises*, spears, aging rifles, and few cannons. Laksamana Usap, the leader, and his followers went up in arms on issue of regulation they believed were wrongly imposed on them. One was the payment of the cedula tax, which resembled the "tribute" of the old which the Moros were not accustomed to give. The American assault force, numbering 790, were under the command of Col. Joseph Duncan. It consisted of infantry and cavalry, an artillery battery, constabulary troops, sailors, and a gunboat anchored offshore.

14 killed and 13 wounded from the American forces.<sup>144</sup> After numerous military losses, the Moros realized the futility of continued resistance in the face of modern weaponry, and as a result, under the administration of General Pershing, the Moros were disarmed.<sup>145</sup> It was estimated during the period from 1903-1935 that 15,000 to 20,000 Moros were killed as a result of the armed resistance to American colonial rule.<sup>146</sup>

## 2. Direct Rule

Succeeding General Pershing in 15 December 1913 was Frank Carpenter, the first civilian governor of the Moro Province. He was responsible for the reorganization of the province into the Department of Mindanao and Sulu which extended to the southern Philippines and the general laws of the country and the general forms and procedures of government followed in the provinces were applied nationwide. Governor Carpenter is credited for vigorously carrying out the policy of "Filipinization"<sup>147</sup> being pushed through by Governor General Harrison,<sup>148</sup> head of the Insular Government. Under his administration, Filipino officials, although mostly Christians, were appointed to assumed increasingly greater responsibilities in the government of the Moroland. To integrate the Muslims into national life, Christian Filipino officials endeavored to educate, civilize and train the Muslims in self-government. Public schools were made compulsory and Muslim scholars were sent to Manila and the United States for

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<sup>144</sup> Jubair, 74. The official estimates accounted for only 300 Moro casualties, John McLeod, who was in Manila at the time of the massacre, reported that 2,000 were killed including 196 women and 340 children, see *Historical Timeline of the Royal Sultanate of Sulu: Including Related Events of Neighboring Peoples* by Josiah C. Ang, PM.

<sup>145</sup> Gowing, 38.

<sup>146</sup> Ismael Z. Villareal, "A Journey Towards Lasting Peace," *Struggle in Mindanao*, Documentation for Action Groups in Asia Dossier, September 2001.

<sup>147</sup> Rapid Filipinization of the government came as a result of the victory of Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats in the United States presidential elections in 1912, and again in 1916.

<sup>148</sup> Francis Burton Harrison became the executor of Wilson's policies in the Philippines. Harrison had faith in the ability of the Filipinos and believed that the best way of teaching was by allowing them to exercise self-government in Agoncillo, 335-336.

higher education. Similarly, the Muslims were able to occupy local and provincial government positions and some were appointed as members of the Philippine Legislature.<sup>149</sup>

The unification process of the administrative structures of Mindanao and Sulu were rapidly implemented by extending the jurisdiction of the central government agencies and bureaus of the Moroland. In 1916, the legislative power over the Moroland was absorbed by the Philippine legislature as provided in the Jones regulation.<sup>150</sup> Under the Jones Law, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes took over jurisdiction from the abolished Department of Mindanao and Sulu, and this new arrangement placed the Moroland under the direct control of a Manila-based bureau for the first time.

The adoption of the “policy of attraction” and the Filipinization were not only the important highlights of the Carpenter administration but more importantly the signing on 22 March 1915 of an agreement better known as the Kiram-Carpenter Agreement whereby the sultan abdicated all his claims to temporal power in Sulu.<sup>151</sup> The sultan, however, retained his position as titular leader of the Islamic faith in the Sulu archipelago and that the Moros “shall have the same religious freedom ... and practice of which is not in violation of the basic principles of the laws of the United States.” The acquiescence to this accord apparently suggests the helplessness to resist the tide of change in Muslim society. Although some Moros co-opted with the assimilation program pursued by the government, many stubbornly clung to the old ways and a few others resigned themselves to becoming “outlaws.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Gowing, 39.

<sup>150</sup> Jones Law (1916), also called the Philippine Autonomy Act promoted Filipinization. It declared, “the purpose of the people of the United States to withdraw their sovereignty over the Philippine islands and to recognize their independence as soon as a stable government can be established therein.” The establishment of the new legislature placed the Filipinos in full control of the insular government marked the beginning of the new government under the Jones Law.

<sup>151</sup> The agreement stipulated that the Sultan recognized the sovereignty of the United States in the Sulu Archipelago.

<sup>152</sup> Gowing, 39.

### 3. Land and the Migration Policies

The United States was able to colonize the southern Philippines in two decades whereas the Spaniards failed to do so in three centuries and one of the successes could be attributed to the “demographic model of colonization.”<sup>153</sup> After the pacification campaign, the Americans began the resettlement program and encouraged Christian inhabitants from Luzon and Visayas to emigrate to Mindanao and Sulu and the government declared the entire country public land, including those considered by the Moros as their ancestral lands. The insular government enacted a series of laws concerning land and homesteading that was designed to encourage especially landless peasants of the north to migrate to Mindanao. These series of laws wiped out Moro communal and ancestral lands, and provided for less and less lands for the Muslims. The Land Registration Act (Act No. 4960) required the registration of all lands occupied by any person, group or corporation. Most Moros lost their communal lands as a result. Most Moros were bound only by traditions and customary laws, and refused to obtain land titles either out of either ignorance or a sense of resistance.<sup>154</sup> Likewise, Acts 2254 and 2280 of 1913, created agricultural colonies (seven in Cotabato and one each in Lanao and Basilan) and encouraged Filipino migrants from the north to settle in the so-called public lands in Mindanao and Sulu and by 1930, some 17 agricultural communities had been created.<sup>155</sup> Public Land Act 2874 (1919) was clearly inequitable in that the Christian Filipino settler was awarded a twenty-four-hectare lot, while a Moro was allowed only ten hectares.<sup>156</sup> Aside from this discrimination, most Muslim Filipinos refused to register their ancestral lands.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, “Class and Colony in Mindanao,” in Kristina Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch eds., *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in Southern Philippines*, (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), 6.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>156</sup> Alan Bradley, *The Moro Question* available at [[http://www.mail-archive.com/marxism@lists.panix.com/msg\\_24363.html](http://www.mail-archive.com/marxism@lists.panix.com/msg_24363.html)]; accessed 10 October 2003.

<sup>157</sup> Jubair, 97.

#### 4. Opposition to Annexation

In the 1920s, the Insular Government appointed all Filipino Christians as governors of Sulu, Cotabato and Lanao to replace the existing Americans. These appointments sent a wrong signal to the Moros for they interpreted Filipinization to actually mean “Christianization” of the bureaucracy in the Moroland.<sup>158</sup> Already, the Moros were distrustful, uneasy, and perhaps fearful of the Christian Filipinos because they fought together with the Spaniards for such a long time. Christian Filipinos vigorously pursued the assimilation and Filipinization programs in the Moroland that meant, from the Muslim Filipino’s point of view, “being ruled by their enemies.”<sup>159</sup>

When the United States government promised to grant independence to the Filipino people, the 57 prominent Moro leaders filed their intense opposition to be incorporated under the new Philippine republic stating clearly:

We are independent for 500 years. Even Spain failed to conquer us. If the U.S. quits the Philippines and the Filipinos attempt to govern us, we will fight.<sup>160</sup>

In a petition to the United States, on June 9, 1921, the Moros of Sulu declared their intention to remain part of the United States instead of being annexed in the independent Philippine nation.<sup>161</sup>

Three years later, in Zamboanga, the Moro leaders claiming a representation of about 500,000 Muslim Filipinos, asked the U.S. Congress that the “Islands of Mindanao and Sulu, and the Island of Palawan be made an unorganized territory of the United States of America” in anticipation that in the event the United States would yield dominion over its colonies and other non-self

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<sup>158</sup> Jubair, 90.

<sup>159</sup> Bertrand, 43.

<sup>160</sup> Abdulmanaf Mantawil, “The Bangsamoro Reasserts Plebiscitary Rights” available at [[http://moroinfo.com/plebiscitary\\_rights.html](http://moroinfo.com/plebiscitary_rights.html)]; accessed 11 October 2003.

<sup>161</sup> Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, “Understanding Bangsamoro Independence as a Mode of Self-determination” available at [<http://www.mindanao.com/kalinaw/peaceproc/bmoroindpendence.htm>]; accessed 11 October 2003.

governing territories, Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan would be granted separate independence. The “Declaration of Rights and Purposes” contains the following excerpt:

The event that the United States grants independence to the Philippine Islands without provision our retention under the American flag it is our firm intention and resolve to declare ourselves an Independent constitutional sultanate to be known to world as Moro Nation. It is the duty of the congress of the United States to make provision at once, for the security and protection promised to us when we surrendered our arms to the United States Army. This promise is just as sacred as any alleged promises you may have made the Christian Filipinos. Have left us defenseless, and it is your duty to protect us or return to us the weapons you took from and which we freely gave you, relying on your promises.<sup>162</sup>

In reaction to the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth, the last stage toward independence, 190 Lanao datos and leaders gathered in Dansalan (now Marawi City) on 18 March 1935 and passed a strong worded Manifesto and pleaded with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to exclude Mindanao and Sulu in the grant of independence to the Filipinos.<sup>163</sup> Part of it reads:

...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 peoples with two different religious practices traditions. The Christian Filipinos occupy the islands of Luzon and the Visayas. The Moros (Muslims) predominate in the islands of Mindanao and Sulu. With regard to the forthcoming independence we foresee that the condition we and our children will be characterized by unrest, sufferings and misery...We do not want to be included in the Philippine Independence (for) once an independent Philippines is launched there will be trouble between us and the Christian Filipinos because from time immemorial these two peoples have not lived harmoniously. Our practices, laws and decisions of our Moro leaders should be respected... Our religion should not be curtailed anyway... All our practices which are incidental to religion of Islam

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<sup>162</sup> Petition to the President of the United States of America from the People of the Sulu Archipelago on June 9, 1921, cited in Datucan Abas, “Muslim Secession Movement in the Philippines” (Master’s Thesis, Manuel L. Quezon University, Manila, Philippines, 1972) and Jubair, 91.

<sup>163</sup> Abhoud Syed M. Lingga, “Understanding Bangsamoro Independence as a Mode of Self-determination,” available at [<http://www.mindanao.com/kalinaw/peaceproc/bmoroindependence.htm>]; accessed 11 October 2003.

should be respected because these things are what a Muslim desires to live for ... Our religion is no more, our lives are no score.<sup>164</sup>

The Americans did not give due consideration to the request of suzerainty because, at this time, the Christian Nationalist Filipinos had established a better relationship with the Americans.<sup>165</sup> The Christian Filipinos readily embraced the American educational system, adopted the government administration and established valuable business relations and partnerships. Thus, the Moroland drifted further under the control of the Philippine legislature, instead of remaining an American responsibility.<sup>166</sup>

#### **E. THE COMMONWEALTH ERA (1935-1941)**

In 15 November 1935, the Philippine Commonwealth transition government was formally established and Manuel L. Quezon became the Commonwealth government's first president.<sup>167</sup> Despite the various petitions and protest of the Muslim leaders, the Moro Province became part of the Philippine territory. During this period, the Office of the Commissioner of Mindanao and Sulu was created with the abolition of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes. The core national policies were economic development, strengthening of the region's security, and the advancement and integration of the Moros instead of the "pacification" and "attraction" policy propagated by the Americans. On 20 September 1938, President Quezon enunciated the government policy in a memorandum issued to the Secretary of Interior which among others authorizes the department to give impetus to the work of improving the condition of the

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<sup>164</sup> Rad S. Silva, *Two Hills of the Same Land: Truth Behind the Mindanao Problem*, (Mindanao-Sulu Critical Studies and Research group, 1974), 25-27.

<sup>165</sup> There were Americans who sympathized with the Moros. The Bacon Bill which fought for the retention of Mindanao and Sulu under American rule and separate from Luzon and the Visayas was presented to the U.S. Congress in 1926. The bill did not pass and brought opposition from Filipino nationalist leaders.

<sup>166</sup> Harber, 39.

<sup>167</sup> The passage of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act in 1933 and its successor, the Tydings-McDuffie Law, in 1934, provided for the granting of independence to the Philippines after a ten-year tutelage in governance.

people, to develop the resources of the region, and not to recognize the power of the datu by protecting the people from the exploitation of their leaders. Quezon bluntly said in one of his meetings:

...The sultans have no more rights than the humblest Moro and that under my administration the humblest Moro will be given as much protection as any datu under the law, and that his rights will be recognized exactly as the rights of a datu will be, and that every datu will have to comply with his duties as citizen to same extent and in the manner that the humblest Moro is obligated.<sup>168</sup>

The Quezon administration viewed Mindanao as a “land of promise” to be exploited and developed for national gains. Accordingly, the government encouraged the resettling of Christian Filipinos from Luzon and Visayas to the region. The turning point of the land settlement issue was the enactment in 1935 of the “Quirino-Recto Colonization Act,” when the government declared settlement as the “only lasting solution to the problem in Mindanao and Sulu.” This law opened the floodgates to the massive influx of settlers who were aided by development support from the government.<sup>169</sup> Similarly, in 1936 another law was passed, Commonwealth Act No. 141, which declared all Moro ancestral landholdings as public lands.<sup>170</sup>

Aside from the loss of territory and system of governance, the Moros were not given adequate representation in the national government to advance their interests.<sup>171</sup> Moreover, under the Commonwealth regime, the Moros were denied special privileges guaranteeing protections of Islamic and traditional laws, the institution of the sultanate and socio-economic programs.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Gowing, “Mandate in Moroland,” 178.

<sup>169</sup> Bertrand, 43.

<sup>170</sup> Satur Ocampo, “Deeper Look at the Moro Problem,” *Sun Star Manila*, 5 May 2000.

<sup>171</sup> On 10 July 1934, only four Moros out of the 202 delegates were elected to the constitutional convention.

<sup>172</sup> Bertrand, 43.



As the number of Christian Filipinos multiplied, the Moros became a minority in many of their strongholds. They began to be treated as second class citizens in their own land.<sup>173</sup>

Ralph Thomas, in his doctoral dissertation, summarized the condition of the Muslim Filipinos under the Commonwealth Government as follows:

During the Commonwealth period, Muslims were structurally integrated. In the political sphere, they participated as well as minority could; in the economic sphere, they were assuming a secondary and dependent status in their own territory. Political and economic changes have increased contacts between Muslim and Christian Filipinos. It remained for the future to decide whether those relationships would be mutually beneficial and whether Muslim Filipinos will be assimilated by the Christian Filipino majority.<sup>174</sup>

#### **F. JAPANESE OCCUPATION PERIOD (1941-1945)**

The ten-year transition period was cut short when the Philippines was occupied by the Japanese. Davao and Sulu were immediately occupied while in April 1942, so were Cotabato and Lanao. Guerilla activity was widespread and plagued the Japanese authorities until the end of the war. Muslim and Christians joined in guerilla units led by the Americans and cooperation between the Christians and Moros was the rule.<sup>175</sup> Tens of thousands of Moros were either enlisted in the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFE) or joined the guerilla units to fight the invaders. Violent resistance of numerous Moro groups appeared in the form of hit and run tactics, pitched battles, damaging ambushes and damaging retaliation by the Japanese.<sup>176</sup> Prominently figured guerilla leaders during the occupation were Lt. Salipada Pendatun, Datu Udtog

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<sup>173</sup> Gowing, "Mandate in Moroland," 339.

<sup>174</sup> Luga, 31.

