

# **Extending the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front a Catalyst for Peace**

**A Monograph  
by  
MAJ Thomas G. Wilson, Jr.  
United States Army**



**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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MAJ Thomas G. Wilson, Jr.

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This monograph was defended by the degree candidate on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 2009 and approved by the monograph director and the reader named below.

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan G. Cox, Ph.D.

Monograph Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas S. Hollis, COL, IN

Second Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stefan Banach, COL, IN

Director,  
School of Advanced  
Military Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

Director,  
Graduate Degree  
Programs

## Abstract

EXTENDING THE AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO TO THE MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT A CATALYST FOR PEACE by MAJ Thomas G. Wilson, JR., USA, 52 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to demonstrate the conflict between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Government of the Philippines is territorial and not religious in nature. To understand this conflict the past four-hundred years from the spread of Islam through the Sulu Islands and Mindanao, Spanish occupation, American occupation, and the Government of the Philippines rule from 1946 must be understood to put this complex adaptive problem in context. Extending the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao serves a catalyst for peace in the region.

The Moros of the Southern Philippines have been fighting a four-hundred year war for autonomy. The Government of the Philippines (GRP) has been fighting several insurgencies during the last thirty years against four groups of insurgents. A technique used as an attempted peace catalyst against the aggression of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was granting them an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The concept of the ARMM with the MNLF set a precedent for peace in the Southern Philippines. The GRP realized the only way for the peace to hold was to negotiate a similar agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The Government of the Philippines in 2008 was days away from signing a similar agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to extend the ARMM and bring peace to the region, but the Philippine Supreme Court declared the agreement, known as the Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) unconstitutional.

Several problems between the GRP and the MILF serve as complications to the peace process. The MILFs known linkages and interdependency to terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah plague the peace process at the present time. MILF provides safe haven in their camps in the Southern Philippines in exchange for financial aid, arms, ammunition, and training from Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah. The MILFs failure to recognize the Philippine constitution is a major stumbling block as well. The GRP will not come to peace with the MILF until the MILF recognizes the Philippine constitution. The GRP has its own problems such as the New People's Army (NPA), whom is considered the most threatening insurgent group in the Philippines. The GRP strategy was to settle for peace with the MNLF and then the MILF so its Armed Forces could concentrate on the NPA.

The Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) deals with territorial rights. The MILF wants the territory their ancestors used to own before being pushed out by Christian migration to the island of Mindanao. An extension of the ARMM would give more land, governance, socio-economic development, and peace to the Muslims and Christians of the Southern Philippines. MILF and the GRP are interdependent. The MILF needs to break linkages to terrorism, make amends with the MNLF, and come to peace with the GRP. The GRP is dependent upon the MILF for any possibility of peace in the region.

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## Introduction

The Moros of the Southern Philippines have been fighting a four-hundred year war for autonomy.<sup>1</sup>The Government of the Philippines, founded in 1946, has been fighting several insurgencies during the last thirty years against four groups of insurgents. A technique used as an attempted peace catalyst against the aggression of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was granting them an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The agreement was signed in 1996. The Government of the Philippines (GRP) is in the process of negotiating a similar agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), but problems such as the MILF's failure to acknowledge its linkages with terrorist organizations such as Jemaayah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda have brought mistrust and have hampered negotiations. The success of the ARMM with the MNLF set a precedent for peace with a former enemy of the Government of the Philippines.

This monograph will demonstrate the conflict between the MILF and the GRP is territorial and not about religious ideology. A detailed historical background is presented to give the reader a contextual appreciation of the complex problem at hand. The next section shows the reasons why the MILF split from the MNLF, and the "shadow agencies" developed to provide services to their population base. MILF linkages to terrorism and their interdependence with groups such as Jemaayah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda are shown to exist and the importance of the MILF in breaking the interdependence to the peace process with the GRP. Then the ARMM and Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) are explained in detail to show possible end states for the peace process between the MILF and GRP. Finally the benefits derived from an ARMM extension for the GRP and MILF to show it is in the best interest of the region for these two sides to finally be at peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Moro is a term, given by the Spanish, describing the Muslims in the Philippines.

## **Hypothesis**

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao seems to be an excellent idea to peacefully end the conflict that has plagued the region since the 1500s, when the Spanish attempted to convert the region to Catholicism. The Government of the Philippines negotiated the ARMM with the MNLF. The MILF says they want peace in the region, but their connections to known terrorist organizations left a sense of doubt concerning the situation, and past actions lead many to believe that an extension of the ARMM is just an opportunity for the MILF to reconstitute their insurgency in Mindanao.

Despite these concerns, the hypothesis and null hypothesis for this monograph are:

H<sub>1</sub>: Extending the ARMM for MILF will serve a catalyst for peace in the region.

H<sub>0</sub>: Extending the ARMM for MILF will do little to prevent insurgency and terrorism in Mindanao and the Sulu Islands.

## **Methodology**

This paper will analyze the MILF to show all aspects of the organization and internal and external influences that affect the organization to include goals and ideology of the insurgent group. The analysis of the MILF demonstrates the organization is already operating as a shadow government and can make the transition to governing a possible extension of the ARMM. An analysis of the Government of the Philippines will demonstrate internal and external influences that affect the decisions made that have kept the MILF at war with the government instead of accepting a peace agreement similar to the MNLF. The analysis of the MILF and the Government of the Philippines is conducted jointly to demonstrate peace in the region depends on the interdependent cooperation of these two adversaries. Such a holistic analysis will show the interdependence and leverage points as to why extending the ARMM for the MILF is a catalyst for peace in the region. Interviews from primary sources, such as previous and current Joint Special Operation Forces Task Force Commanders for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-

Philippines (OEF-P) were conducted as well as officers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines who served in Mindanao to solicit their experience and educated opinions. Many different scholarly sources written by authors, who hold expertise in insurgent and terrorist activity in the Southern Philippines and Southeast Asia, were used to draw on relationships and systems in the region.

## Literature Review

The literature used provided information and theories from all spectrums of the conflict in the Southern Philippines. Several themes emerged from the literature review of sources such as group interdependence amongst insurgents and terrorists in the region. Another theme that became prevalent was that the conflict was over territory and not ideology. Several authors address these themes, but Michael Brown addresses a theory about ethnic conflict which fits into the Southern Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

Michael Brown provides a comprehensive study of the causes and implications of ethnic conflict. He provides a definition of ethnic conflict and a general framework derived from Anthony Smith's work. The criteria within the framework, which will be discussed later, encompass six categories that must be met before a group can be called an ethnic community. Ethnic conflict resonates when two or more ethnic communities have a dispute within a territory such as in the Southern Philippines between the Christian Filipinos and the Muslim Moros.

Moshe Yegar gives an in-depth understanding of how the tenuous and violent situation developed in Mindanao and Sulu over the past five hundred years. Yegar focuses on Muslim separatist movements in Southeast Asia. He draws the course from the fifteenth century until the establishment of the ARMM in 1996. Moshe Yegar, a research fellow at the Hebrew University

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<sup>2</sup> Brown, Michael E. *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, 5.

in Jerusalem, compares three Muslim separatist movements in Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> Contextual information was drawn from Yegar's narrative of Moro history throughout the Philippines and proved helpful to understand Thomas McKenna's ethnographic study of Muslim Mindanao.

Thomas McKenna paints a picture of an everyday Muslim local in the Southern Philippines that does not want to live under strict Islamic law such as the Taliban ruled with in Afghanistan within the 1990s, but of a Muslim who does not follow Islam to the letter of the law. He says the Philippine Muslims in Cotabato," is one who relies on magical charms and amulets and appease local spirits. They are Muslims whose religious practice exhibits a good deal of ritual impropriety, who may drink and gamble, neglect their prayers, and who embrace many ingredients of the highly Westernized culture of their Christian neighbors."<sup>4</sup> McKenna understands that the Muslims in Mindanao are different than the ones in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan. His point is that the Muslim insurgency is not totally based on fundamentalist Islamic ideology. There are other issues such as regional self-determination, local governmental issues and the Moro identity that he believes was developed by the Americans during the colonial period of 1899-1946. McKenna explains how Hashim Salamat founder of the MILF, separated from the MNLF under the guise of a difference in religious ideology, but says the real reason was based off of a failed takeover of the MNLF. He also shows how the MILF organized itself better than the MNLF to govern Muslim communities.

McKenna explains, "The term Moro itself exemplifies the process whereby members of a colonized population define themselves according to indignations advanced by their Western

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<sup>3</sup> Yegar in his book *Between Integration and Secession* conducts a comparative study of the Muslim communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar. Yegar served as an Israeli diplomat in Southeast Asia.

<sup>4</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 283-284.

rulers.”<sup>5</sup> He claims that American colonization built the Moro national identity especially through the education process that was established during American rule of the Philippines.<sup>6</sup>

Adding to this line of reasoning, Zachary Abuza, a leading expert in terrorism in Southeast Asia, writes about the spread of radical Islam through the region by Al Qaeda. He explains how safe havens in Mindanao provided by the MILF to Jemaayah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda served as an operating base and training camp for thousands of terrorists. Throughout his book he gives as chilling analysis of the interworking of the MILF and the interdependence the various insurgent and terrorist groups share with each other.

A monograph published through the Strategic Studies Institute by Abuza titled *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* lays out the interdependence of the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF. This interdependence among insurgent and terrorist groups is one reason why certain politicians among the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) do not want to extend and expand the ARMM to the MILF. Other politicians of the GRP see the ARMM as driving a wedge between the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF. Abuza says consequences of the dangerous relationship between the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF needs addressing because the relationship has regional security implications in Southeast Asia. The GRP sees the ARMM as addressing this issue.

One of Abuza’s more recent publications is about the peace process between the MILF and the GRP and also addresses the root cause of MILF’s insurgency being Ancestral Domain and not ideological differences between religions.<sup>7</sup> In Abuza’s analysis, the point of contention for the MILF and the negotiated peace process is the topic of the Filipino constitution. The MILF does not recognize the constitution. The failed recognition of the constitution by the MILF has to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 274-275.

<sup>7</sup> Ancestral Domain encompasses territorial rights that the Muslims once had. The Jebson Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies was established at The Fletcher School in September, 2005. Its mission is to increase the understanding and competency of counter-terrorism professionals.

be overcome for the peace process to move forward. Any peace plan or extension of the ARMM may have difficulty getting approved by the GRP due to the limits set within the GRP's constitution. Abuza's works explains interdependence amongst terror and insurgent groups and Government of the Philippines. Similar to Abuza, Maria Ressa echoes the sentiments of terror and insurgent group interdependence in the Southern Philippines.