<sup>175</sup> Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," 385.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

Matalam, Gumbay Piang, Mohammad Ali Dimaporo, Rasid Lucman.<sup>177</sup> However, some Muslims leaders also cooperated with Japanese authorities. They were convinced that it would be better to take part in the Japanese war efforts.<sup>178</sup>

The end of the war brought significant consequences to the Moroland. The rehabilitation produced large amounts of cash, helping to prime the economy against dependence on a barter system. Likewise, many Filipino Muslims were now able to afford to go on pilgrimages and to build mosques.<sup>179</sup> With the weapons and ammunitions left behind by both the Americans and Japanese forces, the Muslim leaders began to rearm themselves. Steinberg asserts that the war

spawned a totally armed society, and the readiness to resort to force has been a disturbing feature of post-independence Philippine life. Politicians, businessmen and other elites began to armed themselves for more protection against banditry and dissidence. In Mindanao, private armies and armed gangs grew rapidly which were molded along ethno-religious in the 1970s.<sup>180</sup>

#### **G. EARLY YEARS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC (1946-1965)**

Amidst incalculable damage done by the war, Philippine independence was granted, as scheduled, on 4 July 1946. Aside from the enormous challenges of rehabilitating and reconstruction, the situation in the war-torn state was complicated by the insurgent activity of the Communist-dominated Hukbalahap (Huks) staged in Central Luzon. The Huks took arms and resorted to terror and violence to achieve land reform and gain political power. They finally laid down

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<sup>177</sup> When war ended, Salipada Pendatun was appointed Governor of Cotabato and Datu Manalao Mindalano to the Executive Committee the Philippine Veterans' Legion in Manila. In the 1946 elections, Salipada Pendatun won a senate seat and Manalao Mindalano was elected congressmen for Lanao, see Jubair, 111 and 114.

<sup>178</sup> Jubair, 112.

<sup>179</sup> Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," 384.

<sup>180</sup> David Joel Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 58.

their arms when Secretary Magsaysay came to the communist rebels with an open heart and persuaded most of them that their future lay in peace with honor.<sup>181</sup>

A hallmark of the Magsaysay program was the relocation of the members of the Huk movement who surrendered to resettlement areas in Mindanao. Thus, during the administration of Magsaysay, Christian settlement in Mindanao proceeded inexorably, with the arrival of thousands of former Huks, ex-soldiers, Ilongos, Ilocanos, and Tagalogs. Many of the lands in Mindanao were considered public lands because Moros did not have issued titles to claim ownership.

The massive influx of Christian Filipinos from the North created bitter conflicts in land distribution and ownership among Muslims and Christian settlers. Christians often had to pay different members of the same family for the same lot because some members of the family refused to recognize previous sales. Oftentimes, Muslims claimed that Christian settlers would secure a land title through government agencies unknown to the Muslim resident. A common understanding of the so called Torrens title was particularly slow among the Moros for cultural reasons. Land issues have been the singular most critical source of Muslim concern. Aijaz Ahmed claims the Moros had owned all the lands before colonization, but, in 1981, the Moros owned less than 17 percent located mostly in remote and unproductive areas that lack marketing facilities and infrastructure. At present, about 80 percent of Muslims are now landless farmers.<sup>182</sup>

George attributes the economic exploitation of the Muslim region as another important factor contributing to Moro unrest.<sup>183</sup> American companies and the local elites were in the forefront of the exploitation and development of Mindanao. Some of the American capitalists who engaged in business ventures in Mindanao are Firestone Tire and Rubber Company which was granted 1,000

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<sup>181</sup> Agoncillo and Alfonso, 543

<sup>182</sup> Ahmad, 13.

<sup>183</sup> T. J. S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics*, (Malaysia: Oxford University Press, 1980), 105.

hectares of land in Cotabato for a rubber plantation in 1957. Another is Dole Philippines which acquired vast tracts of lands in 1963, for its pineapple plantation. Logging and timber corporations obtained hundreds of hectares of forest lands and concessions for logging operations<sup>184</sup> and these lands often included areas being farmed by Muslim communities. The Filipino capitalists took the lion's share of the booming timber, pasture and coconut concessions. Jubair claims that many Christian elites not only amassed huge wealth out of the region's rich resources but also "directly contributed to the deprivations and sufferings" of the Moros.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, distrust and resentment is prevalent in the public school system which was regarded as an agent for instilling Christian values. It is difficult to persuade the Moros that the public educational system, with its uniform curriculum for both Muslims and Christians, is not designed to separate them from their Islamic faith. Owing to this prejudice, Muslim parents often hesitated to send their children to public school, insisting that their parochial school be used instead.<sup>186</sup> Thus, the literacy rate of the Moros is far below that of the Christians, and scholars opine that they are behind their fellow citizens.<sup>187</sup>

Due to the Philippine government policies, the Moros felt marginalized. Resentment intensified as decades of Christian migration completely altered the demographic feature of Mindanao completely. The Muslims were reduced from 76 percent of Mindanao's population in 1903 to about 23 percent in the 1960s and 19 percent in 1990s. In 1913, there were 518,698 Moros and 193,882 non-Moros or a ratio of nearly three Moros to two Non-Moros. This was completely reversed in 1939 during the Commonwealth period in which there were

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<sup>184</sup> Jubair, 118.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Harber, 43.

<sup>187</sup> Frederico V. Magdalena, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Conflict: The Case of Philippine Moros," ISEAS Working Papers on Social and Cultural Issues (Singapore: ISEAS, 1996), 20.

1,489,232 non-Moros compared to 755,189 Moros.<sup>188</sup> As a consequence of this demographic transformation, the economic and social control of the region shifted in favor of the Christians.

After the Second World War, sporadic bloody confrontations between Christians and Muslims rekindled in various localities particularly over land disputes and other economic problems. These occasional disturbances of peace and order were not organized Muslim uprisings against the new republic. However, the Kamlon<sup>189</sup> and Tawantawan revolts generated widespread public interest and the government decided to investigate the causes of the unrests. Consequently, in 1957, Manila organized the Commission on National Integration (CNI)<sup>190</sup> charged with effecting, in a more rapid and complete manner, the economic social, moral and political advancement of non-Christian Filipinos and to render real, complete and permanent the integration of all said minorities into the body politic. The CNI focused on granting scholarships to Muslims and other minorities to study in colleges and universities. Although the government believed that with the acquired learning and skills the scholars would bring socio-economic improvement upon their return to their respective communities, what actually transpired was that their education brought awareness of their Islamic identity making the educated vocal in their aspiration.<sup>191</sup>

This era brought the revival of Islamic consciousness in the Philippines as more Muslim Filipinos came in contact with other peoples from Islamic countries. Thousands of Muslims took the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca and returned with greater enthusiasm for the universal Islamic brotherhood and

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<sup>188</sup> A different estimate suggests that it was in 1970, that the ratio was completely reversed: 711,430 non-Muslims and 424,577 Muslims, see Rudy Rodil, *Tri-People Relationship and the Peace Process in Mindanao* (Lecture delivered at Gahan sa Kinabubi Diecesan College Seminary, Iligan City, the Philippine March J98), available at [<http://mindanao.com/kalinaw/dev/tri-people.htm>]; accessed on 11 October 2003.

<sup>189</sup> In the 1950s, Datu Hadji Kamlon led a revolt in Sulu, which lasted for several years. The government had practically exhausted its military muscles to defeat Kamlon, only to conclude with a negotiated surrender.

<sup>190</sup> A Special House Committee composed of a Muslim Senator and Congressmen was organized to inquire into the problem of Moro unrest and the findings were: the Moros must be made to feel that they were an integral part of the Philippine nation and this aim must be achieved through a comprehensive approach covering economic, social, moral, political and educational developments.

<sup>191</sup> Majul, "Ethnicity and Islam in the Philippines," 387.

greater religious zeal. Arab nationalism has fueled the resurgence of Islam in the Southern Philippines. Hundreds of Filipinos were given scholarships to study in Islamic theological centers in Egypt and some of them diversified to professional schools and even to military institutions. Furthermore, on the international scene, Pakistan and Indonesia had become independent nations, and Western dependence on oil from Islamic countries began to rise in significance. These resulted in a heightened sense of *umma* and sense of Islamic dignity and pride began to prevail.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 387-388.

#### IV. THE BIRTH OF THE CONTEMPORARY MORO REBELLION

The American administrations pursued “integration” as an essential preliminary for Philippine independence while the Filipino nationalists considered independence as a preliminary to “integration.” However, the Moros regarded integration as assimilation, and assimilation as surrender of their identity. Peter Gowing depicts this perception as follows:

...many Christian Filipinos are persuaded that underneath Muslim and Christian Filipinos are the same except that through the misfortunes of history the Muslims were somehow left behind in their economic, political, social and educational development. The whole integration program of the Government seems to revolve around the philosophy that if the Muslims are provided with more roads, schools, health, facilities, civic centers and industrial plants, and if they are instructed in more modern methods of farming or are given more scholarships for higher education in Manila or are offered jobs in government, then in time they will be “integrated” that is, they will resemble the Christian Filipinos. While Muslims do in fact want many of these things, they fear this philosophy behind the integration program because it is really a philosophy of assimilation reflecting the basic contempt for the religious, cultural and historical factors upon which they anchor their psychological and social identity.<sup>193</sup>

From the vantage point of the Manila government, its policies in the Southern Philippines were strategies for development and national integration. This was in consonance with the migration of northern Christian settlers and the opening of businesses into what seemed a relatively underdeveloped south. For Muslim locals, these programs represented an imposition of intense colonialism in the guise of nationalism.

As Christian migration to the Moroland was accelerated, conflict over land became severe because Moros tended to consider the entire region as theirs by right and by their legal standard. Seldom do Moros have Philippine documents to establish ownership of their possessions because Christians usually controlled

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<sup>193</sup> Peter G. Gowing, “Muslim Filipinos Between Integration and Secession,” *Southeast Asia Journal of Theology*, No. 2, 66.

the government bureaucracy in charge of land decisions.<sup>194</sup> Land ownership disputes became more frequent in Cotabato and Lanao provinces which took on religious and “ethnic” overtones. With the influx of Christian settlers, the Moros became increasingly alarmed over the dilution of their political power by making them a minority in what they felt was their own land.

Young Muslim intellectuals and students influenced by Nasserite nationalism and student radicalism in Manila advocated a militant, anti-state, anti-Filipino nationalism among Muslim communities.<sup>195</sup> Coincident with the increasing Christian influx is the growth of Islamic consciousness among the Moros. Notable is the effect of foreign missionaries and this awareness is displayed in the proliferation of Muslim organizations in the country. Initially these organizations were closely linked with politicians, until radical Muslim students established their separate organization.

The Moros were definitely disunited for they remained separated by language, custom, and geography. Family and clan structures were also divided and divisions are often intensified by political rivalries. Moros were also fragmented by wealth, skills, and education. By the end of the 1960s, the amalgam of Muslim grievances grew into a full-fledged organized separatist movement. Among the immediate critical events that led to the formation of an organized front and war of liberation were the Jabidah massacre in 1968, the Manili Massacre in 1971, the election of 1971 and the declaration of Martial Law.<sup>196</sup>

#### **A. SABAH AND OPLAN JABIDAH**

The formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1966 which incorporated Sabah as one of its thirteen states generated a territorial dispute between the Philippines and Malaysia. The dispute arose from the claim of the Sultan of Sulu over Sabah and the Philippine position that North Borneo belonged to the heirs of

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<sup>194</sup> Lela Garner Noble, “The Moro National Liberation Front,” *Pacific Affairs*, 49 (3), 1976, 406-407.

<sup>195</sup> Patricio Abinales, “State Authority and Local Powers in Southern Philippines” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1997), 466.

<sup>196</sup> W. K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 74.



the Sultan.<sup>197</sup> The Philippine claim over Sabah dates back to 1922, 1950, 1962 and to 1963 when then President Diosdado Macapagal asserted a claim to Sabah based on the historic right or legal title clause of the 1935 Philippine Constitution.

When Marcos came to power as President in 1965, he planned the groundwork in regaining Sabah as part of Philippine territory and organized a clandestine operation code-named Project Merdeka- ostensibly to infiltrate Sabah<sup>198</sup> and plant rebellion in that island state. The word *merdeka* is an Indo-Malayan term meaning “to set free” or simply “freedom.” The plan was to organize a rebellion among the Tausogs in Sabah whereupon the Philippine military would airlift thousands of troops to Sabah with the overt purpose to “protect the rebellious Tausogs from the Malaysians who usurped the Island State from the Sultanate of Sulu which is a part of the Philippine sovereignty.”<sup>199</sup>

In 1967, under the cloud of complete secrecy, Muslim boys in Sulu were recruited with the promise they would be part of an elite unit in the Armed Forces. From August to December 1967, about 180 Tausogs and Samals, aged 18 to 30, were trained in a secret camp on Simunul Island<sup>200</sup> and later moved to Corregidor Island for specialized training.<sup>201</sup> The intense training included mountaineering, survival techniques, and the use of sophisticated communication equipment, weapons, and explosives. The recruits performed simulated patrols, raids, ambushes, and infiltration. They specialized in demolition, sabotage, assassination as well as jungle survival.

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<sup>197</sup> Paridah Abd. Samad, and Darusalam Abu Baker, ‘Malaysia-Philippines Relations,’ *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 6, June 1992, 556 -557.

<sup>198</sup> On 13 September 1963 UN Referendum over Sabah and Sarawak on Sabahans voted to join the Federation of Malaysia despite objections filed by Indonesia and the Philippines in the United Nations.

<sup>199</sup> Norodin Alonto Lucman, *Moro Archives: A History of Armed Conflicts in Mindanao and East Asia* (Quezon City: FLC Press Inc., 2000), 155,

<sup>200</sup> Simunul is a picturesque island-town of Tawi-Tawi. It is a landmark in Philippine history, being home to the first mosque in the Philippines, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Simunul is the last town before Sabah and on a clear day, Sabah is visible from the island.

<sup>201</sup> Corregidor was the last bastion of Filipino-American resistance against invading Japanese forces. It was the site of many deaths and some describe its history as written in blood. Today, it is a tourist destination, with the battle ruins well preserved.

In March 1968, a mutiny on the island was reported where 14 Muslims were killed and 17 others missing.<sup>202</sup> The government never made the cause of the execution public. The testimony of the lone survivor, Jibin Arola, made for a shocking and chilling revelation. It was claimed that “they were ordered shot because they refused to follow orders to attack Sabah.”<sup>203</sup> The military authorities sensing the negative impact of the leakage of the clandestine plan decided to execute the recruits en masse so that no one could tell the story.

The Jabidah incident was the most important event that sparked the Muslim uprising<sup>204</sup> and it had two significant political effects. First, the Muslims were enraged at the Marcos regime for its low regard for Moro lives. In Sulu, the incident had become a personal tragedy. Second, the Malaysian government was inflamed by the Machiavellian scheme of the Marcos government which sought to reestablish diplomatic relations. Similarly, Malaysian authorities responded drastically to the point of placing the country on war footing.

## **B. THE MUSLIM INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT**

The Jabidah incident reached its nadir when the court martial acquitted the accused military personnel. Expectedly, Muslims together with several organizations denounced the verdict as a whitewash, and accused the Marcos government of criminal intentions against the Moros. Describing the incident as the “worst crime of the century,” Muslim militants organized anti-government protests and demonstrations. These mass actions already had revolutionary undertones.

Two months after the alleged execution of the Moro recruits, Datu Udtog Matalam, one of the most prominent Moro datu politicians and famed guerrilla leader against Japan, founded the Muslim (later Mindanao) Independence Movement (MIM). With Cotabato as the core of the movement, Matalam accused the government of pursuing the “systematic extermination” of the Muslims. Declaring independence from the Republic of the Philippines, the MIM manifesto

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<sup>202</sup> George, 123.

<sup>203</sup> Jubair, 123.

<sup>204</sup> George, 122.

asserted “its desire to secede from the Republic of the Philippines, in order to establish an Islamic State<sup>205</sup> that shall embody their ideals and aspiration, conserve and develop their patrimony, their Islamic heritage under the blessings of the Islamic Universal brotherhood.” It called on all Muslims to pursue a jihad to change the Moroland into a Darul Islam.<sup>206</sup>

The MIM’s creation has evoked fears and apprehension among the Christians and in many isolated Christian areas, settlers evacuated to more populated Christian centers for safety. Others preferred to stand fast and were determined to fight and defend their established productive farms and businesses. Similarly, disturbed by the reports that Muslim youths are undergoing “months of rigid training” in Malaysia, some Christian political leaders began meeting together to take appropriate actions to what they perceived as a Moro uprising. Reportedly, in September 1970, seven Christian Ilongo political leaders calling themselves “Christian datus” organized the *Ilaga* (rats) Movement which was later led by Feliciano Luces better known as “Toothpick.”<sup>207</sup>

### **C. VIOLENCE IN COTABATO AND LANA O**

From mid-1970 to 1971, fighting erupted between Muslims and Christians in Cotabato and Lanao del Norte where the greatest concentrations of settlers were located.<sup>208</sup> The Muslim groups, called “Barracudas” and “Blackshirts” were organized to counter the Christian armed vigilantes called Ilagas. The Blackshirts were allegedly linked with MIM of Datu Matalam and operated in the province of Cotabato. The Barracudas were organized by Congressman Ali Dimaporo and

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<sup>205</sup> The territory covered in the declaration was the contiguous southern part of the Philippines, namely: the provinces of South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao Sur, Lanao Norte, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan.

<sup>206</sup> Eliseo R. Mercado, *Southern Philippines Question: Challenge of Peace and Development* (Cotabato: Notre Dame Press, 1999).

<sup>207</sup> George, 145-147.

<sup>208</sup> Cotabato in 1939 was 55% Muslim, 45% Christian; by 1948 the figures were 55% and 65%. The northern part of Lanao province was inundated before and after WWII by Christian migrants mostly from the Visayas. Lanao was divided into two in 1959 with Lanao del Sur remaining solidly Muslim and Lanao del Norte mostly Christian. The 1970 population data in Cotabato shows 63% are Christians and 37% are Muslim while the status in both Lanao provinces remained unchanged.

operated in the province of Lanao. Meanwhile, the Ilagas started as self-defense units to defend Christian communities. However, the Ilagas later degenerated into a lawless group as time passed.<sup>209</sup>

By the end of 1970, the fighting between these rival groups had caused the closure of schools in many areas, disruption of the local economy, many casualties, and mass evacuation of thousands of innocent victims. The misery on all sides was terrible. The Social Welfare Administration reported that about 30,000 had abandoned their homes and farms for safer areas.<sup>210</sup>

The government deployed additional military and constabulary units to restore order by preventing any confrontation between the warring groups. As Christians pleaded for protection, town after town were placed under Constabulary control. The Moros leaders accused the Constabulary of taking sides with the Christians. Muslim leaders suspected that the Ilagas were in constant collusion with the constabulary in the area.<sup>211</sup>

After Jabidah, the most controversial event was the Manili incident. This took place on 19 June 1971 when 65 Muslim men, women, and children were executed by Ilagas inside the mosque in Barrio Manili, Carmen, North Cotabato.<sup>212</sup> This incident is serious and symbolic to the Muslims because it took place in a mosque compound. It was viewed as an act of religious humiliation. After meeting between the late Libyan Information and Foreign Minister, Saleh Bouyasser and Moro leaders, Bouyasser recommended to his government that help be extended to the Moro people. In July, representatives of different groups of Muslim leaders signed a manifesto in which they vowed before God to preserve their communities and lands. Likewise, cries of “genocide” began to be heard from Muslim leaders.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> McAmis, 46.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>211</sup> Gowing, 192.

<sup>212</sup> Che Man, 75.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

The armed violence in Cotabato spread into the Lanao provinces. In Wao, Lanao del Sur a grenade exploded inside a mosque on 4 July 1971 and over 60 Moro homes were burned by Ilagas. Thousands of Maranao Muslims were evacuated from the mountains to Lake Lanao. Later, Christians in Wao were ambushed and homes were burned down in retaliation. As the elections drew near, fighting between the Barracudas and Ilagas became intense. This resulted in a large-scale evacuation of both Muslims and Christians. By September 1971, about 50,000 evacuees were moved to safe areas. Together with the evacuees from Cotabato and Bukidnon, over 100,000 evacuees were displaced from their homes.<sup>214</sup> A month later, 17 soldiers of a 22-man constabulary patrol were killed in an ambush by Barracudas in Magsaysay, Lanao del Norte. The following day, 66 Muslims were killed in a skirmish in the same town.<sup>215</sup>

In November in Tacub, Kauswagan a group of unarmed Moro voters returning from the special election in Magsaysay were fired upon by government troops. About 40 Muslims were killed and about 50 others were wounded with no casualties on the government side. An investigation was conducted by the National Bureau of Investigation, and in March 1972, the charges were dropped against the three civilians and five soldiers for “lack of evidence.” The disposition of the remaining 16 soldiers was never reported.<sup>216</sup> This incident further contributed to the sense of injustice, confirming the feelings among Moros that their persecutors enjoyed the support of the establishment.

The conflict between the warring groups for control of the region intensified during the 1971 elections. The result of the 1971 political exercise was disastrous for the Muslim elite as political power shifted from Muslims to Christians in many parts of the Moroland. For the first time in the Province of Cotabato, the City of Cotabato and many Cotabato municipalities elected

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<sup>214</sup> McAmis, 48.

<sup>215</sup> Gowing, 194.

<sup>216</sup> McAmis, 49.

Christian candidates.<sup>217</sup> The leadership changes increased the level of rivalry between the Moros and Christian groups, and further intensified the degree of violence attracting the attention of Islamic nations abroad.<sup>218</sup>

In May 1972, new fighting erupted in Balabagan, Lanao del Sur and about 5,000, mostly Christians, were evacuated to safe areas. Similarly, fears and tensions occurred in the cities of Iligan and Marawi prompting Christian families in Marawi to evacuate the city while Muslim families evacuated Iligan. These new tensions occurred in areas where Christians and Muslims lived together. The conflict spread in Zamboanga del Sur. Reports also had circulated on the presence of training camps with foreign instructors in Sulu. The economic dislocations and hardships brought about by the evacuations of families of both groups further intensified the resentment between the Muslims and Christians, and deepened the rift between them.

#### **D. DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW**

The civil war that was unfolding between the Christian settlers and Moro people soon spun out of control without a sign that the violence would abate. Invoking the power under the Philippine constitution, on 21 September 1971, Ferdinand Marcos placed the entire country under Martial Law. He accused the Moros of instigating rebellion in Mindanao with Christian vigilantes exacerbating the peace and security problems in the region and also asserted that lawlessness was perpetrated by Philippine Communists.<sup>219</sup> He was quoted as stating that the lawlessness in the southern Philippines had resulted "... in the killing of over 100 civilians and about 2000 armed Muslims and Christians, not to mention the more than five hundred thousand of injured, displaced, and

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<sup>217</sup> Mercado, *Southern Philippines Question*, 26.

<sup>218</sup> Noble, "The Moro National Liberation Front," 410.

<sup>219</sup> Yong Mun Cheong, "Political Structures of the Independent States," *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. 4, World War II to the present ed. by Nicholas Tarling, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 97.

homeless persons as well as the great number of casualties among our government troops and the paralyzation of the economy of Mindanao and Sulu.”<sup>220</sup>

With Martial Law, Marcos launched the “September 21 Movement” in 1972 where he proclaimed the need for a “revolution from the center” where the state would initiate fundamental changes in society. This transformation envisioned the reduction of the gap between the poor and the rich, “if only for the sake of social stability.” In reality, however, the Marcos regime failed to fulfill these goals because political order and stability were given priority sacrificing fundamental human rights and freedom.

An advocate of maximum government, Marcos shut down the era of pluralistic politics that had existed since the Commonwealth period. Martial Law dismantled the democratic structure. Centralized state power increased with the abolition of Congress and the emasculation of the Supreme Court. As checks and balances melted, the state’s predatory leanings became more conspicuous as the state’s interests were equated to that of the Marcos clan and cronies. Marcos sustained his hold on power by overplaying the security problem, which is a result of his misrule.<sup>221</sup>

In some parts of the archipelago, many Filipinos welcomed Martial Law for it improved the peace and order situation. Others opposed it for it stifled democratic freedom. In Mindanao, a great number of Moros interpreted it as a ruse perpetrated to destroy their Muslim faith.<sup>222</sup> President Marcos decreed the immediate surrender of firearms. This imposition drew sharp resistance for it would be tantamount to capitulation and removal of an important status symbol of the Moros. Moreover, the Moros feared that their unarmed communities would be defenseless against government-backed Ilagas.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> *Philippine Sunday Express*, 24 September 1972, 7.

<sup>221</sup> Noel M. Morada and Christopher Collier, “The Philippines: State Versus Society?” in ed. Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 554.

<sup>222</sup> George, 190.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

The Muslim rebels, the communist insurgents and the moderate opposition groups, challenged the legitimacy of the Marcos authoritarian regime. With no median available, the imposition of authoritarian rule restricted the political activity of the people. The choice was either to accept the new system or conduct revolutionary struggle against the regime. Martial law had been an exacerbating variable and not the consequence of the Moro revolt.<sup>224</sup> The Moros, feeling threatened by the political development in Manila, were left with the option of resuming armed confrontation with the government.

Noble articulated the consequences of Martial Law and the concomitant government attempts to disarm the Moros, thus:

Marcos' declaration of martial law broadened the base of support and determined timing of the resort to warfare by the core-group of Muslim radicals. Three characteristics of martial law were critical. First, the centralization of the regime left power almost exclusively in 'Christian hands: Marcos, his family and associates; 'technocrats' in Manila; and the military. Second, by restricting the range of legitimate political activity the regime left as options only the acceptance of the regime and its promises, or anti-regime revolutionary activities. Third, the regime's immediate moves to collect guns from civilians meant that compliance removed the potential for an eventual resort to force. Thus both Muslims who had been frustrated under the old system but had been able to channel their frustration into nonviolent political activities, and opportunists ready to seize any chance to achieve immediate goals – for power, wealth, or pride – became willing to join the radicals.<sup>225</sup>

Armed defiance to martial law first occurred a few days before the 21 October 1972 deadline for the decreed surrender of guns. Fanatical Moro fighters calling themselves the "Mindanao Revolutionary Council for Independence," numbering from 500 to 1,000, simultaneously attacked the Mindanao State University, the provincial headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary and the Pantar Bridge that separates the two Lanao provinces. The rebels gained control of the radio station, the school campus, and broadcast inflammatory propaganda and pleaded for support from fellow Muslims. The message making a sensational

<sup>224</sup> Marites Dañguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, 2000), 30.

<sup>225</sup> Noble, 411-412.



impact both at home and abroad stated that “since the Spanish times the government of the Philippines had always been against the Muslims and that it is necessary to overthrow the government so that there would be no restrictions on the practice of Islam.” The battle between the government troops and the attacking forces lasted 24 hours, at which time the government reestablished control of the city and the uprising ended. The rebels withdrew to the hills and took several Christians as hostages who were later killed. When the war was over, many Christians left the city.<sup>226</sup>

After the Muslim attack in Marawi City, armed violence spread in other parts of Lanao, Cotabato, Zamboanga and the Sulu archipelago. In November 1972, the Moro rebels received sizeable quantities of arms in Jolo and in Tawi-tawi, and in the succeeding months, full scale attacks were conducted in these islands. On 29 November, bloody fighting erupted in Basilan and by January 1973, the rebels were in control of about 80% of the island. In April 1973, violence flared up in the Davao areas, a former area of disturbance. On 07 February 1974, MNLF forces numbering 5,000 stormed the Jolo town, seat of the Sultanate of Sulu. The rebels occupied the town for two days before the government troops regained control. This large-scale battle brought the complete destruction of the town and economic misery to the Muslim population.

#### **E. THE EMERGENCE OF THE MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT**

Appalled and incensed by the Jabidah incident and inspired by the spirit of the MIM, a small group of Muslim intellectuals and students in Manila began conspiring and preparing anti-government activities, including guerilla movement with the aim to secede the Moroland from the republic.<sup>227</sup> The MIM was short lived and it was never more than a local movement in Cotabato, but it ignited the Moros’ hearts and minds to yearn for independence from the Republic of the Philippines. Young Moro students and professionals began to organize and conduct anti-government demonstrations and rallies in Manila. From this group

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<sup>226</sup> McAmis, 52-53.

<sup>227</sup> Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1980), 192.

emerged the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) whose leaders included Nur Misuari of Sulu (then a faculty member of the University of the Philippines) and Abul Khar Alonto of Lanao del Sur (then a law student at the San Beda College).

Barely four months after the Corregidor incident, 92 young Muslims were sent to Sabah, Malaysia to undergo “special forces” training which included guerilla warfare, intelligence and counter-intelligence, demolition, weapons and jungle survival under Malaysian officers. Most of the early trainees were Marxist inspired Muslim students committed to organizing a radical separatist movement. During their period of training, the radicals formed a small group for a political discussion and analysis of Moro history and aspirations of an independent state. During this short period, they organized a seven-man Provisional Central Committee electing Nur Misuari as Chairman and Abul Khayr Alonto as Vice Chairman. This organ was established without the knowledge of Rashid Lucman and other leaders who had recruited them because the new leaders wanted to disassociate the MNLF from the traditional Muslim leadership and organization.<sup>228</sup>

Misuari’s vision for Moros rested on the principle of an egalitarian society requiring the restructuring of power relations within the Moro community. Originally, the MNLF:

... moved to identify itself with the worldwide Muslim ummah and consolidated an important foundation for the Moro vision. As a result, the project was able to rely on the social apparatuses that supported Islam for generations... drew its strength principally from to goals it came to be associated with: Islamization and the attainment of social justice. Islam was the unifying concept of Moro identity. Without it, there would be little that would bind together the 13 or so ethno-linguistic groups considered as comprising the Moro nation.<sup>229</sup>

In an interview with a commander in the MNLF in 1974, he identified three factors for the creation of the MNLF: “the Corregidor Massacre, land grabbing,

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<sup>228</sup> Che Man, 78.

<sup>229</sup> Eric U. Gutierrez, *The Re-Imagination of the Bangsa Moro: 30 Years Hence*, Institute for Popular Democracy (Manila, Philippines): available at [[http://www.ipd.ph/pub/wip/reimagining\\_bangsamoro-e\\_gutierrez.shtml](http://www.ipd.ph/pub/wip/reimagining_bangsamoro-e_gutierrez.shtml)]; accessed 14 October 2003.

and the disappointment of the broad masses toward government failure to solve social, political and most of all, economic problems.”<sup>230</sup> Some MNLF leaders sympathized with the organization for “national identity” but regarded Jabidah as having a “galvanizing effect.”

Upon the arrival of the first batch of trained guerillas to the Philippines, Congressman Rashid Lucman, who made the training arrangement in Malaysia, organized the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO). Lucman apparently provided the original patronage and external networks for the younger group led by Misuari. The BMLO considered itself to be the umbrella organization of all liberation forces. Logically, Rashid Lucman became the head of the Supreme Executive Council with Macapanton Abbas as secretary, Nur Misuari being appointed as head of the military committee in for Sulu, Abul Khayr Alonto the head for Lanao, and Udtog Matalam, Jr. for Cotabato.<sup>231</sup>

Later, the inevitable happened. Lucman and the radical Misuari broke the relationship. Apparently, the ideological differences and the style of Lucman’s leadership were the reasons for the split. The breakaway happened when Lucman learned of the underground organization, the MNLF, to which Misuari channelled funds and logistics. The BMLO’s leadership accused the MNLF of betrayal and counter-revolution. At this time, the MNLF had already consolidated networks with various militant Muslim organizations in the Philippines, and with Qaddafi and Mustapha as the primary benefactors.<sup>232</sup>

The MNLF fought primarily to defend Muslim communities against the Ilagas and it became a “household name” among the Muslims. At the start, the MNLF organized its fighting units covering a particular area, independent from the local units already in operation. Its membership soon increased and emerged

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<sup>230</sup> Interview with Commander Ulangutan, a Bangsa Moro Commander in Tawi-tawi, April 1974, p. 2. Mimeographed copies of the interview were circulated in the southern Philippines; though they carried no identification of the person who did the interviewing, there are reports that the journalist was Frank Gould, who disappeared in late 1974 and see also Noble, (1976), 409.