Maria Ressa, former CNN Jakarta Bureau Chief, describes Al-Qaeda's history in Southeast Asia. She demonstrates that MILF has provided sanctuary and training to some of globe's most notorious terrorists. The MILF camps sanctioned by the GRP in the mid-1990s show how the MILF used a semi-autonomous area to train terrorists, reconstitute their military wing, and conduct attacks from these areas.<sup>8</sup> These actions dissuade many politicians from supporting the extension of the ARMM to the MILF. Along with this, Ressa describes the shadow government the MILF created. The MILF possesses the structure to transform into a governing entity within the ARMM if desired and this too prevents many politicians from considering an extension of the ARMM.

Robin L. Bowman, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Air Force Academy, goes into detail, similar to the authors stated previously about the interdependence between the terrorist and insurgent groups in the Southern Philippines. She also goes on to state, "The Philippine example offers more than a case study on domestic ethno-religious grievances, separatist movements, and links to foreign terrorism. It (Philippines) is rich and multifaceted case highlighting the intersection amongst these differing yet connected issues."<sup>9</sup> Bowman is correct in her analysis. Several issues are at stake and cannot be addressed separately because of the

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<sup>8</sup> The GRP sanctioned MILF camps in the 1990's in an attempt to keep better situational awareness on the insurgent group. The GRP strategy backfired and enabled the MILF to provide a sanctuary for their insurgency and a regional center for Southeast Asia terrorism.

<sup>9</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 502.

interdependence and connectivity of the system at hand. Injects into the system in the Southern Philippines and the resulting emergent properties may not be the results wanted by the GRP.

## Background

Michael Brown, author of *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, says that “ethnic conflict is a dispute about political, economic, social, cultural, or territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities”, this definition fits the ongoing conflict in Mindanao and Sulu between the Moros and Filipinos.<sup>10</sup> Nathan Quimpo takes Brown’s general argument and applies it to the Philippines.<sup>11</sup> Quimpo uses Anthony Smith’s framework<sup>12</sup> of the six criteria for a population to be deemed an ethnic community: the group must have a name for itself, common ancestry, shared historical memories, shared culture, territorial attachment, and a common ethnicity.<sup>13</sup> Both the Christians and Muslims fighting for territory on Mindanao fit this definition of ethnic communities.

To understand present day Mindanao a closer examination at how the situation developed over five centuries is necessary. This section will give context to the complex problem the Government of the Philippines is facing. A brief history of the spread of Islam to Mindanao, the Spanish and American colonization periods, and the period from 1946 through the founding of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1972.<sup>14</sup> The history of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from their split with the MNLF, in the late 1970s until their negotiations extending the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is worth examining to show

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, Michael E. *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Quimpo, Nathan. “Options in Pursuit of a Just Comprehensive and Stable Peace in the Southern Philippines.” *Asian Survey*, No.2 (March-April 2001), 273-274.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Smith is a renowned Sociologist who has written several books on ethnic studies. He is one of the founders on the study of Nationalism in which he teaches at the London School of Economics.

<sup>13</sup> From Brown, Michael E. *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Bowman, Robin L. “Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines,” In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 488.

the deep rooted hatred that has built up over the past thirty years between the two groups.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the background of the Government of the Philippines and the multiple insurgencies they have been fighting for the last fifty years lends additional context to the situation to show the MILF is not their only enemy.

### **Early Years: Islam arrives in Sulu and Mindanao**

In the early years of the thirteenth century, Muslim traders peacefully spread Islam to the Sulu archipelago via trade routes from Malacca, a state that is located in present day Malaysia and Borneo.<sup>16</sup> By the fifteenth century, the religion started to move to southern Mindanao, and began spreading faster through Muslim traders and missionaries. The largest tribe on Mindanao, the Maguindanao, welcomed Islam to the island and supported Islamic expansion. This enabled the spread of Islam to many of the smaller tribes on the island. Even though many of the tribes on the Sulu archipelago and Mindanao converted to Islam, the area lacked a unifying tie beyond religion.

Yegar says several interdependent factors made Islam stronger and more unifying during the fifteenth century. The first factor was the Islamization process which occurred in Brunei and Ternate.<sup>17</sup> This served as a model for the process to occur peacefully. Brunei and Ternate were converted and unified through noncoercive means. The second factor was the sea lines of communications from Islamic Malacca and Java, and the Arabian Peninsula, where Muslim missionaries and traders had easy access to the Southern Philippines.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the Muslim visitors from the Arabian Peninsula, Brunei, Borneo, and India married daughters of powerful

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 489

<sup>16</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 185.

<sup>17</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 186.

families in the Southern Philippines.<sup>19</sup> These were mainly marriages between ruling families in Brunei, Sulu, Ternate, and Maguindanao which ensured the new religion would grow peacefully throughout the region. The intermarriage of powerful families from different islands in Southeast Asia generated many alliances and helped solidify Islam as a potent force in the region.

The Tausigs, the largest tribe in Sulu, and the Maguindanaos, the largest tribe in Mindanao, established powerful sultanates in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Sulu and Mindanao.<sup>20</sup> The sultanates unified the many inhabitants of the region under the leadership of the sultan. The sultanates were the closest thing to a local government within the islands of the Philippines. Under the Sultanate, Islam brought together the many different communities in Sulu and Mindanao. This was a very impressive feat since most of the Muslim conversions were by choice and not by physical coercion. When the Spanish arrived in 1565, they halted the spread of Islam from Mindanao and started converting the rest of the Philippines to the Catholic faith, but the sultanate had already established itself as the strongest political force in Mindanao and conversion to Catholicism was all but impossible.<sup>21</sup>

## **The Spanish Years:1565-1898**

The Spanish arrived in the Philippines in 1565 on Cebu, an island north of Mindanao. Their purpose was to extend their religion and find riches under the name of King Philip II, for whom the Philippines was named.<sup>22</sup> The term “Moro” describes the Muslims in Sulu and Mindanao; it was derived from the term Moor, Islamic fighters who just lost a war to the Spanish Christians in Spain.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

<sup>22</sup> Fulton, Robert A. *Moroland 1899-1906*. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.

A vicious three-hundred and thirty four year battle was fought in the Philippines between the Moros and the Spanish. The Spanish, who were far away from Europe, lacked the manpower and resources to sustain an effective effort against the Moros. Coming to the realization, they could not win alone, the Spanish decided to use the Filipinos who converted to Catholicism to fight their war against the Moros.<sup>24</sup> This fight matched Catholic against Muslim and planted the seed for a deep-rooted problem that remains at the heart of all major issues in Mindanao and Sulu including the ARMM.

Islam was too deeply rooted in Sulu and Mindanao for the Spanish to come in without a fight and convert all the Muslims to Christianity. Yegar explains Muslims on Sulu and Mindanao had feelings of being part of Dar al-Islam<sup>25</sup> and resistance against Spanish colonizers was a jihad, or “holy war” fought against the imperialist Spaniards.<sup>26</sup> Even though the Muslims in Sulu and Mindanao shared a common enemy, the Spaniards and their converts, there was no coordinated effort between the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao.<sup>27</sup> This led to a disjointed effort that mirrors present day situation on Mindanao.

The Moro Wars fought between the Moros and Spanish were marked by savagery on both sides for over three centuries. Numerous times during the conflict the Spanish would set up settlements and forts on the coasts of Mindanao. The Moros, early in the conflict, would burn Spanish settlements and take the women and children as slaves. The Spanish razed Moro villages on Sulu and Mindanao and the prisoners taken were used as oarsmen on Spanish ships.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 199.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 411. Yegar defines dar al-Islam as the land of Islam, territory of Islam, Islamic countries.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>27</sup> Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is comprised primarily of Tausigs whom derive their roots from the Sultanate of Sulu, while the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is comprised of Maguindanaos.

<sup>28</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 202.

Financial burdens and wars with other countries turned the Moro Wars into an economy of force mission for the Spanish. At one point, two hundred years into the conflict, the Spanish ran out of money and ships.<sup>29</sup> Coastal areas in Luzon and Visayas were susceptible to Moro naval raids. The Moros continued razing coastal settlements throughout the entirety of the Philippines and the Spanish could do little about stopping the Moros. The Spanish signed a peace treaty with both the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. The peace lasted for almost fifty years, and enabled the Spanish to end conflicts with England and France.<sup>30</sup> In 1848, the Spanish introduced the use of cannons and steamships into the war. This violent introduction gave the advantage to the Spanish.<sup>31</sup> As the Spanish were able to garrison large amount of forces in what were previously Muslim strongholds on Sulu and Mindanao. Simultaneously, the Spanish navy blockaded Sulu and Mindanao and effectively stopped any arms and ammunition from reaching the Moros.

The Spanish military success did not transition to the political world of the Moro. The Moros did not consider themselves conquered even though the Spanish set up military governance of the island. The Moro political framework established over the previous three centuries was rooted within the Muslim communities. They never accepted Spanish authority and kept fighting a guerilla war.<sup>32</sup> In 1896, the Christian rebellion led by Emilio Aguinaldo on the northern island of Luzon, ensured the Spanish would not fully dominate and conquer Mindanao.<sup>33</sup> The Spanish had to concentrate their forces against the rebellion and thus again Mindanao became an economy of force mission. Aguinaldo made an incredible gesture by trying to enlist the support of the Muslims against the Spanish by claiming the Muslims were an integral part of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 208.

the Philippine people.<sup>34</sup> However the Muslims would not listen to Aguinaldo's pleas, because they considered the Spanish and the Christian Filipinos their enemies.<sup>35</sup> The Muslims deep-rooted hatred for the Christian Filipinos would carry over when the Americans attempted to pacify Mindanao after the Spanish relinquished their colony after their defeat at the hands of the Americans in 1898.

### **The American Years: 1898-1946**

The Americans were more successful in dealing with the Moros. It took the Americans twenty-one years to develop the Moros into a society that would work with them. The Spanish were unable to provide security in three centuries of colonial rule. Three factors proved instrumental in this change. The Americans chose to implement socio-economic change, by building massive amounts of infrastructure. The Americans also disarmed the Moros but they allowed them to freely practice Islam.