<sup>231</sup> Che Man, 78.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

as the significant voice of the Muslims' grievances and aspiration. When the MNLF came out in the open, it attracted international attention particularly in the Muslim world.<sup>233</sup>

The MNLF is a loosely knit organization. It is organized with parallel political and military structures. Its political organ is composed of a central committee of 20 members, a political bureau, a propaganda and intelligence bureau, and provincial and barrio committees. A Chairman, who is selected from among its members and provincial committees, heads the Central Committee. The military component, Bangsa Moro Army (BMA), is headed by the field marshals under but not directly supervised by the central committee. At the provincial level, the rebel army is also led by a field marshal and under him are zone commanders in designated municipalities. The rebel army provided six months training for its recruits, which included political education.

The provincial revolutionary committees were organized in different Moro provinces and were divided into three major groups: Sulu, Kotawato, and Lanao. The groupings represented the three major ethno-cultural groups: Tausugs, Maguindanaos and Maranaos. The provincial committees were tasked to consolidate the existing Moro fighters within their respective areas, to recruit and train fighters, and carry out the war.<sup>234</sup>

Under the leadership of the MNLF, the various Muslim ethno-linguistic groups attained a measure of unity. Historical disunity has defined the Moros as Maranao, Maguindanao and Tausog: who were unable to bond together for a common cause. The individual's level of support for the MNLF was dependent upon which ethno-linguistic group one was connected with, or to which clan or family one was related. Moros are divided into locally-educated youth, foreign trained and educated Islamic radicals. This diversity in the Front's membership resulted in unclear ideology which ultimately spoiled the growth of Muslim unity in future dealings with the Philippine authorities. Similarly, the diverging ideology

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<sup>233</sup> Gowing and McAmis, 213.

<sup>234</sup> Che Man, 82.

and objectives led to the eventual breaking up of the front.<sup>235</sup> The more secular MNLF and other splinter groups made concessions and compromised with the government, while the more radical members later embraced the fundamental Islamic line.

The Muslim secessionist conflict reached its peak in 1974. Estimates of armed men actively fighting have ranged from 5,000 to 30,000. One rebel estimated that about 55 percent of the Moro population supports the MNLF, 15 percent supports the government, and the remainder is neutral.<sup>236</sup> In 1975, there were about 1.8 million Muslims in Mindanao.

#### **F. THE MNLF LEADERSHIP**

The leadership of the Muslim secessionist movement has been provided primarily by the Moro National Liberation Front and its Central Committee was formally formed in Libya in 1974 comprising about thirteen members. The MNLF leadership started with three prominent Moro student activists – Nur Misuari, Abul Khayer Alonto and Hashim Salamat.

Nur Misuari, chairman of the central committee, is a former political science instructor at the University of the Philippines. Misuari grew up in extreme poverty and was granted a college scholarship. He became the embodiment of campus charisma through his campus activities particularly as a debater. He became one of the founding fathers of the *Kabataan Makabayan* (Patriotic Youth) or KM<sup>237</sup> and became the Chairman of the Western Mindanao sector of the youth organization. The KM became widely known as a Marxist front organization and it was the first opposition group to be outlawed upon declaration of Martial Law.<sup>238</sup>

Although Misuari intensively studied Marx, he was unable to rise above his traditionalist religious background. He became a converted anti-capitalist on a socialist mission. To resolve the dialectics of communism and Islam, Misuari's

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<sup>235</sup> Harber, 50-51.

<sup>236</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 June 1975, 5.

<sup>237</sup> The Kabataaan Makabayan (KM) was founded by Jose Maria Sison, the Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP). KM drew membership from students and ideologues.

<sup>238</sup> Che Man, 77

group argued that everything Chairman Mao had proposed, the Prophet Mohammad had already proposed. Misuari and his group embraced Islam and chose to preach their ideology in the name of Islam because many of the Moros were too strongly rooted in Islamic faith to accept the ungodly tenets of Marxism. In another aspect, they maintained their radical thoughts and ardently studied Maoist tactics and techniques.<sup>239</sup>

In 1967, Misuari became instrumental behind the organization of the Philippine Nationalist league and the editor of its official organ, the *Philippine Muslim News*. At this stage of the organization, he could not ignore the need for political support and resources to advance action programs. Consequently, he became an associate of Congressman Rascid Lucman, an influential political boss of the Lanao province and began building his network among the traditional leaders of the region. Despite the support of the Muslim elites, Misuari's visions of justice for Filipino Muslims involved the Marxist principles of egalitarianism which entail the restructuring of the power relations in Muslim society by eliminating the traditional leaders. Having found a patron, Misuari took the opportunity to undergo the first batch of guerilla training program in Malaysia. While abroad, he cultivated the significant contacts to organize the MNLF as an underground organization in 1972. Misuari married Desdemona Tan who is a niece of the wife of Salih Utulalum, a long time leader in Sulu.<sup>240</sup>

Misuari organized the MNLF central committee around university men, with little participation from the field commanders left fighting in Mindanao. Yussop Abbas, a theology student, was given the education portfolio, and Hatimil Hassan, a student of medicine in Cairo, was designated as the "minister of health." Assad Asani, a former government official, was placed in charge of the "information ministry" while Uztadz Abijari, who was studying in Mecca, was named the head of the "Supreme Court." Appointed as the legal advisers were Abdul Hamid Lucman, a former judge and Hadji Hassan Jamil, a lawyer.<sup>241</sup> A

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<sup>239</sup> George, 198.

<sup>240</sup> Noble, "Moro National Liberation Front," 415.

<sup>241</sup> George, 230.

five-man junta was also organized constituting Yossop Abbas, Gaipur Ali, a student in Islamic law and jurisprudence, and history and Abdul Baki Abubakar, along with Misuari and Hashim Salamat.

The vice-chairman of the central committee was Abdul Khar Alonto, a co-founder of the MNLF. He is a member of a known Maranao family and was a former law student at San Beda College in Manila, and was elected vice mayor of Marawi City in 1971. He stayed in Mindanao and was a field marshal in command of the central Mindanao based in Lanao. Like Alonto, tough local leaders, Usman Sali and Al Caluang, were part of the Committee of Thirteen. Usman was Sulu's most powerful leader figure. When martial law was declared he quickly became a field marshal of the MNLF. Al Caluang, a field marshal, was popular and one of the more prominent commanders of the NNLF.<sup>242</sup>

Another famous MNLF leader was Hashim Salamat, who later broke away from the Front because he favored autonomy over independence. Salamat and Alonto, together with Misuari, were among the first batch of Muslim radicals to covertly undergo training in Malaysia. Like Alonto, Salamat came from an affluent family and scions of a royal family. Corruption among traditional politicians in Cotabato, who were his relatives, caused Salamat to strongly dislike them, and he longed for changing the system.<sup>243</sup>

#### **G. EXTERNAL INTERVENTION**

When bloody incidents made news in the late 1960s, many Islamic countries were alarmed about the plight of the Muslim Filipinos. As reports of violence swelled, they began to believe that the Moros were being persecuted. Their empathy was further intensified when Filipino Muslim radicals sent out appeals for support. Various Islamic organizations made pleas to the United Nations Organization to conduct investigations concerning the charges of genocide.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 228.

In particular, the Manili incident caught the attention of Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi.<sup>244</sup> Moved by the gruesome event, Qaddafi warned that Libya “will be compelled to shoulder its responsibilities towards the four million Muslims in the Philippines.” His ambassador to the UN insisted that the world body intervene to stop the senseless killings of Muslim Filipinos. Since this incident, the prospect of peace in the southern Philippines became firmly linked to Libya and other countries belonging to the Organization of Islamic Conference<sup>245</sup> (OIC).

Malaysia appears to have provided logistical support to the Moro rebels not so much because of Kuala Lumpur’s commitment to religious fraternity, but in response to the Philippines secret military plan to invade the contested territory of Sabah in the late 1960s. Kuala Lumpur sharply reacted to the Jabidah incident by promising the Moro leaders that, “they will train young Muslims from the Philippines on ‘special forces’ courses and they will give 10,000 arms with continuous supply of ammunitions and the necessary logistical support for 10,000 well-trained boys.”<sup>246</sup> At the federal level, the government of Malaysia aided the Muslim movement as a means of forcing Manila to abandon its Sabah claim. At the state level, Tun Datu Mustapha Harun, the chief Minister of Sabah, purportedly consented to the MNLF sanctuary and armed assistance in terms of training, supply, and communications purposes.<sup>247</sup> In 1969, 90 young Muslim Filipinos sailed to North Borneo for military training.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Vitug and Gloria, 60.

<sup>245</sup> Organization of the Islamic Conference is a 56-member organization, established in September 1969 during the First Conference of Head of Islamic States and Governments, in Rabat, Morocco. It represents more than 1.3 billion people, and its headquarters is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The main objectives of the Organization are to “strengthen Islamic Solidarity and cooperation in economic, social, cultural and knowledge among its members, to strengthen the Islamic Umah in striving to attain their national pride, freedom and rights, and to assist in the establishment of world peace and security based on justice.” OIC members include Libya, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Senegal, Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

<sup>246</sup> Lucman, 303.

<sup>247</sup> Che Man, 138-39.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.



The Malaysian Government denied that it gave support to the Moros. In Islamic conferences, it had adopted the facade of non-interference in the domestic affairs of the Philippines but it did not stop Mustapha from providing support to the Moro secessionists, perhaps fearing that Sabah would secede from the federation.<sup>249</sup>

Libya's support and intervention was primarily inspired by its commitment to Islamic brotherhood and the Quranic obligation to relieve the persecution of the *ummah*. Libya is believed to have provided about \$1 million to cover the expenses of some 300 Muslim recruits who were trained in Sabah in the early 1970s. After the declaration of martial law, Libya began to deliver funds, weapons, and other equipment to the MNLF under the leadership of Nur Misuari. The MNLF received about \$35 million from Libya and the other OIC countries between 1972 and 1975. Libya also attempted to persuade member states of the OIC to impose sanctions against the Marcos regime although with little success. However, Qaddafi's full support of the MNLF was later moderated under pressure from the OIC countries. Later, it played the role of mediator between Manila and the MNLF. The Tripoli agreement, signed in December 1976, provided for an autonomous government in the predominantly Muslim provinces of Mindanao.<sup>250</sup>

Saudi Arabia also played a mediating role in the Mindanao conflict since 1973 and provided both funds and sanctuary to different secessionist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Bangsa Moro Islamic Liberation Organization (BMILO). Through agencies such as the Muslim World League and Darul Ifta, Saudi Arabia granted contributions to a number of projects in the Muslim areas of Mindanao. In 1980, when the Marcos regime failed to satisfactorily implement the 1976 Tripoli agreement in good faith, Saudi Arabia temporarily halted its oil supply to the Philippines-an effective tool for

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<sup>249</sup> Astri Suhkre and Lela Garner Noble. "Muslims in the Philippines and Thailand," in *Ibid.*, eds., *Ethnic Conflict in International Relations*, ( New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1977), 178-212.

<sup>250</sup> Che Man, 140-41.

pressuring Manila to abide by the accord, as about 40 percent of the Philippine's oil requirement came from the Kingdom.<sup>251</sup>

Unlike many conventional revolutionary movements, the MNLF Central Committee operated outside the Mindanao. The primary function of the leaders was cultivating foreign support. It left the task of fighting and organizing to local leaders. It was a significant accomplishment of the Central Committee that the rebel organization continued to receive funds and other logistic support from Muslim countries and to obtain the recognition of the OIC.<sup>252</sup>

Misuari's MNLF was also provided support from Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini who said, "the victory of the Islamic revolution of Iran would not be complete until the oppressed Bangsa Moro Muslims in the southern Philippines won their victory." In November 1980, the MNLF was bestowed embassy status and the accompanying official recognition by Iran. To demonstrate its support to the Moro struggle, Iran cut off its oil supply to the Philippines, although only for a short period.<sup>253</sup>

Generally, Indonesia's policy have been non-interference and unlike, Malaysia, it did not support the Moro secessionist movement, although it tried to end the conflict. There were reports, however that the governor of Makasar provided support. Officially, Indonesia had been endorsing autonomy, not independence.<sup>254</sup> Their refusal to aid the rebels was the result of its experience with militant movements in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, Indonesia does not consider itself an Islamic state in the sense that Islam is not constitutionally considered as the religion that provides the ruling principles for the nation's policy. At the Islamic conferences, Indonesia consistently supported the Philippine government and asked Libya not to interfere in the conflict.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 141-142.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>254</sup> Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-Determination of Minorities in International Politics*, (London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1991), 174.

<sup>255</sup> Suhrke and Noble, 190.

The MNLF successfully secured moral and material assistance, with its commitment to Islamic ideology and revolutionary struggle which formed its basic link to Islamic countries pursuing a similar vision. Thus, with strong foreign support, the MNLF emerged as the leading revolutionary front of the Muslim Filipinos. Among the majority of Moros, the MNLF articulated their aspirations for self determination and independence.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Franciso L. Gonzales, "Sultans of a Violent Land," 114.

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## V. GOVERNMENT RESPONSES AND PEACE PROCESSES

### A. THE MARCOS PERIOD (1972 - 1986)

Initially Marcos adopted a “total war” policy against the MNLF and related groups deploying more than half of the AFP in Mindanao and Sulu. The conflict escalated into large-scale conventional warfare. In February 1974, Southcom conducted a full scale attack on the MNLF rebels who had taken control of Jolo in the biggest battle of the civil war in Mindanao. Cemcom hit the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) in Cotabato.<sup>257</sup> The Moro rebels tied up over 50 battalions of the AFP. From 1972-76, the bitter warfare waged by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front had resulted in approximately 50,000-60,000 deaths. Official government figures reveal that between 500,000 to million were considered internally displaced persons (IDP) and 200,000 sought refuge in the Malaysian state of Sabah.<sup>258</sup>

Marcos portrayed himself as a loyal and dependable American ally who needed continued U.S. support in the battle against insurgency. The growth of military assistance after 1972 shored up the military expenditures nearly nine times from 608 million pesos that year to 5.3 billion pesos in 1977. The military’s share of the national budget practically doubled to 22.6 percent in 1977. The Philippine military swelled to more than 113,000 in 1976 from just 35,000 in the early 1960s. Meanwhile, the Philippine police was reconstituted under centralized control and carried out counterinsurgency functions alongside with paramilitary forces.<sup>259</sup>

Later in the mid-1970s, the military response was accompanied by social and economic packages in an effort to win some of the MNLF supporters to the government’s side. Marcos issued decrees ordering relief and resettlement of

<sup>257</sup> The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) created two integrated commands: the Central Mindanao Command (Cemcom) for the Cotabato-Lanao areas, and Southern Command (Southcom), for the Zamboanga peninsula and the Sulu archipelago.

<sup>258</sup> Eliseo R. Mercado. “Culture, Economics and Revolt in Mindanao: The Origins of the MNLF and the Politics of Moro Separatism,” in Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S., eds., *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 162-163.

<sup>259</sup> Morada and Collier, 555.

refugees and a Presidential Task Force for the Reconstruction of Mindanao was constituted to rebuild areas destroyed by the conflict. To encourage and boost economic activities, he further created the Southern Philippines Development Administration.<sup>260</sup> Arabic instruction was allowed in some public schools in predominantly Muslim provinces, university scholarships for Muslims were expanded, a Code of Philippine Muslim Personal Law was promulgated which established Shariah courts as part of the national system of courts, the Philippine Amanah Bank was created to provide financial assistance to Muslim entrepreneurs on generous terms, and Muslim title to ancestral lands was recognized by law. Also, the regime expanded Muslim appointees to government positions.<sup>261</sup>

The tremendous pressure of the huge costs associated with enlarged military combat actions and the likelihood of sanctions by oil producing countries forced the Marcos regime into considering a negotiated settlement with the Muslim secessionists. In August 1973, Marcos allowed the visit of the delegates from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Somalia to the Southern Philippines to investigate the 'the plight of Muslims living in the Philippines.' The team concluded that political settlement could bring a cessation of the dispute and not the military and socio-economic approaches being undertaken by the regime.

Consequently, at the 5<sup>th</sup> ICFM in June 1974, the body called upon the Marcos regime to stop all actions that resulted in the killing of Muslims and the destruction of their property and places of worship. The OIC pressed upon the Philippine government "to find political and peaceful solution through negotiation with Muslim leaders, particularly with the representatives of the Moro National Liberation Front in order to arrive at a just solution to the plight of the Filipino Muslims within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines."<sup>262</sup> Indonesia's influential position in the OIC was significant in

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<sup>260</sup> Eric Gutierrez, "Chronology of Events," in Kristina Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch, eds., *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), xiv.