Infrastructure projects were paramount to the success of the American forces in Sulu and Mindanao. At first, resistance to these projects was fierce. Government schools were built in all areas and the Moros were scared the schools were going to take the place of the traditional religious schools. General Bliss, while in charge of Mindanao, gave the traditional Muslim schools equipment and supplies. This act by General Bliss provided the Muslims how Americans were not trying to convert them to Christianity. Many railways and roads were built across Mindanao, this development along with telephone lines connected the island and enabled the Americans and Christian Filipinos to extend their reach to the hinterlands.<sup>36</sup> As Kalyvas writes in his book, "The importance of government institutions reaching the populace claiming that the higher level of control exercised by an agent, the higher level of collaboration that will exist in an

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 221.

area thus the less agents (Moros) will continue their struggle.<sup>37</sup> This principal was key for the Americans, who initially under General Wood tried a campaign of violence. The campaign of violence did not win any hearts or minds it just destroyed the Moros and their will to fight.

Brigadier General Pershing took over for Brigadier General Bliss in 1910. Pershing, like Bliss, continued the socio-economic reforms the region desperately needed, but he took it a step further in 1913 when he decided to disarm the Moros.<sup>38</sup> Disarming the Moros became a tenuous issue. The Moros wanted and felt they needed to keep their firearms to defend themselves against any Christian Filipino threats. Some Moro villages turned their weapons in, but in areas such as Jolo Island in Sulu, some 5000 Moros decided to fight the Americans.<sup>39</sup> The Americans destroyed the Muslim fighters and their will to continue an organized resistance.

The Americans were not concerned about converting the Moros to Christianity. The Moros recognized this and, according to Yegar, preferred the Americans to govern them instead of the Christian Filipinos. The Moros believed the Christian Filipinos would try to destroy Islamic culture and the traditions that go with the religion.<sup>40</sup> The American point of view was Muslims could keep practicing Islam as long as it did not interfere with American law. Muslims did not see this gesture with the Spanish. They just saw missionaries and Spanish soldiers trying to kill or convert them. The Muslims appreciated the Americans view of freedom of religion, but could not comprehend American property ownership procedures.<sup>41</sup>

A cultural misunderstanding about property ownership happened between the Americans and the Moros. The Americans did not understand how the Muslims dealt with property rights. They looked at it through a western lens and not through Muslim one. A Muslim looks at

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<sup>37</sup> Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 219.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 224-225.

property as being part of the community and anyone in the community can use it. The ruling American government in Mindanao would let Muslims keep their land if they could prove property ownership.<sup>42</sup> This proved difficult for a Muslim to prove since most land was passed down from ancestors without a property deed or title. Thus a conflict between communal goods and Western notions of property law occurred.

Muslims view land as part of their ancestral rights and not something that could be sold for a profit or passed between strangers.<sup>43</sup> The land belongs to Allah and to the Dar al-Islam community. The Department of Mindanao and Sulu, operated by Americans with Christian Filipino integration, was in charge of the Southern Philippines from 1914-1920. The Department of Mindanao and Sulu wanted to move Christian Filipinos from overpopulated islands like Luzon to develop the natural resources and economic potential that Mindanao provided. If a Muslim could not show ownership proof to land, a Christian Filipino from Luzon or an American that wanted to farm in Mindanao would be granted property rights. In some cases the Muslim, who lost his land, could have been farming it for generations for his community. Yegar's comments, "It was one of the greatest –if not the foremost—irritants leading to friction with the Muslim Community."<sup>44</sup> The issue of property not religion has been at the forefront and still is the driving force behind the violence of the insurgency in the Southern Philippines.

The differences between Spanish and American colonization techniques played a significant role in how the Moros responded to their various demands. Tolerance of the Muslim faith marks American rule. Conversion to the Catholic faith and intolerance to Muslims highlighted Spanish colonial rule. After World War II, the Philippines finally received its independence from the United States in 1946. The Christian Filipinos took over the country and now completely governed the Muslims in Mindanao.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 231.

## 1946-1972

Several events between 1946 and the 1972 founding of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) need to be highlighted to show how events helped shape what is known as present day Mindanao.<sup>45</sup> Land issues with Christian Filipinos remained the central problem with the Manila government during this period. In addition, the Government of the Philippines (GRP) extended the olive branch by educating Moros in universities in Manila and schools built in Mindanao. The education of the Moros proved to be a double-edged sword for the GRP. Finally, the controversy between the GRP and Malaysia over the Sabah territory in Northern Borneo started a causal chain that eventually regenerated the Moro insurgency and the reemergence of violence on Mindanao.

After receiving their independence from the United States in 1946, the GRP realized the importance of Mindanao and Sulu for political and economic reasons. Muslim Mindanao wanted to be separated, from GRP rule. The Muslims would rather be a United States territory than be part of Christian Filipino rule because ill feelings were still left over from the Spanish colonial period.<sup>46</sup> Christian Filipino immigration to Mindanao was encouraged by the government. The GRP wanted immigrants to exploit the agricultural potential Mindanao possessed. As mentioned earlier, Muslims had a different cultural context concerning land ownership. They often could not produce land owning documents because the documents did not exist. Many corrupt Christian Filipinos cheated Muslims out of their natural land. They did this by getting paperwork from the local government, ruled by Christian Filipinos, even though Muslims were living on the land they had owned for centuries. Moro society, according to Yegar, was based on unwritten tradition;

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<sup>45</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by James J.F. Forest, 488. The MNLF was officially founded in 1972, but was an organization in the late 1960s.

<sup>46</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 241.

whereas Christians relied on legal documents.<sup>47</sup> The Bangsamoro (Moro Nation) did not feel the GRP were their rulers. The Moros considered them foreigners who invaded their land. Consequently, the Moros felt they were being cheated out of their ancestral land.

The GRP passed the Commission of National Integration (CNI) law in 1957. The purpose of the CNI was to bring the standard of living for Muslims to the same level as Christian Filipinos regarding economics, social, educational, and political to facilitate a transition into a Christian and Muslim integrated society.<sup>48</sup> Many Muslims did not participate or support the CNI out of fear of losing their Muslim culture under this agreement.

The CNI provided educational opportunities for Moros not available prior to the start of the 1957 law. Many Moros attended universities in Manila and in Mindanao. Studies such as law, engineering, medicine, fine arts, and liberal arts were now available. Moros were now being educated and began looking at the world, especially the situation in their homeland in a different way. The universities gave the Moro students an opportunity to talk to each other about the problems their people were facing.<sup>49</sup> Moro students were able to talk about problems concerning the GRP. According to Yegar, these meetings and discussions would have far-reaching effects, but ironically, universities would have the opposite effect the CNI was trying to accomplish.<sup>50</sup> The CNI had good intentions regarding educational opportunities the program brought to Bangsamoro, but the CNI backfired because it enabled many educated Moros to make connections with other Moros and gave them the ability to express their concerns with each other. Universities opened the Moro minds to the larger Muslim world. This enabled the Moros to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 245. Moro students in Manila met in the universities to talk about issues. They also conversed in the only mosque in Manila. According to Yegar, it is here where many realized they shared a common identity and were part of a bigger Muslim community.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 245. Many of the influential leaders of the Moro movement received their start in the Manila universities such as Musari, MNLF founder.

realize that they were not being treated fairly, and shaped the new generation of Moro leaders as being young, educated, and filled with radical ideology.

The controversy between the GRP and Malaysia over the Sabah territory in Northern Borneo started a causal chain that eventually fueled the Moro insurgency and the reemergence of violence on Mindanao. The Sabah territory ownership rights are traced back to the Sultan of Sulu before Europeans started colonizing the region. In 1878, the Sabah was leased to the British North Borneo Company for arms to fight the Spanish.<sup>51</sup> Sovereignty was not transferred to the British. The British North Borneo Company acting on its own gave the territory to Great Britain in 1946.<sup>52</sup> The GRP's argument was that the Sabah was given illegally to Great Britain since the British North Borneo Company did not have sovereignty over the territory. Great Britain eventually gave the Sabah territory to Malaysia in 1963. This has been a root cause of bad blood between the Philippines and Malaysia since the Philippines gained its independence in 1946.

The GRP, in 1967, planned to carry out attacks and incite the people of Sabah to reject Malaysia and join the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos, president of the Philippines, gave authorization to form a unit of Moros with Christian officers to carry out the secret mission in Sabah. The unit's training took place in Corregidor. In 1968 between twenty-eight and sixty-eight members of the unit were massacred by their Christian officers.<sup>53</sup> The GRP claims that the Moro soldiers refused to follow an order and wanted to return to Sulu immediately. Some Moros escaped the massacre to tell their story. The perpetrators of the incident were never brought to justice.

The Muslim population became enraged when details of the "Corregidor incident" reached the public. Marcos added fuel to the fire of an already growing radical Muslim population in the Southern Philippines. When the Malaysian government found out about this

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 251.

attempt by the GRP to incite what was essentially a revolution in the Sabah, they decided to train and supply the Moros with arms and ammunition. The Malaysian government was going to do the same to the GRP, but in Mindanao.

The “Corregidor incident” also sparked the founding of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in May 1968.<sup>54</sup> The MIM never picked up a major following in Mindanao, but with its establishment, it marked a new phase in Mindanao, one of organized violence, resistance and insurgency. The MIM inspired other Muslim leaders such as Nur Misuari, founder of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), to carry on the fight politically but more importantly with violence and rage. Not only would these groups and others receive military training from within Malaysia, but other Muslim countries around the world would provide weapons and explosives training such as Libya and Pakistan.<sup>55</sup> The MNLF would be at the tip of the spear in leading the Moro separatist movement. It became the main spokesman for all the different Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines.

The MNLF, lead by Nur Misuari, was formed in 1969 primarily to address three grievances: The Corregidor incident, land grabbing of traditional Muslim lands by Christian Filipinos, and disappointment of the Muslim population over the GRP’s failure to solve socio-economic problems in Mindanao and Sulu.<sup>56</sup> Misuari’s goal for the group was complete liberation of the Moro land from the Philippines. The MNLF leadership base, comprised of young educated Muslims, was driven by their goal of liberation. Most of these young leaders were products of the Universities in the Philippines and Islamic Universities and Madrasas in Pakistan and Egypt.

The MNLF was comprised of a political and military arm. The political arm of the MNLF operated in Sabah and later from Tripoli, Libya. It was made of a Central Committee, which

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 256-257.

<sup>56</sup> Noble, Lela. “The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines.” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Autumn 1976), 409. Noble conducted an interview with an unidentified MNLF Commander.

dictated policy for the MNLF. Its main mission though was to solicit external support from other Muslim countries.<sup>57</sup> The MNLF, already receiving support from Malaysia, Libya, and Pakistan, wanted to appeal to more Muslim communities for support.

The military arm, the Bangsamoro Army (BMA), reported to the Central Committee but had no direct supervision from the political arm probably because of geographical distance. This was significant because the unity of effort within the MNLF was not always integrated causing problems for the Central Committee with their talks with the GRP. Several autonomous tribal groups comprised the BMA. The MNLF numbered close to 30,000 members primarily because of the BMA's guerillas.<sup>58</sup>

The MNLF conducted violent attacks against Christian Militias and the Armed Forces of the Philippines from 1973-1977. During this time Ferdinand Marcos, the ruthless dictator of the Philippines, tried several times to make peace with the MNLF. His efforts were hampered by the Christian Militias in Mindanao who were difficult to control and often had their own agenda of self-preservation since the GRP was perceived as not being tough enough against the MNLF.

Though the MNLF's military numbers were an estimated 30,000 by 1975, the MNLF was losing popular support due to the amount of casualties they were taking. Zachary Abuza estimated the casualty total at 50,000.<sup>59</sup> Because of the high casualty rates on both sides, Marcos extended the olive branch and sent an envoy to Tripoli to meet with members of the MNLF and the Libyan leader Mohamar Khadafy. Libyan aid was significant and the external support provided enabled the MNLF to continue its insurgency. The MNLF surprisingly also gave up their goals of separating from the Philippines. In an interview conducted in early 1976 in Tripoli,

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<sup>57</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 269.

<sup>58</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 488.

<sup>59</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 38.

Musari, the leader of the MNLF, said, “They (MNLF) merely aspired to autonomy and federal-state relations as was the case in the American System, but added they wished to maintain their own army in the Moro State.”<sup>60</sup> The MNLF realized that no Filipino President was going to let them separate all ties to the Philippines. This was the MNLF’s best option. In December, 1976 the Tripoli Agreement was signed establishing an autonomous zone for the MNLF.

## **1976: Tripoli Agreement**

The Tripoli Agreement was a landmark document after four centuries of warfare. It defined eighteen points of agreement between the MNLF and the GRP. Highlights of the eighteen points are as follows: within the thirteen areas of Mindanao and Sulu that would comprise the autonomous region, all natural resources will belong to the GRP; but some revenue sharing from the natural resources will be determined at a later time; within the autonomous areas Muslims shall have the right to set up their own courts which would operate under shari’a law; and finally the GRP shall take all necessary steps for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.<sup>61</sup> The Tripoli Agreement laid out the general direction for Muslim autonomy on Mindanao and Sulu.

The agreement was seen as a victory for both the MNLF and the GRP. Marcos, the President of the GRP, was praised throughout the world for negotiating a peace for one of the longest standing conflicts in the world, while the MNLF was seen as getting favorable measures within the agreement. Both the insurgents and the GRP had their reasons for signing it. The GRP hypothesized that Khadafy, the Libyan leader, was the centerpiece behind the external support provided for the Muslim Mindanao.<sup>62</sup> Marcos figured if he could appease Khadafy that the Muslim rebellion could be neutralized. The MNLF signed the document to reconstitute their

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<sup>60</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 302. The Moros wanted a relationship that was established when the Americans governed Mindanao, 227.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 413. Shari’a law is an Islamic law based on scholarly religious interpretation of the Qur’an and Islamic basic sources.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 304.

Army which has been decimated over the four years of fighting, but mainly because the MNLF wanted autonomy to govern Moro lands. Also the MNLF, according to Thomas McKenna, “was now recognized as the official representative of Philippine Muslims and accorded it (MNLF) belligerent state status.”<sup>63</sup> The recognition as the official representative of the Moros was important because the GRP never fully recognized any Muslim separatist groups, and for the MNLF to achieve this status was a significant accomplishment.

The peace made by the agreement lasted only nine months. The Marcos led Philippine Government had no real intentions of implementing the Tripoli Agreement and the MNLF quickly understood that. Token efforts were made to look like the agreement was being implemented. Marcos appointed Muslim government officials in political positions over the so called autonomous areas, but most of the appointees were Marcos sympathizers and corrupt Muslims. The final issue came when Marcos wanted to hold a referendum letting the citizens of the autonomous areas vote to see if they wanted to live under MNLF rule. The referendum scared the MNLF because after centuries of Christian migration, the Christians were a majority of the population in eight of the thirteen autonomous provinces.<sup>64</sup> The MNLF feared that the Christian majority would vote not to be ruled by the MNLF but remain under the watchful eye of the GRP.

Due to the Tripoli Agreement the MNLF lost many of its supporters. According to McKenna, “After the signing of the agreement, the rate of defections from the MNLF accelerated, its (MNLF) support from foreign sources was reduced, and dissension intensified in its (MNLF) top ranks. The MNLF threat to the martial law state (Philippines) remained significant but was no longer an immediate one.”<sup>65</sup> The dissension in the ranks of the MNLF, mainly over the group’s

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<sup>63</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 167.

<sup>64</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 308

<sup>65</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 308.

objectives, leadership issues, and questions of Islam and ideology caused a splinter group to form. The splinter group was the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) led by Hashim Salamat.<sup>66</sup>

### **MILF: Split from the MNLF**

With the breakdown of the second round of Tripoli talks in 1977 to address implementation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement with the GRP. Salamat decided to break away from the MNLF and form the MILF. Salamat wanted control of the MNLF because he was frustrated with Misuari's dictatorial and corrupt leadership.<sup>67</sup> He also accused Misuari of favoring his own Tausig tribe and ignoring the other powerful Muslim tribes such as the Maguindanao.

Aside from allegations of being a "bad" leader and corrupt, Salamat, according to McKenna, "Changed the title of his organization to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to underscore Islam as the rallying point of the Bangsamoro struggle."<sup>68</sup> Salamat's objective for his newly found group was to create a separate Islamic Moro state as opposed to Misuari's objective for the MNLF of creating a secular Moro state.<sup>69</sup> Salamat attempted to make the MILF struggle a religious one initially.

McKenna attributes Salamat's splinter group and name change as a failure on Salamat's attempt to take over the MNLF. Interestingly he says, "The name change of the Salamat faction represented less an alteration of goals and more a recognition that, after six years (1978-1984) of challenges to his leadership of the MNLF, Nur Misuari retained a tenacious grip as chairman. Salamat's only option was to relinquish his claim to sole leadership of the MNLF and develop

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<sup>66</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 39

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>68</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 208.

<sup>69</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 489.

another organization.”<sup>70</sup> Salamat desperately wanted control of the MNLF because he felt he could force the government to implement the negotiated 1976 Tripoli Agreement. He used Islamic ideology as a rallying cry to drum up support for his new organization which appealed to followers of the MNLF to join his more perceived radical and militant group. His use of Islamic ideology as a platform to launch the MILF also appealed to the Muslim fence sitter. From 1978 to 1984, Salamat and MILF leadership left the Philippines and began a program of establishing diplomatic ties with Islamic countries such as Egypt and Pakistan. The key for his insurgency would be external support. The kind of external support needed would be Islamic education at Madrasas and universities, military training at camps in Pakistan, and money. Experience for the military arm of the MILF was developed in the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Salamat sent over one thousand Filipino-Muslims to Afghanistan to train and fight the Soviets.<sup>71</sup> Key contacts with future members of Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah were established during these years abroad. The MILF’s military wing was gaining precious experience fighting in Afghanistan and the political arm was undergoing a reorganization of its own.

### **MILF: Shadow Government**

The MILF in 1984, under Salamat’s direction, reorganized and recognized the importance of establishing a shadow government in parallel with the GRP from the local to the national levels. Salamat was quoted as saying, “The MILF operates as a parallel government vis-à-vis the enemy government (GRP) within its area of responsibility and exercises influence extensively among the Bangsamoro masses in a degree more effective and binding than that of

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<sup>70</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 208.

<sup>71</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 126.

the enemy administration.”<sup>72</sup> The MILF shadow government was more influential than the GRP at the local level because of its ability to provide services such as its own judicial system loosely associated with shari’a law. The shadow government also provided services such as granting marriage and birth certificates to local Muslims, something the GRP usually failed to do.<sup>73</sup> One reason the shadow government was effective was because in the 1980s the New People’s Army (NPA) was becoming more effective in their movement to make the Philippines a communist state, so the GRP had to shift armed forces to other islands in the nation to counter the NPA. This enabled the MILF to grow in strength politically and militarily in Mindanao.

Maria Ressa describes how the shadow government replicated almost everything the legitimate GRP does,

At least thirty regional Islamic Committees scattered throughout Mindanao, Palawan, and Manila. These committees govern villages and report to the MILF Standing Committee, in effect, the equal of a cabinet, which breaks down into nine portfolios, including Finance, Information, Education, Internal Security, and Military Affairs. The Standing Committee reports to the Central Committee or the Jihad Executive Council and MILF chairman, Hashim Salamat.<sup>74</sup>

Ressa’s description of the MILF’s political structure is one that is already prepared to provide services for an autonomous area.

## **MILF: Financial Support**

The MILF has an elaborate financial network. The extensive shadow government and numerous members under arms require broad financial support from all aspects of society. The Lajinah a-Uly-e, a branch of the MILF’s Central Committee, is tasked by Salamat to raise money

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<sup>72</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 209.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>74</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 128.

under the guise of collecting zakat.<sup>75</sup> Through zakat their financial support has four main sources: Muslim charities, sympathizers from nation states, taxes collected amongst the Moros, and narco-terrorism.

Salamat, through his connections from the Soviet-Afghan war, benefited financially from his ties with Al Qaeda. Mohammed Jamel Khalifa, Osama Bin Laden's brother-in-law, established several Muslim charities that served as a front for fund raising for the MILF and the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. He was sent by Bin Laden in 1988 to create a financial network in the Philippines to be used as a staging base for attacks throughout the world.<sup>76</sup> Khalifa even married a Muslim Filipina woman to gain further acceptance into the Moro society.<sup>77</sup> Al Qaeda would provide the MILF with financial assistance in exchange for safe haven. An example of providing financial assistance in exchange for safe haven came out of the interrogation of a Jemaayah Islamiyah terrorist named Hambali,

“Hambali has revealed since his capture that in the summer of 2003 he authorized the direct transfer of \$27,000 to the MILF. The money was transferred by Bashir bin Lap, Hambali's aide, and used to purchase weapons. It was seen as a thank you gift to the MILF for giving a large number of JI fugitives sanctuary.”<sup>78</sup>

Khalifa established several charities, which the MILF benefited from such as the Islamic Worldwide Mission, International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), and United Overseas Bangsamoro.<sup>79</sup> These charities were also active in recruitment and sending MILF members

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<sup>75</sup> Information was accessed on 14 August 2008 from <http://search.janes.com> through the Combined Arms Research Library internet portal at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Zakat is a set amount of one's wealth given as charity under the Islamic faith.