<sup>261</sup> David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1988), 159.

<sup>262</sup> Che Man, 143.

convincing the conferees to agree that secession is not the solution to the Muslim insurgency.<sup>263</sup> Similarly, the OIC urged the Philippine authorities to hold direct negotiations with the MNLF chairman Nur Misuari to commence the political process of ending the Mindanao problem. The OIC nonetheless denied the MNLF a belligerent status (same as that of the Palestinian Liberation Front).<sup>264</sup>

In the end, the Philippine government was compelled to negotiate. It could not disregard or crush the rebellion in the Southern Philippines, and it could not isolate the Front from its foreign Islamic supporters. The series of Islamic Conferences generally passed resolutions which were considered reasonable to the Philippine government and the Front. The resolutions restrained the MNLF from pressing its goal to secede. "The diplomatic restraint was also a clear signal to the Philippine government that the conference would not interfere with the internal affairs of another sovereign state."<sup>265</sup> The OIC exerted sustained pressure on the Marcos government to negotiate autonomy demands with the MNLF along with giving resistance.<sup>266</sup> The "Committee of Four," appointed by the Foreign Ministers' Conference to oversee negotiations, recommended that genuine autonomy was necessary in achieving justice for Muslim Filipinos.<sup>267</sup>

In 1975, Marcos built -up the government's diplomatic efforts by sending delegations to include special representative Imelda Marcos to Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria. The Philippines established friendly relations with Islamic countries and opened its embassy in Saudi Arabia, the United Emirates, Iran, Algeria, Lebanon and Kuwait. A well-planned diplomatic initiative was initiated aimed at stopping the flow of external support to the Muslim rebels. Likewise, the Philippines allied with the Arab cause in the United Nations to persuade Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. This action was carried

<sup>263</sup> H. Stockwin, "Marcos Gain Fame from the Muslims," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 July 1974, 10-11.

<sup>264</sup> Wurfel, 159-160.

<sup>265</sup> Eric S. Casino, *Mindanao Statecraft and Ecology: Moros, Lumads, and Settlers Across the lowland-Highland Continuum* (Cotabato City: Notre Dame University, 2000), 240.

<sup>266</sup> R. J. May, "The Moro Movement in Southern Philippines", *Ethnic Studies Report*. Vol. 6, No. 2, July 1988, 57.

<sup>267</sup> Noble, (1981), 1099.

out to win the friendship of the Arabs in order not to disrupt the supply of oil in the Philippines and to exert influence by stopping foreign aid to the Muslim rebels in Mindanao.<sup>268</sup>

The government efforts apparently had some success since there was a significant decrease in the supply of arms to the rebels. This event jibed the defeat of Tun Mustapha by Dato' Harris Salleh in the Sabah election in the middle of 1975.<sup>269</sup> In the field, local ceasefires were forged and defections increased. Under the policy of attraction, key rebel leaders were offered amnesty and other socio-economic incentives as well as government positions allowing them to give up arms with dignity. Some of those who surrendered were Amelil "Ronnie" Malaguio, Chairman of the Kutawato (Cotabato) Revolutionary Committee, and Abdul Hamid Lukman, member of the MNLF Central Committee and Misuari's legal adviser in Jeddah.<sup>270</sup>

Meanwhile, the series of Islamic Conferences generally passed resolutions which were considered reasonable to the Philippine government and the Front. The resolutions restrained the MNLF from pressing its aim to secede. "The diplomatic restraint was also a clear signal to the Philippine government that the conference would not interfere with the internal affairs of another sovereign state."<sup>271</sup> The OIC exerted sustained pressure on the Marcos government to negotiate autonomy demands with the MNLF along with giving resistance.<sup>272</sup> The "Committee of Four," appointed by the Foreign Ministers' Conference to oversee negotiations, recommended that genuine autonomy was necessary in achieving justice for Muslim Filipinos.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> David Wurfel, "Southeast Asian Alignments," *International Journal*, Volume 29, No. 3, Summer 1974, 452.

<sup>269</sup> Noble (1981), 1099.

<sup>270</sup> Gutierrez, "Chronology of Events," in eds. Kristine Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch, *Rebel Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in the Southern Philippines* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), xvi-xvii.

<sup>271</sup> Casino, 240.

<sup>272</sup> May, 57.

<sup>273</sup> Noble, (1981), 1099.



A series of conferences between representatives of the Philippine government and the Islamic Conference culminated in the visit by Imelda Marcos, the president's wife, to Tripoli in November 1976 and negotiations involving the Philippines, the Islamic Conference, and MNLF officials in Tripoli in December. Consequently, under the auspices of the powerful Organization of Islamic Conference, the Tripoli Agreement was signed by the two contending parties in conflict on 23 December 1976.

The negotiation and signing of the Tripoli Agreement is by itself a remarkable diplomatic triumph for the MNLF as it accorded them belligerent state status. The Philippine government also benefited enormously from the agreement as it provided a much needed breathing spell to recover from the consequences of the Mindanao war on the economy. The government was also able to bring home the Moro issue from the Middle East as well.<sup>274</sup>

The Tripoli Agreement was acclaimed as a significant development in the search for peaceful resolution of the southern Philippine dispute. A vital part of the accord was the separate ceasefire agreement between both parties that immediately put a halt to the war. The ceasefire was to be coordinated and observed by a committee comprised of representatives of the Philippine government, the MNLF and the OIC. The three salient features of the agreement are the following:<sup>275</sup>

- The establishment of the autonomous region in the Southern Philippines composed of 13 provinces and all villages and cities therein within the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of the Philippines;
- The agreement in principle of the powers of the autonomous region in local and regional affairs, especially on those that touch on the religion and culture of Islam as lived by the Moro peoples. A mixed committee is to be established composed of the official representatives of the Philippine Government and the MNLF with the participation of the Quadripartite Commission created by the OIC for the purpose. This committee is tasked with hashing out the

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<sup>274</sup> Eliseo R., Mercado "Culture, Economics and Revolt in Mindanao: The Origins of the MNLF: The Politics of Moro Separatism", in Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S., eds., *Armed Separatism Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), 1984.

<sup>275</sup> Mercado, *Southern Philippines in Question*, 28.

details of all the agreements in principle as contained in the Tripoli Agreement; and

- The insertion by the Philippine Government of the provision that will subject the said agreement to the constitutional processes of the Republic of the Philippines.

Provisionary arrangements for the peace settlement included autonomy for the Moros in thirteen provinces.<sup>276</sup> The autonomous government has the prerogative to establish courts and an administrative and educational system under Philippine law. Moreover, the autonomous government is structured to have a legislative assembly and executive council, an administrative system, and representation in the national government. Meanwhile, Muslim security forces would maintain peace and order in the designated autonomous areas while the national government would be responsible for foreign policy and national defense.<sup>277</sup>

However, the euphoria of peace was short lived because within a few months after signing the accord, both parties began accusing each other of breaching the provisions of the agreement. The stalemate arose due to disagreements over the meaning of autonomy and the MNLF insisted that the 13 provinces at once be proclaimed a single autonomous unit. On the other hand, Marcos maintained that certain “constitutional processes” had to be satisfied, including the conduct of a plebiscite in affected areas, because the majority of the inhabitants in some provinces were not Muslim. On March 1977, Imelda Marcos hurried to Libya to seek Qadaffi’s help and it was agreed to declare the thirteen provinces part of the autonomous region, appoint a provisional government, and hold a plebiscite to deal with administrative details.<sup>278</sup> Thus, on 25 March 1977, Marcos issued Proclamation 1628 establishing regional

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<sup>276</sup> The region was to consist of the following provinces: Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Davao del Sur and Palawan.

<sup>277</sup> Francisco L. Gonzales, “Sultan of a Violent Land,” in eds. Kristine Gaerlan and Mara Stankovitch, *Rebel Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in the Southern Philippines* (Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000), 115-116.

<sup>278</sup> *The Southwestern Philippines Question*, Second Edition, Philippines: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1977, 95-98.

autonomy in the Southern Philippines and created a provisional Regional Government that was mandated to prepare the constitutional processes required for the full operation of the agreed autonomous regional government.<sup>279</sup>

On 17 April 1977, a referendum on autonomy was held, with an overwhelming majority rejecting the merger of Region 9 and 10 into one autonomous region. Several other proposals that were dismissed by the electorates were naming the autonomous region the Bangsamoro Islamic Region, establishing the regional flag, official language and courts, and empowering the MNLF to organize separate security forces.<sup>280</sup> It was a resounding defeat for the MNLF because the Christians dominated the area numerically, economically and politically. The referendum understandably rebuffed any move to shift political power to the Muslims, particularly the MNLF.

The MNLF protested the conduct of the poll exercise and it was boycotted by a majority of the Muslims. Subsequently, the Tripoli Agreement ended in deadlock amid mutual allegations. Misuari accused the Marcos regime of unlawful actions including violations of the ceasefire, dividing the area into two autonomous regions and the demilitarization of the region.<sup>281</sup> At the 8<sup>th</sup> ICFM held in Tripoli, the MNLF was bestowed observer status by the OIC but failed to convince the body to impose economic sanctions against the Philippines. The foreign ministers expressed displeasure over the outcome of the agreement, but the ICFM simply urged the Quadripartite Commission to continue pursuing mediation efforts.

1977 was a breaking point in the history of the MNLF as it entered an era of disarray characterized by factional infighting and weakening of mass support. During this period, the Bangsa Moro Army was a depleted force as many had been killed and many others sought refuge in Sabah or in the Middle East while

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<sup>279</sup> The provinces included in Proclamation 1628 were: Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur in Region 9, Lanao del Norte, Lanao el Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat in Region 2, Palawan in Region 4, and Davao del Sur and South Cotabato Region 11.

<sup>280</sup> Casino, 239.

<sup>281</sup> Mercado (1984), 165.

37,000 availed themselves of the government's amnesty program. Of significance was the emergence of a split in the MNLF leadership. The division was reportedly attributed to personal differences and ambitions, diverse positions on the issue of autonomy and independence, and over the question of alternative strategies pursuing negotiations outside the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>282</sup> Similarly, insiders denounced that Misuari became inflexible and too domineering in the decision making process.<sup>283</sup> Others accused him of being corrupt and the MNLF of fast evolving toward a Marxist-Maoist orientation.

The MNLF Central Committee began to divide along ethno-linguistic lines. Forcing the division were ex-Senator Salipada Pendatun, a Maguindanao and ex-Representative Rashid Lucman, a Maranao. In Jeddah on 26 December 1977, Hashim Salamat declared an "Instrument of Takeover" of the MNLF leadership which was supported by both Pendatun and Lucman. Misuari countered by purging Abul Khar Alonto and Hashim Salamat.

Supported by the ethnic Maguindanaos, the Salamat faction became a separate organization named the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which advocated a more moderate and reconciliatory approach toward the government. Salamat, an Islamic former scholar at the Cairo University, wanted to stress the Islamic orientation in the struggle for autonomy and self determination. Salamat shaped the MILF into an organization advancing the creation of a genuine Islamic state in the Southern Philippines governed completely by the dictates of the Qur'an.<sup>284</sup>

The MILF underscores the need for a strong autonomous government in a Bangsamoro homeland and defined its goal as "the establishment of a democratic system of government with equal representation in the executive, legislative and judicial departments following the principle of elections...centering

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<sup>282</sup> May, 52-84.

<sup>283</sup> Gonzales, "Sultans in violent land," 116.

<sup>284</sup> Luga, 45.

on self determination, except in foreign affairs and national defense.” His leadership enjoyed the support of more fundamentalist Muslims particularly from his tribe – Maguindanaos.<sup>285</sup>

The Bangsa Moro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) is the military organization of the MILF.<sup>286</sup> The Chairman of the MILF commands the BIAF. The area of operations of the BIAF mainly covers the central and western regions of Mindanao. The MILF has swelled from about 6,000 in 1990 to a peak of 15,000 in 1999.<sup>287</sup>

Similarly, Abul Khayr Alonto, Vice-Chairman of the MNLF, and his followers gave up arms, in March 1978. He was removed from the MNLF Central Committee because he did not favor Misuari’s maneuvering for total independence.<sup>288</sup> In 1982, Abdul Khayr Alonto became the Speaker of the Region XII Assembly. He published a booklet, addressed to President Marcos, which censured the operations of the autonomous governments and recommended the merger of the two regions and the granting of ‘a meaningful autonomy’. Alonto was enlisted into the Marcos political party ticket for the 1982 Regional Assembly election.<sup>289</sup>

With the removal of Salamat and Alonto, Dimasangkay Pundato, Chairman of the Ranao Revolutionary Committee, was promoted to Vice-Chairman of the MNLF. However, in March 1982 Pundato announced the formation of the MNLF-Reformist Group (MNLF-RG). Pundato’s breakaway from the MNLF was the result of a dispute with Misuari over the latter’s reversion to MNLF’s original goal of secession and independence.<sup>290</sup> Like most of the Moro

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<sup>285</sup> R. J. May and Francisco Nemenzo, *The Philippines After Marcos* (Bailing & Sons Ltd., Worcester, 1985), 120.

<sup>286</sup> The BIAF was vastly patterned after the structure of a conventional armed force such as the Armed Forces of Philippines. Its chief of staff provides overall supervision to ten functional staffs, a General Headquarters division, a National Guard division, the Bangsamoro Women Auxiliary Islamic armed forces and field divisions.

<sup>287</sup> Luga, 47.

<sup>288</sup> George, 263.

<sup>289</sup> Che Man, 156.

<sup>290</sup> Che Man, 85.

groups, the MNLF-RG aimed to create an Islamic community in the Muslim provinces through the gradual implementation of the Sharia. The Reformists group is mostly comprised of traditional Maranao aristocrats with a secular education. Pundato went further by seeking support from the United States for the peaceful resolution of the Mindanao dispute.<sup>291</sup> During the Aquino regime, Pundato came home from exile in 1987 and eventually became the executive director of the Office for Muslim Affairs (OMA).<sup>292</sup>

The Arab countries were split on their support to the rebel groups. The MNLF's main sources of aid were Libya, Syria, Iran and the OIC.<sup>293</sup> The MILF received support from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Kuwait and Malaysia. On the other hand, the MNLF-RG obtained support from Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Starting in 1977, international support to the MNLF decreased. However, the OIC continued to support Misuari's leadership.<sup>294</sup>

Meanwhile, at the 15<sup>th</sup> ICFM in 1984, the foreign ministers reaffirmed their commitment to respect the territorial integrity of the Philippines and continued to refuse support for Misuari's separatist position.<sup>295</sup> Similarly, at the second Bangsa Moro Congress in 1986, the MNLF leadership conceded to the pressure and gave up the demand for secession and independence.<sup>296</sup>

Marcos adopted a two-prong strategy, i.e., using conventional military force to stop the rebellion and employing non-military measures mostly aimed in bringing economic reforms that would benefit the masses. However, despite all efforts to promote the socio-economic and political well being of the Moros, the conflict remained. It was observed that the Moros masses accrue few real

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<sup>291</sup> Vitug and Gloria, 35.

<sup>292</sup> Vitug and Gloria, 38.

<sup>293</sup> In 1985, Misuari's MNLF faction reportedly forms close relations with Iran. Viewing this relationship a potential threat to U.S. interests, the State Department and the Pentagon opened up lines of communication with the MNLF Reformist Group. Pundato was invited to Washington in 1985.

<sup>294</sup> May, 58.

<sup>295</sup> Lela Garner Noble, "Mindanao: A Perspective from Philippine Frontier," a paper for a conference on Southeast Asian Studies and International Business Northern Illinois University, 31 May – June 1983, 4.

<sup>296</sup> May, 59.

benefits and little was achieved to alleviate the fears of Muslims, and that real motive was to benefit the Christian settlers. Similarly, the military campaigns offset the limited economic gains.