<sup>76</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 10.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>78</sup> Abuza, Zachary. “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiya” National Bureau of Southeast Asia Research: Volume 14, No.5, December, 2003. (Accessed on January 28, 2009 ) from <http://www.apgml.org/frameworks/docs/7/Z%20Abuzer%20-%20TF%20in%20SE%20Asia%20Dec03.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 130.. Ressa received this information from confession of JI operative Pandu Yuduhawinata.

abroad to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to receive a radical Islamic education.<sup>80</sup> According to Abuza, the IIRO was used by bin Laden and Khalifa to distribute funds for the purchase of arms and other logistical requirements of Abu Sayyaf and MILF.<sup>81</sup> A former Abu Sayyaf member said, “Only 10 to 30 percent of the foreign funding goes to the legitimate relief and livelihood projects and the rest go to terrorist operations.”<sup>82</sup> Abuza explains that the reason the IIRO was allowed to remain open in the Philippines, even though it had ties to the Muslim insurgency and terrorism in the region, was because of a large amount of pressure put on the GRP by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>83</sup> The IIRO is supported by the Saudi Royal family and elites of the Kingdom, and even the Ambassador to the Philippines is a board member of the IIRO. Saudi Arabia employs a large amount of Filipino workers numbering close to 200,000 and according to Abuza the employment was likely used as leverage to keeping the IIRO open.<sup>84</sup> This demonstrates that the so-called legitimate Muslim charities are nothing but tools to help the MILF insurgency and terrorism in the region.

The large Moro Diaspora and Muslim sympathizers primarily from the Middle East, Australia, and Europe also provide financial support to the MILF’s insurgency.<sup>85</sup> One example of the amount of money provided by sympathizers abroad was 200,000 United States dollars donated after the 2001 Ramadan.<sup>86</sup> The money was wired from the United Arab Emirates through

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>81</sup> Abuza, Zachary. “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiya” National Bureau of Southeast Asia Research: Volume 14, No.5, December, 2003, page 27.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>85</sup> Information was accessed on 14 August 2008 from <http://search.janes.com> through the Combined Arms Research Library internet portal at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 7.

a bank in New York City.<sup>87</sup> This example shows the complicated web of funding that provides the MILF financial support.

The local shadow governments at the village and city level do an effective job of collecting zakat also known as taxes at the Moro peasant level. The MILF's understanding of zakat says that the money raised should go to their fighters because they are in an active fight with Christians.<sup>88</sup> McKenna adds, "MILF representatives had, each year since the beginning of the Bangsamoro Rebellion, claimed the largest portion of payments collected by local imams, who were required by the MILF to keep a list of contributing households."<sup>89</sup> The fact that MILF kept the majority of the zakat collected in Mindanao alienated much of the poorer Muslim population because they felt they were in more dire need of the money than the rebels. The poor population was probably correct as the rebels grew their own food and lived in their own camps.<sup>90</sup>

Narco-trafficking is a prominent way for the MILF to raise money. As other sources of income such as external support have been disrupted, the drug trade has become reliable source of income. The MILF has been growing marijuana alongside cassava, Filipino fruit, in three provinces in Mindanao.<sup>91</sup> According to Vicente Soto III, GRP Dangerous Drugs Board Chair, "This is a fund source for the Moro rebels."<sup>92</sup> The MILF dismisses the claims of narco-terrorism as government propaganda claiming that marijuana usage and distribution goes against Islamic practices, but the evidence of the links between narco-terrorism and the money flowing to the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>88</sup> McKenna, Thomas. *Muslims and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1998, page 229.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>91</sup> Umel, Richard. "MILF protecting marijuana farms-Sotto." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. November 30, 2008. (Accessed on 2 December 2, 2008).

<sup>92</sup> Umel, Richard. "MILF protecting marijuana farms-Sotto." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. November 30, 2008. (Accessed on 2 December 2, 2008).

MILF is overwhelming. The MILF have used the profits to continue to buy arms and ammunition from Muslim countries.

## **MILF: Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces**

The Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) is the militant wing of the MILF. Like every other facet of the MILF's organization it is modeled after its GRP counterpart. Murad, the current Central Committee Chairman, is the commander of the BIAF. The BIAF has a chief of staff who provides oversight and supervision to ten functional staffs, a General Headquarters division, a National Guard division, the Bangsamoro Women Auxiliary Islamic armed forces and four field divisions.<sup>93</sup> Most of the units consider Central Mindanao their area of operations, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division operating in Western Mindanao.<sup>94</sup> The MILF further subdivides its military districts into nine base commands, which allow further autonomy and flexibility in operations.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes the autonomy leads to problems with unity of effort similar to the MNLF in the 1970s, where local military unit leaders have their own agenda.

A military academy was established and modeled after the Philippine Military Academy, which was modeled after West Point.<sup>96</sup> Ressa says, "The two story building inside the MILF headquarters was simply known as the academy, and was the hub of military training not only for the MILF but for thousands of Muslim militants across the region and beyond."<sup>97</sup> Graduates of the academy went through a rigorous training program similar to Bin Laden's camps in

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<sup>93</sup> Luga, Alan LTC, Philippine Army. Muslim Insurgency in Mindanao, Philippines. Thesis from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College: Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. 2002, page 47.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>95</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 490.

<sup>96</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 129.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 129.

Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s. The academy's cadre was comprised of Afghan war veterans.<sup>98</sup>

The current numbers of the military wing of the MILF is estimated at being between 12,000 to 15,000 depending on the source.<sup>99</sup> Many more members can be mobilized if the need arises, but these members are not very effective fighters. Many of the BIAF were trained at Camp Abubakar in Central Mindanao.

### **Camp Abubakar: Training Ground for Terrorism**

In the early 1990s the GRP misunderstood the intentions of the MILF's move toward an Islamic state in Mindanao. Leaders of the GRP believed the MILF wanted economic development on equal terms to the Christian provinces of the Philippines. The GRP also believed that the MILF's movement was more secular like the MNLF's and wanted the economic parity that the New People's Army (NPA) desired.<sup>100</sup>

The GRP, in a surprising move, started negotiations with the MILF and authorized them areas for base camps in the hope of the military keeping closer tabs on the MILF.<sup>101</sup> As Ressa states, "The government (GRP) licensed a jihad movement on their own turf."<sup>102</sup> A safe haven for terrorism and insurgency was established by the MILF and sanctioned by the GRP. Camp Abubakar was gigantic in size covering over 10,000 hectares of land. The camps location in the provinces of Maguindanao (MILF stronghold) and Lanao del Sur enabled the MILF to span its influence and rule to over seven towns.<sup>103</sup> The MILF without repercussion could strengthen ties

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>99</sup> Bowman, Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 490.

<sup>100</sup> Ressa, Maria. *Seeds of Terror*. New York: Free Press, 2003, page 128.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 124.

with jihadists and terrorists from Al Qaeda and JI, build better political institutions, and have a safe haven where they could extend their operational reach deep into the hinterlands where the GRP did not have a presence. The GRP inadvertently contributed to terrorism in the region, but did not realize it at the time. Hashim Salamat had an established Muslim area in the Southern Philippines, ruled by Shari-a law, protected by a Muslim army, and established a Muslim government. Salamat was close to his goals of a separate Muslim state.

Camp Abubakar was overrun and destroyed by the Philippine military in 2000 because of its links with foreign terror groups Al Qaeda and JI. Former President of the Philippines Jose Estrada ordered an all out offensive once these links were uncovered by the GRP. The MILF and JI moved training operations to Indonesia until the Indonesian government conducted similar crackdowns on these organizations.<sup>104</sup> With all the Al Qaeda and JI terror links associated with the MILF through Camp Abubakar and three others, the GRP still offered peace and autonomy to the MILF. The MILF provided safe haven for Al Qaeda and JI for money and training and Ressa estimates that over one-thousand JI and Al Qaeda members were trained there during its tenure.<sup>105</sup>

### **Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)**

The 1996 peace agreement signed between the GRP and the MNLF produced the implementation of the ARMM. The ARMM in its present state is comprised of five provinces Maguindanao, Lanao del Sure, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi encompassing roughly 12,000 kilometers and close to four percent of the Philippines.<sup>106</sup> With the signing of the ARMM the MNLF laid their arms down, and its leader Misuari became the first governor of the ARMM. This ended the MNLF's two-decade long struggle. The GRP spent an estimated 3 billion dollars in the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., XV.

<sup>106</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 41

insurgent war with the MNLF.<sup>107</sup> Finally money and military efforts could be focused on the MILF, Abu Sayyaf, and NPA.

With the establishment of the ARMM in 1996, an estimated 5,074 MNLF fighters made peace with the GRP thus making them non-combatants.<sup>108</sup> Immediately 2,200 were integrated into the Philippine military and its police force on Mindanao.<sup>109</sup> These fighters could be used against the MILF who was opposed to the peace process with the GRP in 1996. Many of the fighters who opposed making peace with the GRP joined the MILF and ASG to continue their struggle. The United States made attempts to give many of the former MNLF rebels some life skills. From 1998-2003 the United States government gave the GRP four and a half million dollars to train some 15,000 MNLF members to farm crops, breed fish, and grow seaweed.<sup>110</sup> It was important to make sure former MNLF members had an occupation besides fighting once peace was made.

The elements of the ARMM were negotiated with the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, but never fully implemented by the Marcos government. The Tripoli Agreement laid the groundwork for what would eventually become the ARMM in the 1996 GRP agreement with the MNLF. Two parts of the 1996 agreement were significant. The first being that Misuari, former leader of the MNLF, would be the first governor of the ARMM and would signify his recognition for the Philippine Republic, something that the Moros had never done before.<sup>111</sup> The second part was the creation of the Special Zone for Peace and Development, and the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), which would put the thirteen provinces stated in the 1976

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<sup>107</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 341.

<sup>108</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>111</sup> Yegar, Moshe. *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar*, 339.

Tripoli Agreement under the SPCPD governance for a three-year period. At the end of the three-year period, a vote would take place in each province determining if the provinces would fall under ARMM control or go back to GRP control.<sup>112</sup> The three year period would give Misuari an opportunity to try to convince the Christians who lived in those provinces to be governed under the ARMM. Misuari promised the GRP Islam would only be taught in Muslim schools and only Muslims would abide by shari'a law. Christians would live under Christian GRP rules. A tenuous, but workable situation was at hand.

Though the GRP worked a solution with the MNLF for autonomy in areas of Mindanao several issues still existed such as economic development, dependence on the GRP, and MNLF reconciliation with the MILF. An important subject for the ARMM was economic development. In 1996, President Ramos promised the ARMM government an annual budget of approximately \$380 million dollars.<sup>113</sup> Misuari, the first governor of the ARMM, did little with financial aid to help the Muslim population. Instead Misuari squandered the money on himself and his Muslim cronies instead of improving infrastructure in the region. Little was accomplished by the ARMM government to encourage growth at the micro level. Misuari was worried transfixed on building a unrealistic and ill-advised bullet train through Mindanao and an international airport in Jolo.<sup>114</sup> During his reign as the ARMM Governor, minimal socio-economic improvement happened. The ARMM areas are some of the richest in natural resources in the Philippines, but frustration amongst the ARMM officials over the split of revenue between the GRP and the ARMM were evident. Out of one-hundred percent revenue generated, the ARMM gave sixty percent of the revenue to the GRP while the GRP returned only ten percent of the sixty percent in return. One

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>114</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42

ARMM official stated in frustration, “We produce more, but receive less.”<sup>115</sup> Many GRP politicians own land in Mindanao and let their self-serving interests get in the way of peace. Much of the revenue according to ARMM officials was fueling the corruption in the GRP.<sup>116</sup>

The ARMM is dependent on money from the GRP for socio-economic improvements. Even though the ARMM is an autonomous area it is still at the mercy of the GRP for money. Misuari attempted to encourage foreign investment in the region. Foreign companies were not ready to invest in Mindanao when the GRP was still at war with the MILF, Abu Sayyaf, and NPA. The ongoing insurgencies still make Mindanao a dangerous place which is not safe for foreign companies and their employees. A travel warning issued by the U.S. State Department for Mindanao has discouraged American investment in the area. American companies will not conduct business in an area where a travel warning has been issued due to the high amount of life and business insurance money that would have to be paid if one of their employees was killed.

Reconciliation between the MNLF and the MILF seems difficult if not impossible. Several deep separations divide the two groups. The lines of tension are as follows, the MNLF sees itself as the representative for all Muslim groups in the Philippines, the MNLF says the wording in the 1996 agreement stating it as the “final” agreement means there can be no more, and the MILF view the MNLF as selling the best interests of the Moro people out for a favorable role for MNLF members within the ARMM.

When the MNLF was created in the early 1970s it saw itself as the leader and spokesperson for all Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines. Once the MILF split from the MNLF it saw itself as the new spokesperson for the Moros. Thus, the rivalry and competition for power began and still has not ended even with the signing of the “final” agreement in 1996 between the MNLF and the GRP.

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<sup>115</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 43. An interview conducted by Dr. Abuza with an ARMM media official.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

When negotiated in 1996, the ARMM was labeled as the “final” agreement between MNLF and the GRP. The MNLF had the word “final” put into the 1996 agreement so other groups such as the MILF or Abu Sayyaf could not negotiate with the GRP. The MNLF wanted to ensure the concessions they gained would remain in the future. The MNLF also saw the word “final” as recognition of their role as leader and spokesperson of the Moros.

The MILF see the MNLF as corrupt, bad Muslims, and not the leaders of the Moros in the Southern Philippines. Abuza says, “Egos are at stake. The MILF view the MNLF as a bunch of corrupt, debauched, un-Islamic sellouts, and the MNLF does not treat the MILF with any respect fearful that it will lose its influence.”<sup>117</sup> The relationship between the two are similar to when two brothers fight and do not want to talk to each other. The egos and rivalry between the two are childish and petty and the GRP has been exploiting the rift between the two to drive a deeper wedge. The GRP now realizes peace in the region will never be established unless these two groups can reconcile their differences. The Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) has to take the MILF’s best interest into account while incorporating the desires of the MNLF.

### **Memorandum of Agreement for Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD)**

The MOA-AD was the document negotiated by the MILF and the GRP regarding territorial rights in the Southern Philippines. The negotiations were ongoing since mid-2003 and ended on the eve of the signing in 2008.<sup>118</sup> Essentially the MOA-AD would have brought peace between the MILF and GRP. The MOA-AD addressed three main issues: Ancestral Domain, peace, and natural resource rights within the newly designated Moro territory. The terms of the document for the most part were secret to the majority of the Philippine people and governmental

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<sup>117</sup> Abuza, Zachary. “The Philippine Peace Process: Too Soon to Claim a Settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front?” The Jebson Center for Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series, Vol. 3, No. 3, February 2008, page 5.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1.

officials. Several problems erupted from this secrecy when the document was released to the GRP and the public such as constitutional questions, loss of land by GRP politicians, and the belief of many GRP politicians that the MILF should not receive more concessions than the MNLF received in 1996.<sup>119</sup>

Ancestral Domain deals with territorial rights. The MILF are fighting a territorial war under the disguise of religious ideology. The GRP, as stated in the MOA-AD, offered the MILF 737 villages that would be added to the ARMM that was negotiated in 1996. These 737 villages, would have the opportunity to vote a year later on whether to be included in the Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE). The BJE would replace the ARMM in 2010 according to the MOA-AD. An additional 1,459 villages comprised of a Christian majority population with some Muslim residents would have the opportunity to vote on whether to be part of the BJE 25 years after the signing of the MOA-AD.<sup>120</sup> The MILF stood by the agreement to let the additional 1,459 Christian majority population villages choose their fate. In the twenty-five year period, the MILF believes they can co-opt the Christian population into voting or coerce them into leaving. Islamic law would be instituted in the Muslim areas that constitute the BJE. Within the BJE, Christians would not fall under the Islamic law. They would still follow GRP law. Christians would not have to attend Madrasas. They would still be allowed to attend the schools of the GRP. The concept would be two ethnic groups or cultures living and farming in the same areas sharing power without violence. It would be an apparent Utopia, if it was approved by the GRP.

Peace is what both sides desire. The GRP and MILF suffered many casualties. The MILF has traditionally used cease fires and temporary peace agreements to refit, rearm, and reorganize. Instead of peace talks over the MOA-AD broke down and three renegade MILF commanders

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<sup>119</sup> The Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE) would encompass the ARMM from the 1996 agreement with the MNLF and add an additional 613 villages. *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>120</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 88, Jakarta/Brussels, 16 February 2009, page 2.

went on the offensive killing many innocent Christians in Central Mindanao. The MILF has since denied any association with the renegades and said these commanders were acting on their own and not under the authority of the Central Committee. Currently the GRP is demanding that the MILF use its influence to have the three renegade commanders surrender and face trial. The MILF demands a third party, such as Malaysia investigate the incident because of perceived bias of the GRP.<sup>121</sup> Peace with the MILF would enable the GRP to focus on the NPA. The Communist insurgency has spread to every province in the Philippines and is considered to be the more important fight of the two. The GRP is demanding that before any type of agreement is signed the MILF has to disarm. This may be a sticking point that cannot be overcome. The MILF will claim the right to defend themselves against Christians who do not agree with the peace agreement and want retribution for the amount of violence and loss suffered throughout the years.

Natural resource rights are major concerns for the MILF and GRP. Mindanao is the richest area for natural resources in the country. The MOA-AD calls for the sharing of wealth between the GRP and the BJE.<sup>122</sup> The BJE would enjoy a 75:25 percentage over the GRP regarding natural resource wealth.<sup>123</sup> Also the BJE would be allowed to open trade negotiations pertaining to natural resources with other countries which are not violent toward the GRP.<sup>124</sup> This offers great flexibility for the BJE to trade with whom they want. Both the GRP and the BJE can benefit from the MILF's connections to Muslim countries with regards to trade. By receiving more revenue from natural resources the BJE will be able to improve socio-economic conditions in the Southern Philippines. Initial revenue from natural resources could be distributed to finance micro level projects, and with the BJE managing the revenue it would enable the BJE to diversify

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., page 4.

<sup>122</sup> The Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, by the MOA-AD, would include previous ARMM land and 737 villages. The BJE would primarily comprised of the MILF and MNLF.

<sup>123</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 83, Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2008, page 4.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., page 4.

socio-economic projects. The MOA-AD states that the BJE would have rights to onshore and offshore gas. This became important since offshore oil was discovered near Palawan and Sulu in 2008.

After the MOA-AD was released to the Senate of the Philippines, several Senators put pressure on the Supreme Court to declare the MOA-AD unconstitutional. The constitution of the Philippines does not allow power sharing of any of its territories. Power sharing in the BJE was one of the major attractors of the MOA-AD. An arrangement similar to the 1996 ARMM agreement with the MNLF is not favorable for the MILF because it allows the government too much central control.<sup>125</sup> The MILF requires a high degree of self-governance from MOA so it can appear more credible amongst their supporters and actually steer programs that would increase socio-economic conditions toward the right path.<sup>126</sup>

Although the MOA-AD appeared favorable to the GRP negotiators, once made public, several politicians did not agree with the Ancestral Domain, since the numerous land grabs authorized since the early 1900s by the Americans and then the GRP, Christians have become the majority population in the Philippines. Many politicians saw the recognition of the MOA-AD as a platform for Moro land claims. The MOA-AD would be a threat to the interests of the politicians that own land that would be included in the BJE. Many of these same politicians put pressure on the Supreme Court to declare the MOA-AD unconstitutional in October 2008.<sup>127</sup>

The MNLF did not want the MILF to get more concessions with the BJE. The “final” agreement negotiated in 1996 was supposed to be the “mother of all agreements” according to the MNLF. The MNLF does not want the MILF to have a greater leadership role in the BJE. With a greater leadership role the MILF would be able to institute socio-economic programs and control

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<sup>125</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 88, Jakarta/Brussels, 16 February 2009, page 1.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

the finances of the BJE something the MNLF has struggled with during its reign of the ARMM since 1996. If the MOA-AD was signed, the ARMM would dissolve in 2010 and be swallowed by the BJE.<sup>128</sup> The MNLF ego would not be able to take a blow from its splinter group MILF.