The Tripoli agreement was not fully implemented because of the lack of the commitment from the Marcos regime and the unrealistic demand of the MNLF.<sup>297</sup> Thomas McKenna observes the agreement

provided a much needed breathing spell from the economic drain of the war and considerable diplomatic pressure for settlement coming from the Middle East. It is doubtful that President Marcos ever sincerely intended to implement the agreement as signed.<sup>298</sup>

Nonetheless, the Tripoli Agreement became the benchmark for future negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro rebels. Violent encounters continued but at a lower intensity than in 1972-76, and negotiations were not revived until Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency in 1986.

At the national scene, Marcos' dictatorial rule provoked mass discontent throughout the Philippines, expressed in the 1980s by large demonstrations, general strikes and a rapid growth of support for the insurgents. At the same time, by clinging to a monopoly of political power, Marcos had alienated his political and economic rivals. In February 1986, he was overthrown by a combination of popular uprising and military revolt.

## **B. AQUINO PERIOD (1986-1992)**

On February 1986, President Corazon C. Aquino came to power on the wave of anti-Marcos protests triggered by the assassination of her husband, former Senator Benigno Aquino, the political archrival of Marcos. She had run for election and soon after her inauguration, her administration restored a system of electoral democracy. Likewise, she released 500 political prisoners and granted amnesty to the communist guerrillas in attempt to end the insurgency.<sup>299</sup> A new

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>298</sup> Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 168.

<sup>299</sup> Return to Democracy 1986 – 1998 available in, [[www.ualberta.ca/~vmitchel/fw10.html](http://www.ualberta.ca/~vmitchel/fw10.html)], accessed 7 November 2003.

constitution was drawn up in 1987, by a commission whose members were appointed by the President. Under her administration, the media restrictions were relaxed, and the number of NGOs mushroomed.

The “People Power” revolution of 1986 opened another possibility for genuine compromise among the different rebel groups. Various Muslim groups joined with the anti-Marcos forces in support of the regime change. “A communiqué issued after a general meeting of the MNLF leadership in Mindanao in March 1985, for example, reported a resolution that mujahideen were ready ‘to establish channels of communication and cooperation with opposition groups so as to hasten the downfall of the Marcos regime.’”<sup>300</sup> This commonality of interests is instrumental to the new climate of trust that would allow negotiations to begin.<sup>301</sup> In her pronouncement on 2 October 1987 on the peace policy in the Southern Philippines, President Aquino pushed an approach that was “not just political but (involves) all aspects of all aspects of development; not just the MNLF but all Muslim Filipinos; not just Muslim Filipinos but all of Mindanao.”<sup>302</sup>

Following the takeover of the Aquino government, talks with Nur Misuari began. Disregarding protocol, President Aquino personally met Nur Misuari on 5 September in Jolo to dramatize the government’s sincere effort in resolving peace in Mindanao. This historic event led the warring parties to agree to halt hostilities<sup>303</sup> and engage in dialogue with the Tripoli agreement and the regional autonomy as the starting point. In January 1987, the government and the MNLF reached a ceasefire. Under pressure from the OIC, the MNLF abandoned its aim of total independence for Muslim regions and accepted the offer of autonomy. At

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<sup>300</sup> R. J. May, “The Philippines under Aquino: A Perspective from Mindanao,” *Journal Institute of Muslim Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1987, 348.

<sup>301</sup> Jacques Bertrand, “Peace add Conflict in the Southern Philippines,” *Pacific Affairs*, University of Toronto, Canada, September 1999, 39.

<sup>302</sup> Vitug and Gloria. 141.

<sup>303</sup> James Clad, “The Misuari Gamble,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 September 1986, 18.



the end of 1987, the Aquino administration organized the Regional consultative Commission (RCC) in an attempt to continue dialogue between the two parties in preparation for the constitutionally autonomy legislation for Mindanao.<sup>304</sup>

However, by mid-1987, the MNLF abandoned the negotiations as both parties could not agree on the territorial scope of the autonomy. The MNLF demanded fourteen provinces while the Philippine government insisted that only five provinces with a Muslim majority should be considered. Meanwhile, breaches of ceasefire became frequent and armed encounters persisted between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and other Moro insurgents, like the MILF. Misuari went into exile and the negotiations eventually collapsed.<sup>305</sup>

The Philippine government pushed ahead with plans for Muslim autonomy without the MNLF's cooperation. In February 1987, the New Philippine Constitution was ratified and provided for the inclusion of a clause in the new constitution recognizing autonomy of Muslim Mindanao.<sup>306</sup> The Aquino regime worked with the some traditional Muslim leaders to provide for the creation of an "Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao" (ARMM).<sup>307</sup> Moreover, the new Constitution also mandates that "the creation of the autonomous region shall be effective when approved by majority of the votes cast by the constituent units in plebiscite called for the purpose, provided that only provinces, cities and geographic areas voting favorably in such plebiscite shall be included in the autonomous region."<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> "Philippines," *Far Eastern Economic Review Asia 1989 Yearbook* (Hong Kong: FEER Publishing, 1989), 207.

<sup>305</sup> R. J. May, "Ethnic Separatism in Southeast Asia," *Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 31 (1990), 50.

<sup>306</sup> Mercado, *Southern Philippines Question*, 34.

<sup>307</sup> Federico V. Magdalena, "The Peace Process in Mindanao: Problems and Prospects," *Southeast Asian Affairs 1997* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies), 250. Also on August 1 1989, President Aquino signed into law Republic 6734, the Organic Act, creating an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao as mandated by Article X, Sections 15 to 21 of Philippine Constitution, The same law provides that the plebiscite shall be conducted in the provinces of Basilan, Cotabato, Davao el Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Palawan, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga del Sur, and the cities of Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa, and Zamboanga.

<sup>308</sup> Article X, Section 18b, of the Philippine Constitution.

The autonomy law was passed by the Philippine Congress and on 19 November 1989, a plebiscite was held in thirteen provinces and nine cities to decide which of these areas would join the autonomous region. Rejecting the poll exercise, Nur Misuari vigorously urged five million Muslims to boycott the poll and threatened to reignite the armed struggle for Moro secession. He criticized the autonomy law for violating the full autonomy for the Muslims stipulated under the Tripoli Agreement and claimed that they were not included in drawing up the autonomy law. The MNLF officially resumed its armed insurgency in February 1988, but little fighting resulted.<sup>309</sup>

The ratification of the ARMM opened another opportunity for the traditional leaders to reestablish political power. Many who joined the insurgency were attracted to cooperate with the government after the Tripoli accord. These distributions of power have benefited the Moro elite from the representation in formal political institutions and related sources of enrichment.<sup>310</sup>

The conduct of the plebiscite was relatively peaceful and voter turn out was moderate. As expected, those living in predominantly Christian areas rejected the law and only four provinces with no cities voted to join in the ARMM.<sup>311</sup> The four-province ARMM was officially installed on 6 November 1990 constituting the provinces of Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The first election for all elected offices, governor, vice governor, and 21-man legislative assembly, was held on 9 July 1990 with Zacaria Candao, a Maguindanao and a legal representative of the MNLF elected as Regional Governor. Benjamin Loong, a Tausug, was voted the Vice Governor. Candao attempted to find a measure to surmount intertribal differences, mediate family feuds and raise money for the region's coffer. Accordingly, the representatives of

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<sup>309</sup> John Gershman, "Moros in the Philippines" (revised October 2001), available at [[http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines\\_body.html](http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines_body.html)]; accessed 7 November 2003.

<sup>310</sup> Bertrand, 40.

<sup>311</sup> David G. Timberman, "The Philippines in 1989," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, February 1990, 170.

the legislative assembly were reasonably distributed comprising three representatives from Tawi -Tawi, and six each from Sulu, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao.

This political exercise regularized and completed the 1987 constitutional steps in establishing the autonomous region in the southern Philippines.<sup>312</sup> The functions of the departments of public works, labor and employment, local government, social services and other bureaus were moved to the regional government. The national authorities empowered the regional government to initiate and seek direct foreign investments for socio-economic growth and development, but the lack of Moro unity and commitment hindered the ARMM from functioning effectively as a legitimate governing organ.<sup>313</sup> Overall, the establishment of the ARMM afforded some institutional autonomy to the Muslim areas but was short of satisfying Misuari.

Similarly, the enactment of the Philippine Local Government Code of 1991 provided greater autonomy and responsibility to develop a socio-economic base through regional initiatives and the internal generation of revenues. In addition, the passage of the Foreign Investment act opened up previously restricted areas of the economy and permitted 100 percent foreign equity in strategic industries such as mining.<sup>314</sup>

In sum, the failure of the political settlement strategy to resolve the conflict could be attributed to the nature of the civil-military relations during this period. The Aquino government, despite massive popular support, was politically unstable. The executive branch was weakened from the intimidation of several coup plots. Accordingly, the inability of the Aquino regime to control the military gave the insurgents a reason to abandon the peace talks and resume hostilities. Similarly, the return of the traditional oligarchic legislature obstructed the

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<sup>312</sup> Mercado, *Southern Philippines*, 45.

<sup>313</sup> Harber, 58.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

passage of substantive and meaningful reforms needed to address the root causes of social unrest. Although Congress enacted a land reform law, most of its provisions protected the interests of the landowner.<sup>315</sup>

In the final analysis, the Aquino administration was a transitional period, restoring the political structures and processes of democracy and providing the groundwork upon which further socio-economic reforms could be constructed. Although negotiations had been abandoned with the MNLF and attempts to woo the MILF had been unsuccessful, it was during President Aquino's regime that the culture of peace was promoted.<sup>316</sup>

### **C. THE RAMOS PERIOD (1992 – 1998)**

Ramos had been the Chief, Philippine Constabulary under martial law, but was one of the leaders of the military uprising, which ousted his cousin Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. He served under the Aquino government, first as head of the armed forces and then as Defense secretary, and played a significant role in suppressing the coup attempts. In resolving the country's insurgency problem, the Ramos government basically pursued the combined strategy of a political settlement approach with a military approach. Under both the Aquino and Ramos administrations, the Marcos military strategy has been tempered by greater emphasis on political and diplomatic approaches.<sup>317</sup>

Ramos had a clear vision and program of government, which aimed to establish political and economic stability. Under the campaign called "Philippine 2000," the program was envisioned to turn the Philippines into a "Newly-Industrialized Country" and to enable the country to catch up to its more prosperous Asian neighbors. The inflow of foreign investment became the keystone of Philippine 2000 which essentially required peace. Therefore, a key part of Ramos' political strategy was to negotiate with the communists, the

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<sup>315</sup> Morada and Collier, 566.

<sup>316</sup> Vitug and Gloria, 141.

<sup>317</sup> Morada and Collier, 552.

military rebels and the Moro insurgents. Without peace and security, the success of the government reforms would be uncertain. For the Ramos government, peace negotiations were a vital component of a wider agenda.

In foreign affairs, the Ramos administration stressed political and economic co-operation in the South East Asian region, principally through the Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN). This included enhancing friendly relations with President Suharto of Indonesia. Correspondingly, Ramos reciprocated Indonesia's good offices, in helping to negotiate a peace agreement with the MNLF, by supporting Indonesia over East Timor.

After more than two decades of war, on 2 September 1996, the Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front signed the historic Peace Agreement. The Philippine officials revealed that the government had spent US \$2.78 billion during the last 26 years in the conflict with the Moros. It also stated that of the 100,000 recorded casualties, half were Moro while the government accounted for 30% and innocent civilians the remaining 20%.<sup>318</sup>

Indonesian President Suharto and members of the OIC were instrumental in the mediation during the three years of negotiations. External pressure from the OIC played a vital role in the compromise position of Nur Misuari. Although the OIC had been very supportive of the Moro cause, it decided on a settlement with the Philippine government. Upon the signing the peace accord, Suharto and Malaysian promised support to their "Muslim brethren in Mindanao."<sup>319</sup>

The 1996 Peace Agreement provided for two phases of implementation of autonomy. The first phase (1996-1999), a three-year transitional period, created a temporary administrative body, the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), to be followed by the establishment of a new Regional Autonomous Government that would operate from September 1999. The coverage included the fourteen provinces and the nine cities that comprise the

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<sup>318</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, 30 July 1996.

<sup>319</sup> Harber, 63.

so-called Special Zone of Peace and Development or SZOPAD.<sup>320</sup> The SPCPD was an interim organization to implement the peace agreement and it was directly under the office of the president. The specific functions of this body were to promote, coordinate and monitor development efforts in SZOPAD. It maintained an advisory body and Consultative Assembly (CA).

The final outlines would be a new Regional Autonomous Government that would replace the ARMM and the SPCPD through a plebiscite within the SZOPAD which would be decided by the inhabitants of the provinces and cities of the SZOPAD. Also provided under the agreement was the creation of the security forces and the insertion of an Islamic curriculum in the educational system by integrating the Islamic schools (*madrrasah*) into the system. Likewise, the regional government was empowered to establish a Shari'ah court.<sup>321</sup>

On 11 September 1996, with government support, Nur Misuari ran unopposed and was elected governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The MNLF Chairman was likewise designated as chairman of the SPCPD and presiding officer of the SZOPAD and the CA. It was believed that placing Misuari in both positions, the peace settlement would gain wide acceptance among the Moros and demonstrate to the non-Muslim community that autonomy would benefit all groups. Moreover, Misuari's designation is expected to attract financial support from the economic powerhouse of ASEAN countries and the Muslim world.

Meanwhile, six MNLF leaders were elected to the Regional Legislative Assembly. The creation of the two bodies and the victory of the MNLF in the recent election paved the way for the absorption of MNLF top commanders and cadres into positions of power and influence in government bureaucracies and offices both in the SPCPD and ARMM.

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<sup>320</sup> The 14 provinces are Basilan, Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Palawan, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, South Cotabato, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga del Sur. The nine cities are Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa, and Zamboanga.

<sup>321</sup> Bertrand, 42.

Similarly, the MNLF ex-rebels were integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. A total of 5,200 MNLF elements have been integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines<sup>322</sup> while 1,250 members have been absorbed in the Philippine National Police.<sup>323</sup>

The MILF and Abu Sayyaf did not sign the agreement and continued violent engagements with the government. MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat lamented that the Ramos-Misuari agreement did not address the Mindanao Muslims' demand for self rule and considered the accord an outright violation of the Tripoli agreement. Rejecting the peace accord, the MILF vowed to continue the battle for "genuine Muslim Autonomy." Similarly, Abu Sayyaf denounced Misuari as a traitor and declared his pursuit in the struggle for an Islamic State. The majority of Christians are not comfortable with the accord, mounting a number of public condemnations against it to demonstrate their opposition to any compromise with the Muslims.

The Ramos administration pursued negotiations with the MILF and exploratory talks were arranged in 1997. The MILF panel emphasized a political and lasting solution to the conflict and underscored nine broad issues concerning those of ancestral domain, displaced and landless Bangsamoro, destruction of properties and war victims, human rights issues, social and cultural discrimination, corruption of the mind and moral fiber, economic inequities and widespread poverty, exploitation of natural resources, and agrarian related issues.<sup>324</sup> Similarly, the MILF clamored for government recognition of its camps,

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<sup>322</sup> Four hundred sixty-two Moro National Liberation Front former rebels were integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines on September 2002, available at [<http://www.army.mil.ph/E-Publications/Army%20Troopers/Sept02/News1.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003

<sup>323</sup> B. R. Rodil, "Its Time for Mutual Affirmative Action," a paper delivered at the 25th Conference of the Pambansang Samahan as Sikolohiyang Pilipino entitled *Hamon as Kapayapaan: Konteksto ng Mindanao*, November 23-25, 2000, Davao City. This is a modified version of Chapter 7 of my book entitled *Kalinaw Mindanaw: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Process, 1975-1996*, available at [<http://www.mindanao.com/kalinaw/peaceproc/mutualaffaxn.htm>]; accessed 14 November 2003

<sup>324</sup> Gloria and Vitug, 146.

that the Philippine military withdraw from these areas<sup>325</sup> and the Philippine government agreed to recognize some of the camps as “zones of peace and development.”<sup>326</sup>

Clashes between the MILF and the government forces had continued as well as heavy violent clashes amidst the peace talks. Nevertheless, on July 1997, a cessation of hostilities was forged between the two warring parties but the ceasefire was marred by several violations on both sides. At this time, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front had become the biggest threat to national security.<sup>327</sup>

Another major security concern of the Ramos government is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The group was founded by Abdurazzak Abubakar Janjalani, a Tausug who participated as a mujahideen in the Afghan war in the late 1980s.<sup>328</sup> The Abu Sayyaf split from the MNLF in 1991 and aimed for an independent Islamic state and to propagate Islam through a jihad in Mindanao and the Sulu islands. The United States has included the ASG in its list of foreign terrorist organizations, and it has been linked with Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda network. Philippine authorities believed that the ASG has connections with Ramzi Ahmed Yousef who is on trial in New York in connection with the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.<sup>329</sup>

The Philippines Department of National Defense report indicated that in 1995 the estimated membership of the ASG was about 620 rebels.<sup>330</sup> Many joined the rebel group because of its success in obtaining ransoms from a round

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<sup>325</sup> The MILF carved out territories in Mindanao- about 13 main camps and 33 satellite camps or minor encampments. Camp Abubakar, the biggest camp, serves both as military encampment and a civilian community. In it is a military academy, a prison, an arms manufacturing center, mosques, Shariah Courts, schools, multipurpose cooperatives eateries and a self-sustaining market. The camp served as the MILF's headquarters until the Philippine military captured it in July 2000.