### **What does the GRP gain with an extension of the ARMM to the MILF?**

The GRP has much to gain by extending the ARMM to the MILF.<sup>129</sup> Peace would bring the end to hostilities for one of the GRP's longest fought insurgencies, and the GRP would be able to move close to 300,000 displaced civilians back to their homes if the ARMM extension were granted.<sup>130</sup> With the MILF being pacified the GRP would be able to focus on its insurgency with the NPA. It would be considered a great victory by the international community as well. Financially it would be able to help the MILF or BJE government with significant socio-economic development. Something the region has not had since the United States governed Mindanao in the early 1900's. In theory, the MILF being equal partners with the GRP in the BJE would fix their interdependence with Jemaayah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda. The interdependence fix would come by making the MILF and GRP partners in the BJE. Anticipated trade and diplomatic relations with Muslim countries would improve due to historic support for MILF from numerous Muslim countries. Most importantly the MILF will have to recognize the Philippine constitution, something the MILF has refused to do. After centuries of fighting the GRP needs to make a peace effort with MILF.

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<sup>128</sup> Abuza, Zachary. "The Philippine Peace Process: Too Soon to Claim a Settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front?" The Jebson Center for Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series, Vol. 3, No. 3, February 2008, page 5.

<sup>129</sup> The BJE would have equaled an extension of the ARMM because that is what it would have been.

<sup>130</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 88, Jakarta/Brussels, 16 February 2009, page 3.

The GRP has fought the MILF since its separation with the MNLF and had fought many of the MILF members before the split when they were members of the MNLF. It is time to give peace a chance and take the first step in a long process of healing and reconciliation. Since the 1996 ARMM agreement with the MNLF, the GRP has been focused on negotiating a peace with the MILF. The GRP realized that an accord on Ancestral Domain could be reached on paper, but would never actually happen unless peace was made with the MILF. Colonel David Maxwell, former Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTF-P) Commander from October 2006-October 2007, shared his view on the ARMM extension or proposed BJE,

The Ancestral Domain negotiations have been going on for quite some time and they had been close to an agreement in the past. I think it is inevitable that even if an agreement could be reached the fighting would increase because of the rogue elements further split (kind of like an amoeba splitting), however, I still believe it is the right thing to do because the more people that support the agreement, the more people we (GRP and JSOTF-P) take away from the rogue elements. You cannot look at this agreement and think it will end everything. It is one step in a long process. They (GRP) have to keep reducing the size of the rogue elements and separating the population from those elements.<sup>131</sup>

Colonel Maxwell brought up some excellent points the GRP needs to consider. The long war with the Muslims in the Southern Philippines has been going on for over four centuries. An agreement such as an extension of the ARMM will not bring an end to the separatist attitude that many Muslims possess. Maxwell says, "It is one step in a long process."<sup>132</sup> The GRP needs to build on the first promising step of peace. Spoilers in the past such as corrupt politicians looking after their own personal interests, military leaders who want to fight to exact revenge for fallen comrades, and Muslim leaders who claim to look out for the Muslim community in the Southern Philippines but are really looking out for themselves need to be co-opted and included in any type of MOA-AD agreement. One of the primary reasons the original MOA-AD failed in 2008 was

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<sup>131</sup> Interview conducted with Colonel David Maxwell on September 3, 2009.

<sup>132</sup> Interview conducted with Colonel David Maxwell on September 3, 2009.

because of the failure of the GRP to include key stakeholders from the GRP.<sup>133</sup> Including key stakeholders in the process will alleviate any surprises or shocks that the 2008 MOA-AD proposal brought. Nonparticipants in the drafting of the MOA-AD were negative mainly because they were excluded from the process.

A stable peace needs to include actions that allow the GRP and the MILF to look like winners and have continued support from their population base. Both sides need to save face and appear strong to their followers. This bitter war and rivalry have completely exhausted both sides. An estimated 300,000 displaced civilians are scattered throughout the Southern Philippines.<sup>134</sup> These displaced civilians are made up of Christians and Muslims. A peace with the extension of the ARMM would go to considerable lengths to win and get continued support from the population. Peace will give the GRP a chance to finally concentrate on the NPA. The four major insurgency and terrorist groups in the last four decades in the Philippines are the MNLF, MILF, NPA, and Abu Sayyaf. The GRP made peace with the MNLF in 1996 and 5,074 insurgents laid their weapons down and became peaceful.<sup>135</sup> With one group at peace the GRP needs to extend the ARMM and make peace with the MILF. The MILF has from 12,000 to 15,000 fighters. Estimates claim that if a peace was made 9,000 to 12,000 fighters would lay their arms down and stop fighting<sup>136</sup> which means there could possibly be up to 3,000 fighters with various rogue elements of the MILF if a peace was signed.<sup>137</sup>

An inclusion into the BJE and the ARMM would have the two major Muslim separatist groups, MNLF and MILF, at peace with the GRP. This would marginalize Muslim support for the

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<sup>133</sup>International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 88, Jakarta/Brussels, 16 February 2009, page 6.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>135</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42

<sup>136</sup> Abuza, Zachary. "The Philippine Peace Process: Too Soon to Claim a Settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front?" The Jebsen Center for Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series, Vol. 3, No. 3, February 2008, page 6.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 6.

Abu Sayyaf Group, the last Muslim terrorist group left. The Philippine military would be able to give full attention and focus on the NPA on all fronts besides Mindanao. Peace would also present another opportunity for the Philippine military to attend to enlist former Muslim insurgents to fight the NPA. This will build solidarity between the Christians and Muslims, which would contribute to the peace at hand.

Socio-economic programs and focus has suffered in the Muslim areas of the Southern Philippines throughout the many insurgencies. In the past the ARMM under the direction of Misuari, squandered money and did not have any unity of effort between the GRP and themselves.<sup>138</sup> According to current President of the Philippines, Gloria Arroyo, “I see the world needs to fight poverty as the highest of all priorities because it breeds division and conflict and terrorism... There is no denying that poverty provides the breeding grounds for the recruitment of terrorists.”<sup>139</sup> Arroyo can also apply this philosophy to the MILF insurgency. More importantly, unlike before with the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and 1996 ARMM agreement, the GRP must maintain a genuine effort. Oversight of BJE programs ensures unity of effort is achieved and that funds provided by the GRP are used properly for Christians and Muslims.

Accusations made by the GRP of MILF providing safe haven in exchange for financing and training from Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah hampered peace talks in the past. The GRP, by extending the ARMM, would take a step in a major direction of breaking up this interdependence. Clear ties exist that link MILF to Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah. Making MILF legitimate and part of the solution in the BJE begins the process of driving a wedge between MILF and terrorist groups that try to make the Southern Philippines their home.

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<sup>138</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia*, 42

<sup>139</sup> Bowman, Robin L. “Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines,” In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 497.

Part of conditions to extend the ARMM to the MILF should be demands for the MILF to articulate and explain the extent of their relationship with Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah. This would serve two purposes. First it would alleviate any doubt by the GRP to the extent of the relationship while enabling the GRP to start doing damage control and initiate immediate action upon terrorist targets. On the other hand accusations and overwhelming evidence that the MILF and terrorist organizations are interdependent are factual and still remain one of the main opposition arguments, mainly by GRP political land owners against extending the ARMM. Opponents to the extension of the ARMM fear a large scale safe haven such as Camp Abubakar which housed and trained many Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah operatives in the 1990s will become available through the MILF in the extended ARMM.

The GRP and the MILF need to realize independence exists between. There are common interests involved which should not include terrorism. Both populations, Christians and Muslims, want the war to end. The MILF especially wants this since their military wing has been degraded.<sup>140</sup> MILF leader Murad warned, "The radicalism of Moro youth and how they will be drawn toward Jemaayah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf if a peace agreement is not reached soon. Once they (Moros) see some hope, then they will think twice before joining groups advocating suicide bombing."<sup>141</sup> The statement by Murad, the current MILF leader, shows how important peace is to the MILF as well as the importance of breaking away from relationships from terrorist groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Jemaayah Islamiyah. The MILF's Central Committee has demonstrated that their linkages to Abu Sayyaf are getting are weakening, which is good for the GRP. The Abu Sayyaf's taking three Red Cross workers hostages in Sulu has angered the MILF.

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<sup>140</sup> Abuza, Zachary. "The Philippine Peace Process: Too Soon to Claim a Settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front?" The Jebson Center for Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series, Vol. 3, No. 3, February 2008, page 7. According to Abuza the MILF's military has been crippled due to the protracted peace process. It has led to a decline in readiness, training, and weapons acquisitions.

<sup>141</sup> Abuza, Zachary. *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf*. U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Publication: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, page 39.

The MILF said, “We are poised to rescue the three hostages if the opportunity arises.”<sup>142</sup> Also MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu warned, “Abu Sayyaf that if something wrong happens to any of the hostages, they would be answerable to the wrath of the people of Mindanao.”<sup>143</sup>

Diplomatic relations with Muslim countries would improve due to the existing ties the countries have garnered with the MILF. The GRP has had difficult relationships with Muslim countries in the past often being criticized for harsh treatment of the Moros. Countries such as Libya and Malaysia have been instrumental to the peace process. Malaysia has even had a 60 person international cease fire monitoring team recording violations and determining causality with cease fire incidents within the Mindanao region.<sup>144</sup> The Malaysian cease fire team was withdrawn in 2008. The MILF will return to peace talks with the GRP once the Malaysian cease fire team is able to return.<sup>145</sup>

The potential exists for the GRP to fail with a potential peace plan if the United States ends its military presence in the Southern Philippines. The United States military has been battling Abu Sayyaf and Jemaayah Islamiyah terrorists since 2001, while providing valuable training to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). When the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) comes to an end the long term effect is questionable for the GRP. According to Lieutenant Colonel Chad Clark, the Chief of Plans for JSOTF-P, addresses the potential implications of the United States military leaving the Southern Philippines,

There will be an impact but its debatable what the effect will be in the long term. The main threats to the government of the Philippines are the CPP/NPA and the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Philippine government will eventually negotiate a peace agreement with the MNLF and the MILF (they were having talks in Manila two weeks ago). The US sees

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<sup>142</sup> Martin, Sammy. “MILF set for rescue of Red Cross Hostages.” *The Manila Times*, March 21, 2009. (Accessed on April 6, 2009)

<sup>143</sup> Martin, Sammy. “MILF set for rescue of Red Cross Hostages.” *The Manila Times*, March 21, 2009. (Accessed on April 6, 2009)

<sup>144</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 88, Jakarta/Brussels, 16 February 2009, page 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the biggest threats to US interests as JI and ASG. JI doesn't directly attack/threaten the Philippine government, therefore the Filipinos don't see them as a threat. The AFP will continue to conduct operations against the ASG, Rogue MILF commanders, and the CPP/NPA. As you can see, our goals and the goals of the Philippines are not the same. The effect of the JSOTF departing will be that the constant attention that the JSOTF gives towards al Qaeda related organizations will leave with the JSOTF. The affect on the AFP will be two fold. The AFP will lose the JSOTF assets that we share with them; ISR, CASEVAC, movement assets, etc. The second thing the AFP will miss is the attention that the JSOTF brings to the AFP in the southern Philippines. It is no secret that AFP units that work with the JSOTF indirectly benefit from their association because of the attention the JSOTF brings.<sup>146</sup>

The environment in the Southern Philippines has the potential to move to the past if the United States leaves. Lieutenant Colonel Clark addresses the potential for safe havens if the United States military leaves the Southern Philippines,

Absolutely it is possible, but is it probable? If we (AFP/JSOTF-P) don't change the conditions that create safe havens for terrorists then as soon as we leave terrorists will fill the vacuum that is created by our absence. This is what we (AFP/JSOTF-P) saw happen on Basilan in 2004 when we (AFP/JSOTF-P) withdrew our forces and we've been working ever since then to gain back the ground we gained in 2002-2003. Changing conditions takes time, effort and will. The US (Country Team and JSOTF) can provide personnel and resources to help reduce these safe havens but ultimately this is a Philippine problem that requires constant vigilance from our Philippine counterparts. It also requires an education of our leaders to understand that defeating a person or a military can happen quickly but changing conditions takes years to decades.<sup>147</sup>

If the ARMM is extended to the MILF, they will have to recognize the Philippine constitution. This has been a huge sticking point in the history of this conflict. The MILF has claimed they do not recognize anything but Islamic law. Muslim areas within the BJE would fall under Islamic law if an extension is granted. The Philippine constitution also designates all natural resources as belonging to the public.<sup>148</sup> This is being addressed by wealth sharing in the

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<sup>146</sup> Interview conducted on April 4, 2009 with LTC Chad Clark, Chief of Plans for JSOTF-P.

<sup>147</sup> Interview conducted on April 4, 2009 with LTC Chad Clark, Chief of Plans for JSOTF-P.

<sup>148</sup> Abuza, Zachary. "The Philippine Peace Process: Too Soon to Claim a Settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front?" The Jebson Center for Terrorism Studies Research Briefing Series, Vol. 3, No. 3, February 2008, page 3.

BJE's favor 75 percent to the GRP's 25 percent.<sup>149</sup> Recognition of the Philippine Constitution would equal a moral victory by the GRP.

### **What does MILF gain with an extension of the ARMM?**

Like the GRP, the MILF has much to gain with an extension of the ARMM. Peace by far is the biggest reward for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines. In conjunction with peace is the issue of Ancestral Domain also known as territorial rights. With an extension of the ARMM the MILF would gain back what they viewed as traditional Muslim lands. Being able to control socio-economic development within the ARMM or BJE is a step in the right direction for the MILF. Socio-economic development enables MILF to flourish across the impoverished lands of the Moros because of GRP funding coupled with a percentage majority of the natural resources revenue. The MILF would institute their version of Islamic law upon Muslims living in the BJE, which has always been one of their goals as an insurgent movement. Finally the last victory gained by the MILF with an ARMM extension is the MILF would finally be given a chance to break their image of supporting terrorism.

Ancestral Domain, not religion, has been the nexus of the MILF struggle.<sup>150</sup> Muslim lands, much like Native Americans in North America in the 1800's, have disappeared through Christian migration to the Southern Philippines during periods of Christian settlement throughout four centuries of conflict. Ancestral Domain encompasses more than land Ancestral Domain encompasses a way of life for the Moros. Ancestral Domain encompasses the MILFs loose interpretation of Islamic law and the natural resources within the land. The extension of the

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<sup>149</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 83, Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2008, page 4.

<sup>150</sup> Martin, G. Eugene and Tuminez, Astrid S. "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines: A Summary and Assessment of the USIP Philippine Facilitation Project, 2003-2007." United States Institute of Peace Special Report. Special Report 202, February 2008, page 17.

ARMM would return some Muslim ancestral lands back to the Moros and give the Moros governance over the BJE.

Socio-economic improvements and majority control of natural resource revenue are critical for the survival of the extended ARMM. Natural resource revenue, in a resource rich Mindanao, can fund many socio-economic improvements that need to be implemented to the impoverished region. The proposed MOA-AD that the Supreme Court of the Philippines deemed unconstitutional gave the MILF a majority control of natural resources.<sup>151</sup> Moros often felt they are second class citizens within the Philippines.<sup>152</sup> Controlling socio-economic improvements and controlling natural resource revenue will give the Moros a sense of self-control for their future they have never experienced before.

One of Hashim Salamat's goals for the MILF was the "creation of a separate and independent Islamic state in all Muslim-majority areas in the Southern Philippines."<sup>153</sup> With an extension of the ARMM the MILF would save face and partially reach their goal. MILF would not have a separate state, but an autonomous region where they can implement their version of Islamic law amongst the Muslims in the ARMM.

The evidence presented overwhelmingly displays the MILF's linkage to terror groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah. The MILF has denied its ties to terror groups. For the Moros to have any legitimacy in an extended ARMM it has to publicly cut ties with terrorist groups and provide credible intelligence based on past relations. These actions would further relations with the GRP and the western world.

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<sup>151</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 83, Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2008, page 12.

<sup>152</sup> Martin, G. Eugene and Tuminez, Astrid S. "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines: A Summary and Assessment of the USIP Philippine Facilitation Project, 2003-2007." United States Institute of Peace Special Report. Special Report 202, February 2008, page 17.

<sup>153</sup> , Robin L. "Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines," In *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: International Perspectives.*, edited by. James J.F. Forest, 490.

## **Areas for further Research**

The MILF's strategic posture needs further explanation. Further points of exploration should be the MILF leadership's views on reconciliation with the MNLF and if they believe the GRP would ever fully implement an extension of the ARMM if it was negotiated. The literature explored within this monograph carried points of view from members of the MILF, but these points of view were from western writers.

Another area that needs further research is the possible effect of Catholic extremism within the GRP upon the Muslims of Mindanao. The Catholic Church plays a powerful role within the Philippine society. An interesting study would be to find out exactly how much influence is yielded by the Catholic Church upon the GRP.

Finally, the last area that needs to be investigated is MILF's future leadership. Most of the Central Committee has been fighting this war for separatism since the 1970s. Many have died and continue to die due to old age. An in-depth personality study needs to occur with the MILF's future leadership to see if their struggle is for total separation or for autonomy within a sovereign nation.

## **Conclusion**

The situation in the Southern Philippines has remained contentious for over four centuries. Like most insurgencies fought across the world in different regions one must understand the context and history. The Southern Philippines has been rich in violence since the Spanish arrived. The Spanish lack of tolerance for Islam laid the groundwork for the attempted violent conversion of the Moros to Catholicism. Americans were the most successful in dealing with the Moros in the early Twentieth century by tolerating Islam. The Moros respected the Americans for this. Distrust is an accurate word to describe the relationship between the GRP and MILF. The genesis of the mistrust originated during the Spanish occupation and with the conversion of the Northern and Central Philippine islands to Catholicism. The Spanish used the

newly converted people to fight the Muslims for over four centuries. The Moros never trusted the Christian Filipinos. The trust between the two sides needs mending.

Extending the ARMM for the MILF is a catalyst for peace in the region. The MILF and the GRP must reconcile their differences. In August 2008, both sides were days away from signing the MOA-AD, which would have extended the ARMM to the MILF.<sup>154</sup> Muslim and Christian nations throughout the world expressed their disappointment when the MOA-AD was not signed and the peace process stalled again.<sup>155</sup>

One major reason the peace process failed in August 2008 was because stakeholders such as politicians and Supreme Court Justices from the GRP were not included in the process, or did not know the process was going on.<sup>156</sup> The alienation the two branches of government felt forced them not to support the MOA-AD. The President of the Philippines must find some way to co-opt or build consensus with these two groups.

Stability in the Southern Philippines hinges on an extension of the ARMM to the MILF. The region has been destabilized for four centuries. The conflict has stunted socio-economic growth within the region. Foreign businesses and investment are not willing to come in while there is an active insurgency. Infrastructure has been destroyed by both sides and has not been rebuilt. Based on this instability over 300,000 people have been displaced throughout Southern Philippines. With peace, socio-economic infrastructure can be built and internally displaced persons can return to their homes. Both sides, the MILF and GRP, would build credibility and legitimacy with their population bases.

The MILF has replicated all facets of the GRP. Shadow governments run politics at the local levels while providing some services to the Muslim population. A military branch enables

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<sup>154</sup> International Crisis Group Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing No. 83, Jakarta/Brussels, 23 October 2008, page 3.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 14. United States, Japan, and Malaysia all expressed their disappointment with the failure of the signing of the MOA-AD.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 3.

the MILF to provide security. Financial external support from diasporas and Muslim countries fund efforts. With the proper training and coupled with GRP agencies the MILF may effectively run the extended ARMM.

An extension of the ARMM would possibly lead to MNLF-MILF reconciliation. The GRP has driven a wedge between the two Muslim organizations. The MNLF and MILF must drop their petty differences and realize an extension of the ARMM is in the greater interests for the Muslims of the Southern Philippines. The potential exist for this union to unify the Muslims in the Southern Philippines. The GRP should not be scared of this union and embrace it. A

The MILF needs to cut ties with Al Qaeda and Jemaayah Islamiyah. Any associations with these groups will cause the peace process to end in an unfavorable fashion and will cause other nations to get involved. The United States, for example, has had an active military presence in Mindanao and the Sulu Islands since 2001.

If and when peace is finally achieved, the GRP through the BJE needs to find jobs for the thousands of Muslim fighters who will look for work. Former insurgents need to be occupied with a legitimate job; if not, terrorist groups will recruit these former fighters, and then accusations of MILF links to terrorist groups will cast doubt on the legitimacy of the peace. The GRP needs to support the extension of the ARMM and ensure they implement any potential extension of the ARMM to its fullest extent. If the past is any indicator, the GRP will lose all credibility with the Muslim community if the GRP fails to implement any extension of the ARMM. By implementing an extension of the ARMM the GRP would build a base of support with Muslims and Christians while taking population support away from the insurgency. The Moros want a better life and with four hundred years of war the opportunity is present for the GRP to take the first step in a long process of finally bringing an enduring peace to a region of the world that has not experienced it before. The GRP needs to extend the ARMM to the MILF. The extension of the ARMM is a catalyst for peace.

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