<sup>326</sup> R. J. May, “Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2001, 270.

<sup>327</sup> *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 31 December 1997.

<sup>328</sup> Drs. Dirk J. Barreveld, *Terrorism in the Philippines: The Bloody Trail of Abu Sayyaf, Bin Laden's East Asian Connection* (Writers Club Press: San Jose), 2001, 113.

<sup>329</sup> *Reuters*, 23 June 1995.

<sup>330</sup> *Japan Economic Newswire*, 04 January 1996.



of kidnappings. The level of mass support is linked to their success in obtaining ransoms from kidnapping rather than their demand for self-determination.<sup>331</sup>

From 1991-1995, military authorities reported that the Abu Sayyaf conducted 102 terrorist activities and that the group had 11 sanctuaries.<sup>332</sup> In December 1993, the ASG bombed the Davao Cathedral that killed eight people, with scores wounded. In June 1994, the group ambushed a bus in Basilan and 17 were killed and 43 people were taken hostage. The ASG was linked in the assassination plot against Pope John Paul II in Manila on January 1995. Similarly, on 4 April 1995, it staged large scale actions by raiding the Christian village in Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur, leaving 72 killed and taking 37 hostages.<sup>333</sup> The ASG has also been involved in kidnapping tourists causing embarrassment to the Philippines and adversely affecting the tourism industry of the country.

The Philippine government tried to destroy the ASG with brute military force employing howitzers, helicopter gunships or whatever available means that could be used. So far, this technique has led to an enormous destruction of property and loss of innocent lives. The ASG has been very elusive because they could cross the islands from coast to coast limitless times and unhampered. Likewise, having mass followings, they could avail themselves of shelter, food, ammunition, transportations, etc. whenever and wherever needed.<sup>334</sup> In the later years, the AFP employed Special Forces to fight the group.

The tenure of President Fidel Ramos saw economic recovery and a steady improvement in security conditions. It also set up a number of institutions to put its “comprehensive peace program” into practice. It signed a Peace Agreement with the MNLF and brought the MILF to the negotiation table.

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<sup>331</sup> John Gershman, “Moros in the Philippines,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 3, available at [[http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines\\_body.html](http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines_body.html)]; accessed 15 November 2003.

<sup>332</sup> Gloria and Vitug, 19.

<sup>333</sup> Gail Billington, “Afghansi-Linked Terror in the Philippines,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, October 13, 1995, available at [[http://www.larouche.com/other/1995/2241\\_philippines\\_terror.html](http://www.larouche.com/other/1995/2241_philippines_terror.html)]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>334</sup> Gail Billington, “Afghansi-Linked Terror in the Philippines,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, October 13, 1995, available at [[http://www.larouche.com/other/1995/2241\\_philippines\\_terror.html](http://www.larouche.com/other/1995/2241_philippines_terror.html)]; accessed 14 November 2003, 239.

Noticeably, the ASG stayed calm after the 1996 signing of the peace accord and took a respite from their terrorist activities, apparently in “deference to the MNLF.”<sup>335</sup>

#### **D. THE ESTRADA PERIOD (1998 – 2001)**

In the May 1998 elections, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, a former actor, was elected as the next President of the Philippines by a remarkable majority vote. Estrada intended to continue the Ramos peace program, and has retained some of the relevant key officials of the previous administration. At the onset of Estrada administration, an “agreement of intent” was signed with the MILF which embodied both parties’ commitment “to pursue talks on the substantive issues of the Mindanao conflict as soon as possible.”<sup>336</sup> However, it was only in October 1999 that the formal peace talks were opened. The aims of the talks were to return the MILF to the mainstream of society, attain lasting peace in the region through a meaningful autonomy program, and a consolidation of the peace effort. The negotiations were derailed because of the tough demands of the MILF. Similarly, while the Philippine government had agreed to recognize the presence of MILF camps, the area and demarcation were supposed to be verified by the government.<sup>337</sup>

During this time, violent engagements between the Philippine military and MILF continued to develop. On 10 January 2000, the Moro rebels occupied the Talayaan Municipal Hall in Maguindanao and likewise, on 16 March 2000 the MILF occupied the Kauswagan Town Hall in Lanao del Norte. In response, the government continued limited military operations to prevent MILF expansion of their declared territory and deny the insurgent occupation of government political units.

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<sup>335</sup> Gloria and Vitug, 220.

<sup>336</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “Back to War in Mindanao: The Weaknesses of a Power-Based Approach to conflict,” *Philippine Political Science Journal*, Vol. 21, No .44, 2000, 118.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Confronted with increasing militancy as well as the demand in 2000 for an UN-supervised referendum for an independent state and the failure to achieve concessions towards peaceful resolution of the conflict, President Estrada eventually declared an “all-out-war.”<sup>338</sup> Similarly, it is believed the government’s decision to seize the camps was a way to fix its mistake of recognizing the camps.<sup>339</sup> The Philippine government could not accept the challenge to its sovereignty.

On July 2000, the AFP overran 50 MILF camps including the Bushra and Abubakar. The military offensive represented a significant setback to the rebel group and a large number surrendered to the government. However, contrary to expectations, the MILF did not fight in positional warfare to defend the camps, but abandoned the area and disbanded into small groups of guerillas and dispersed to the countryside.<sup>340</sup> The MILF organized and conducted a counter attack in several areas. Hashim Salamat, who took refuge in Malaysia, called on the Moro people to rise in a jihad.<sup>341</sup>

The military offensive against the MILF exacted a heavy toll on the personnel and resources of the government as well as on the inhabitants of the areas directly affected. During the campaign, about 200 soldiers were killed. Financially, the war was a heavy burden on the government. The cost of the operation is estimated to be US \$20 million with daily expenses from US \$200,000 to US \$400,000.<sup>342</sup>

The instability in Mindanao has seriously affected the economy and adversely impacted foreign investment. The tourism industry has significantly

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<sup>338</sup> May, “Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement,” 272.

<sup>339</sup> Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “Back to War in Mindanao: The Weaknesses of a Power-Based Approach to conflict,” *Philippine Political Science Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 44, 2000, 119.

<sup>340</sup> Willem Wolters, “Muslim Rebel Movements in the Southern Philippines: Recruitment Area for al-Qaeda Terrorists?” *Focaal – European Journal of Anthropology*, No. 40, 2002, 159.

<sup>341</sup> May, “Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement,” 270.

<sup>342</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 17, 19 and 24 June 2000.

declined as has the Philippine currency.<sup>343</sup> The stock market has suffered bitterly as some investors lost confidence and pulled out their ventures not only in the Southern Philippines but from the rest of the country. Losses in agriculture were significant and the Department of Agriculture predicted that the country's food supply will be seriously affected if the violent confrontation continues.<sup>344</sup>

While the military offensive was continuing, the Abu Sayyaf attracted publicity following the taking of hostages in Basilan Island. In March 2000, 53 people, including a priest, several teachers, and students were taken hostage and ransoms demanded. On 20 April, the birthday of President Estrada, the bandits beheaded two male hostages as a sinister gift to the president. On 22 April, the military started to attack the Abu Sayyaf mountain stronghold using artillery fire, while helicopter gunships unleashed rockets. On April 24, the military reported that at least 17 Abu Sayyaf rebels were killed as government troops continued ground and air assaults.<sup>345</sup> The government forces conducted pursuit operations against the bandits who took some hostages during their retreat.

At the time the Basilan hostage drama was still in full swing, another group of Abu Sayyaf abducted 21 people, including three Germans, two French nationals, two South Africans, two Finns, a Lebanese woman, and two Filipino and nine Malaysian resort workers, from the Malaysian town of Sipadan, and they were then moved to Sulu.<sup>346</sup> The hostages were released after the negotiations of the Libyan envoy Rajab Azzarouq. He secured the release of 17 hostages upon paying US \$25 million. A chartered plane arrived to take the hostages to Libya.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> At PhP40 to US\$1 in January 2000, the Philippine peso dropped to PhP45 to US\$1 in July. In view of the continued military operation against the ASG, the peso further declined to PhP46 peso to a dollar by the end of September.

<sup>344</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 May 2000.

<sup>345</sup> *20 killed in assault on Abu Sayyaf lair* [Monday, April 24, 2000] available at [<http://www.philstar.com/philstar/archive/archive.htm>]; accessed 14 October 2003.

<sup>346</sup> *Sabah Hostages Now*, by Roel Pareño With Edith Regalado, Paolo Romero, Aurea Calica, wire reports, Publish Date: [Thursday, April 27, 2000], available at [<http://www.philstar.com/philstar/archive/archive.htm>]; accessed 14 October 2003.

<sup>347</sup> May, "Muslim Mindanao: Four Years after the Peace Agreement," 272.

The taking of hostages by the extremist group continued to force President Estrada to declare a full military attack on the Abu Sayyaf. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) launched an assault on the Island of Jolo on 17 September 2000 to rescue the remaining hostages and destroy the Abu Sayyaf. The military operations yielded 17 hostages rescued and killed more than 100 Abu Sayyaf and forced several members to surrender.<sup>348</sup>

As a result of the military campaign in Mindanao declared by President Estrada, intense clashes between the AFP and the MILF and ASG prompted a massive displacement of people near the disputed areas. An estimated 40,000 families of more than 700,000 individuals have been forced to flee their homes and another 40,000 persons became refugees during the initial weeks of the operation against the ASG.<sup>349</sup> The damage to properties is equally high and the amounts for relief and rehabilitation totaled PhP1.323 billion.<sup>350</sup> By August 2000, municipal halls, mosques, school buildings, roads, and bridges were damaged; and at least 5,000 houses were destroyed.

Nonetheless, after the intensified warfare against the MILF, President Estrada issued a four-point approach on the Moro problem and pledged that the government would vigorously pursue reconstruction and socio-economic development. The President established the Presidential Task Force for Relief and Rehabilitation of Central Mindanao (PETFRRCM) with the mandate to "focus on 'quick-win' programs to respond to the more immediate needs of the community and to regain the confidence of the community." The President promised to "win the hearts and minds" of the victims of his "all-out war policy" through his relief and rehabilitation program and money released to the TF totaled P150 million before it was turned over to the new administration.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>349</sup> *Asiaweek*, 6 October 2000, 32.

<sup>350</sup> Carolyn O. Arguillas, "The Cost of War: Part 4: Rehabilitation to Win Hearts and Minds?" *MindaNews* 15 March 2003, available at [<http://www.mindanews.com/2003/03/15pep-cost.html>]; accessed 14 October 2003.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

The President also approved the National Peace and Development Plan which contained the Strategy of Total Approach (STA). The plan covered various policies and programs that would address the various components- political, socio-economic and security - of the insurgency problem. President Estrada issued Executive Order 261 creating the Mindanao Coordinating Council (MCC). Chaired by the President with the Executive Secretary as Vice-Chairman, the MCC was the overall coordinating body to synchronize the implementation of all plans and programs in Mindanao.

In the last quarter of year 2000, the Estrada administration was busy defending the president from plunder charges. He was forced to resign following massive demonstrations on 20 January 2001, after first being impeached by the House of Representatives. He was accused of charges largely concerned with allegations that he had accepted millions of dollars in bribes from illegal gambling operations and tobacco tax kickbacks.<sup>352</sup>

#### **E. THE MACAPAGAL PERIOD (2001 – TO DATE)**

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo assumed power after massive protests and the stunning resignations of top officials forcing President Joseph Estrada from office. After the chaos and corruption of Joseph Estrada's period in office, President Arroyo was faced with the task of restoring the nation's credibility after the Estrada era. Immediately after assuming office, the current administration called for a ceasefire and peace talks, and signed a ceasefire agreement with the MILF in August 2001. The MILF had agreed to put aside its demands for independence in order to achieve progress on the rehabilitation of war-ravaged areas, the implementation of previous agreements forged by the MILF and government, and economic development for Mindanao.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> President Estrada was imprisoned in April 2001 on charges of economic plunder. He remains under arrest although he has not yet been convicted of a crime. If found guilty, he could be facing the death penalty.

<sup>353</sup> Available at [[http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines\\_body.html](http://fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/philippines_body.html)]; accessed 14 October 2003

Vowing “restoration over devastation,” On 27 February 2001, President Arroyo created the Interagency Committee for Relief, Rehabilitation and Development of Areas Affected by Armed Conflicts in Mindanao” (Interact-Mindanao) to coordinate, integrate and implement the overall relief, rehabilitation and community-based development efforts for areas affected by armed conflicts in Mindanao.

In a twist of development, Nur Misuari, head of the MNLF and Governor of ARMM, and some of his group, reverted to armed struggle. Due to political differences and incompetence, some MNLF leaders formed the Executive Council of 15 and stripped Nur Misuari of the chairmanship of the MNLF. Apparently, the Council of 15 is supported by Libya, Indonesia and Malaysia. On 4 August 2001, the MILF and the Council of 15 met in Malaysia and forged a unity agreement. It was agreed also that they will organize the Bangsamoro Solidarity Conference that will serve as the venue to discuss the concerns of the Bangsamoro people.<sup>354</sup>

The ARMM Governor has been critical of the plebiscite which will amend the ARMM Organic Act. Misuari was adamant because this political exercise will trigger an election in which his position is at stake. Some MNLF members argue that the government failed to include them in drafting the law and that it contravened the 1996 Peace Agreement. In 04 August 2001, the referendum proceeded as planned and it resulted in the expansion of the ARMM to include the Basilan Province and Marawi City aside from the former members of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Consequently, Misuari decided not to participate in the November 2001 election claiming that the process was a betrayal of the government’s commitment to the peace accord.

Misuari declared war on the Arroyo government on 19 November 2001 and his loyal followers attacked the Army Brigade headquarters in Jolo, Sulu that left about 100 people dead, most of whom were his men. When this failed, he

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<sup>354</sup> Catherine Dennis R. Jayme, “The Challenge for Peace in Mindanao: Counter-Insurgency Policies of the Estrada and Arroyo Governments for Southern Philippines,” 113, available at [faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jrshiffman/symposium%20files/ symp%20abstracts/jayme.pdf]; accessed 14 November 2003.

fled but was arrested by the Malaysian authorities for illegally entering the country. The attack was apparently intended to disrupt and discredit the forthcoming elections scheduled on 26 November, which would have replaced him as ARMM governor.

Nur Misuari was detained on charges of rebellion and if found guilty, he could face up to 20 years imprisonment. Administrative cases also had been leveled against him for being an inept leader of the ARMM. It is believed that even though the national government allocated about Php43 billions for the ARMM, , the region is still impoverished after five years. No significant project was developed during his term and it was reported that Misuari misused funds intended for the poverty alleviation program, and about PhP40 millions were diverted to procure high-powered weapons.<sup>355</sup> The Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir was one of those Islamic leaders disenchanted with Misuari. He said,

Autonomy has been accorded but unfortunately, when in power, they did not use their power for the development of the southern Philippines ... Not much has been done for the benefit of the people. So therefore, we no longer feel responsible to provide him with any assistance.<sup>356</sup>

The election was successfully conducted with 70% turnout with few incidences of violence. Dr. Parouk Hussin, Presidential Adviser for Muslim Mindanao Concerns and a member of the Executive Committee of 15, won the election. In reference to Misuari's abuse of power and misuse of both government funds and economic assistance from oil-rich Islamic nations, Hussin said, "I assure you I am armed with seriousness, dedication and determination to develop this poor region." He further pledged to support the government's peace effort with the MNLF breakaway group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Ann Bernadette S. Corvera, "Nur: Misuari the 'Good Warriors' Long Struggle Come to a Disgraceful End?", *Philippine Star*, 16 January 2002.

<sup>356</sup> Armando Doronilla, *End Game for Misuari*, 28 November 2001, available at [[http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/opi/2001/nov/28/opi\\_amdoronila-1-p.htm](http://archive.inq7.net/archive/2001-p/opi/2001/nov/28/opi_amdoronila-1-p.htm)], accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>357</sup> "New ARMM Government Vows to be Opposite of Nur," *Inquirer News Service*, 05 January 2002.



The disastrous experience of Nur Misuari consolidated the MILF's leadership of the Moro secessionist movement. Misuari's failure to ameliorate the living conditions and improve the economic conditions of the ARMM seriously damaged Moro confidence in the current autonomy and stirred up the rise of the Islamic fundamentalist movement led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.<sup>358</sup>

Abuza describes the MILF as quite confident in their current position. First, the rebel group has not been defeated on the battlefield and currently holds about 12,000 to 15,000 armed elements. Second, the MILF is gathering the support of most Muslims because of the dissatisfaction from the failure of the MNLF leadership to deliver the reforms. Third, it is successfully working through the political system and is confident of its popular support. Fourth, the MILF is satisfied with the growing trend toward a more Islamic consciousness of the people.<sup>359</sup>

During 2002, some positive developments occurred such as the signing in May of implementing the guidelines of the peace agreement between the two parties and the return of almost all those displaced by the 2000 conflict. On 7 May, the two sides signed the "Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspects of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The first two provisions of the joint communiqué specified that first, the Philippine government and the MILF agree to isolate and interdict "all criminal elements and kidnap-for-ransom groups including the so-called 'Lost Commands' operating in Mindanao", and second both sides agree "that the activities of these criminal groups impede the peace process, the effective pursuit of development programs and the efficient delivery of basic services to the poor", and "for this purpose immediate and joint action is needed for the security and upliftment of the affected communities."

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<sup>358</sup> Doronilla, *End Game for Misuari*, Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc: Boulder, 2003), 208-210.

The ceasefire between the MILF and the AFP has been marked with violations and there were reports that the insurgents were sheltering members of the Pentagon gang, a group on the U.S. terrorist list.<sup>360</sup> On 12 February 2003, President Arroyo ordered the resumption of military actions against the Moro rebels after the MILF negotiating panel failed to meet the government negotiators. Also, the Philippine government was incensed about the continuous cuddling and protection of kidnappers by the MILF. The rebels conducted various forms of retaliation, took people hostage, attacked government installations and torched houses.<sup>361</sup> On 6 May, President Arroyo suspended the informal peace talks with the 12,500-strong MILF after a series of raids and bombings of civilian targets.

After successful military operations, in May 2003, the MILF declared a 10-day unilateral ceasefire, which was later extended, with the hope of stopping the military campaign. The government did not jump at the truce calling it a “token gesture and just for show only and, perhaps, it is just their strategy to reduce pressure on the MILF” and intended for the consumption of the OIC.<sup>362</sup>

On 23 June 2003, Hashim Salamat, the MILF chief, renounced terrorism, a key government condition for resuming long-stalled peace talks. He said, “To stress seriously this point, I hereby reiterate our condemnation and abhorrence of terrorist tendencies.” Salamat added that terrorism is anathema to the teachings of Islam.<sup>363</sup> The MILF denied links to Osama bin Laden’s terrorist network or the Southeast Asian militant Islamic group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). It was reported that camps in an area controlled by the MILF had been used as training centers for the JI.

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<sup>360</sup> *BBC News World Edition Sunday*, 25 August 2003, available at [2002http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2215382.stm]; accessed 11 November 2003.

<sup>361</sup> John Unson, “MILF Rebels Torch 130 Civilians’ Houses in Maguindanao,” 23 April 2003, available at [http://www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=120567]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>362</sup> Roel Pareño, Mike Frialde, Bong Fabe, et. al, “MILF Ceasefire on; Two Rebels Killed,” 03 June 2003, available at [http://www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=125738]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>363</sup> Bong Fabe and Mayen Jaymalin, “MILF Chief Renounces Terror,” 23 June 2003, available at [http://www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=128270]; accessed 14 November 2003. *Philippine Star*, 23 June 2003.

A month later, President Arroyo signed a ceasefire agreement with the MILF paving the way for formal peace negotiations in Malaysia. She said, "As we address the roots of rebellion and secession, I am confident that we shall also effectively isolate and marginalize the dwindling terrorist cells in Mindanao and across our seas in the region." The authorities agreed to the MILF's demand that arrest warrants be dropped against their leaders allegedly involved in the recent deadly bombings in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, the United States accused the separatist group of ties with the regional terror JI and threatened millions in aid unless the MILF stops harboring "outlaws" and "terrorists." Al Haj Murad, who replaced Salamat as MILF chairman, said he met with self-confessed Jemaah Islamiyah Fathur Roman al-Ghozi during the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. He said after the war ended, Al-Ghozi visited the MILF camp but was refused. Also, Taufik Refke an alleged leader of the Indonesia-based JI, reported that the MILF had been providing JI terrorists in Mindanao safe houses and facilities.<sup>364</sup>

Aside from the impending formal negotiations with the MILF in Malaysia, President Arroyo's administration has successfully won the support of the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the United States for the peace process. The World Bank, US Assistance for International Development and Muslim countries, was arranging a multi-donor trust fund for the Southern Philippines.<sup>365</sup> President George Bush said during the state visit in the Philippines on October 2003 that the United States would extend up to \$30 million in development aid for livelihood enhancement, basic infrastructure and education to the Southern Philippines once a peace treaty is signed.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Marvin Sy, "US Hits MILF Ties with JI," 02 October 2003, available at [<http://www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=139862>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>366</sup> "Gov't, MILF to Set Timetable for Talks," 23 October 2003, available at [<http://www.philstar.com/philstar/print.asp?article=142284>]; accessed 14 November 2003.

The Abu Sayyaf has continuously troubled the Arroyo Administration and has been a major security and peace and order concern in Western Mindanao. The bandit group persistently engaged in kidnappings and the taking of civilian hostages and virtually turned these criminal activities into a lucrative million-dollar "cottage industry." In May 2001, the bandits struck again, taking 20 more hostages, including three Americans, Martin and Garcia Burnham, and Guillermo Sobero. The two male Americans and four Filipinos were freed. In June 2001, the Abu Sayyaf had accumulated a total of 102 hostages including three Americans. Showing their ruthlessness, the Abu Sayyaf beheaded 18 of the captives, and one was the American tourist Guillermo Sobero.<sup>367</sup>

The government has launched a massive military campaign against the Abu Sayyaf with little success. The Philippine authorities recognized the deficiencies in terms of equipment and particularly the lack of the ability to conduct nighttime operations. Accordingly, the priority for weapons and equipment acquisition are night-vision goggles, thermal imagers, and helicopters with night-flying capabilities.<sup>368</sup>

President Arroyo lends a robust response to counter-terrorism. She is the First Asian leader to support the American "war on terrorism" and vowed to make all efforts needed to implement the UN Security Council resolution 1368. Immediately after September 11, the Arroyo administration announced the "Fourteen Pillars of Policy and Action of the Government Against Terrorism," to strengthen internal measures against terrorism, modernization of the security forces, enlistment of the cooperation of the other sectors of the society such as the media, and addressing the root causes of terrorism. The Philippine government offered Philippine airspace and seaports to U.S. forces. Moreover,

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<sup>367</sup> Ben Cal, "Operation Daybreak: The inside story," 8 July 2002, available at [[www.manilatimes.net/national/2002/jul/08/prov/20020708pro4.html](http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2002/jul/08/prov/20020708pro4.html)]; accessed 14 November 2003.

<sup>368</sup> Abuza, 207.

the Philippines allowed the deployment of about 1,300 U.S. military forces, including 160 Special Forces to assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf.<sup>369</sup>

In January 2002, the approximately 660-strong U.S. forces were deployed in Western Philippines to train Philippine troops and to provide operational support, including intelligence and air support. However, the American troops were forbidden to directly participate in combat operations, but could join the frontline units and fight back in self-defense. U.S. forces flew helicopters and the Navy P-3 Orion, while the Special Forces deployed ground sensors. Part of the U.S. involvement was the deployment of 280 military engineers to do civil works. Furthermore, U.S. Special Forces trained light reaction companies and provided equipment for counter-terrorism operations.<sup>370</sup>

During Presidents Arroyo's visit to the United States in December 2003, President Bush announced a military package worth \$137 million. Following her visit in May 2003, the Bush administration extended significant military and financial assistance which included \$95 million in military aid, tariff reductions, and expanded veterans benefits.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>371</sup> Amy Goldstein and Vernon Loeb, "U.S. Offers, Increase in Philippine Terror Aid," *WP*, 20 May 2003.

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## VI. CONCLUSION – CAUSES AND PROSPECT

The roots of the Moro resistance are historically linked to the ethno-religious separateness of the Muslim Filipinos. The Mindanao conflict is highly complex and its origin is a combination of several variables which include socio-economic deprivation, political marginalization, and the challenge of the minority over the oppressive majority, government ineptitude and corruption, and foreign intervention.

The politicization of the Muslim identity as a separate nation is a more pervasive factor of the conflict. The colonial aggression, first by the Spaniards then Americans, is a significant variable of the Muslim restlessness. Spain tried to subjugate the Moros through sword and cross but the Moros vigorously fought the Spaniards for three centuries. The American colonial administration succeeded in pacifying the region and pursued a policy of attraction and the integration of the Moros in the body politics of the Filipino nation. Under Filipino administrators, Christian Filipinos were encouraged to settle in Mindanao and received development support from the government. A government study done in 1955 attributed the Moro revolt to an alleged feeling that they did not feel part of the nation as a whole.

Muslim grievances over land distribution and the lack of political representation were the result of colonial era policies and strategies of integration. Land issues have been the most fundamental Muslim concern and important factor fueling the conflict. Private property, as understood by the Christians, does not exist in the minds of the Moro lower class as a rule. The Muslim thinks of land as belonging to clan while to the Christian it is a matter of individual ownership.<sup>372</sup> Differences in the concept of land ownership are a factor leading to conflict.

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<sup>372</sup> Hester I. Hunt, "Moslem and Christian in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 28, Issue, December 1955, 331-349.

The quintessence of political awareness towards separatism is the rise of ethnocentric nationalism, where an ethnic group is attracted to the goal of autonomy or outright independence. Historical experience is a component of the Muslim's conscious need to chart their destiny. Moro autonomy is not only to satisfy their demand for the promotion of a cultural and religious identity but also an effort to change the calculus of power.

Finding a common cause, the Muslims became politicized and began to organize. In 1968, the insurgents formed the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) and later a more radical organization, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), achieved prominence and command. The MNLF's goal was to establish an independent state, protect Muslim practices and culture, and result in an end to subjugation and the return of the lands taken away by Christians.<sup>373</sup> Although the battle cry is along ethnic and religious lines, the clear motive was socio-economic deprivations.

In 1996, the MNLF and the Government signed what was hoped to be "the final peace agreement." The key of the peace accord was the creation of the autonomous region in Mindanao with the expectation that such a political settlement would draw and be able to win the confidence of the great majority of the Moros who are still fighting for independence. The peace process was supported by the international community, particularly the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which poured in financial resources for the development of the region. Many MNLF entered civilian politics and some of their members were integrated into the Philippine security forces. The MILF and the Abu Sayyaf have opposed this peace arrangement.

Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF, became the governor of the Autonomous Region of Mindanao (ARMM) and before his term ended in November 2001; he was ousted as the MNLF chief. After a brief revolt, Misuari was removed from office and was detained for treason. The ARMM is failing to produce the expected benefits of improving the standard of living of the Muslims.

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<sup>373</sup> Quimpo, 44.



This is primarily due to mismanagement and corruption of their regional leaders. Meanwhile, the widespread socio-economic difficulties, and the unstable peace and order situation continue to plague the region. The ARMM has remained the poorest region and has the highest infant mortality rate of 64% and the lowest functional literacy of 60% compared to the rest of the country.<sup>374</sup>

The peace accord failed to win the Moro rebels who have been fighting for secession. As a result, the 12,500 MILF rebel group resumed the violent struggle while the extremists have gone rampaging, kidnapping both foreigners and Christians for ransom. Despite the renewed military campaign of the government against the separatist group, the violent disputes and the idea of secessionism persist.

Today, the Philippine government and the Moro separatist rebels are locked in war. Neither side is willing to capitulate to their respective demands. The former is asserting national sovereignty and territorial integrity while the latter is invoking self-determination. The road to peace remains elusive and Mindanao experiences a trauma of conflict entrapment. However, to avert further escalation and settle the conflict, both parties should be willing to return to the negotiating table and should call for a cessation of hostilities. A third party should be designated to monitor an agreed truce. Both parties apparently consider the Malaysians and Indonesians capable of assuming the role of peacekeepers.

Initially, the government could restore the people's confidence in the ARMM through the establishment of strong and effective institutions around the regional government. Priority programs should be towards good governance by enhancing the functional capacity of the ARMM and strengthening social cohesiveness.<sup>375</sup> The commitment of resources for the alleviation of poverty would be a firm demonstration of the government's genuine commitment to redress the economic flight of the Moros.

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<sup>374</sup> Jose T. Pardo, Addressing the Root Causes of the Mindanao Problem (presentation), Rebuilding Mindanao Mindanao Common-Ground for Peace and Development (concept paper), 2000.

<sup>375</sup> Milner F. De la Cruz, "Addressing the MILF Challenge of Secessionism," *OSS Digest*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 43.

The creation of a separate Muslim state is unlikely because it lacks support by the international community including the countries from the Organization of Islamic Conference. The MILF has to put aside demands for independence and should accept any offer of genuine autonomy. Some sectors of the society have offered alternative solutions towards greater autonomy by supporting the idea of a federalist governance structure as “the ultimate solution to the peace process in Mindanao.” They argue for a federal system under which the ARMM could accommodate their aspirations to practice Islamic law. Federalism would entail constitutional amendments and the only substantive progress so far on this subject is debates.

The Organization of Islamic Conference could play a vital role in the negotiations considering that it brokered the 1976 and the 1996 GRP-MNLF peace agreements. Also, in Bertrand’s opinion, one of the flaws in the previous negotiation process was the failure to involve the non-Muslims in the peace talks. Consequently, the participation of the Christians and Lumad in peace negotiations should be encouraged to generate broad-based support.

The United States should continue to assume a major role in the negotiations because of its historical links to the Southern Philippines. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front’s leadership welcomes American participation in the peace process. President Bush has committed US \$30 million for the development of Mindanao should the peace agreement be forged between the two countries. On the war against terrorism, the Philippine military will continue to receive substantial aid in terms of equipment and training.

In the meantime, the government should endeavor to strengthen the ARMM as a viable political institution in the region. The national agencies, local governments and non-government organizations working in the region should integrate their efforts towards the efficient delivery of services and prevent violent conflict. Short term and doable goals aimed at alleviating poverty should be done to gain confidence. Moreover, making autonomy work will require the commitment of adequate resources from the national government.

Finally, unless the MILF and the Philippine government overcome their differences and agree on a compromise political settlement, the Moro problem will persist. Moro nationalism will likely survive but the external and internal factors will dictate the level of struggle. Policy makers and negotiators should recognize the Moro grievances in terms of ethnic, religious and nationalist factors besides the socio- economic dimensions of the conflict.

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