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The Head Side of the Coin

A Smarter Way to Fight the Moro Secessionists in the Southern Philippines

Araus Robert F. Musico
Lieutenant Colonel, Philippine Air Force

Air Command and Staff College
Wright Flyer Paper No. 42

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Please send inquiries or comments to
Editor
The Wright Flyer Papers
Air Command and Staff College (ACSC/DEI)
225 Chennault Circle, Bldg. 1402
Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6426
Tel: (334) 953-6810
Fax: (334) 953-2269
E-mail: ACSC@maxwell.af.mil

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Foreword

It is with great pride that Air Command and Staff College presents another in a series of award-winning student research projects from our academic programs that reach nearly 11,000 students each year. As our series title indicates, we seek to promote the sort of imaginative, forward-looking thinking that inspired the earliest aviation pioneers, and we aim for publication projects that combine these characteristics with the sort of clear presentation that permits even the most technical topics to be readily understood. We sincerely hope what follows will stimulate thinking, invite debate, and further encourage today's air war fighters in their continuing search for new and better ways to perform their missions—now and in the future.

ANTHONY J. ROCK
Brigadier General, USAF
Commandant

Abstract

This paper examines the counterterrorist strategy employed on the Island of Basilan during Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF–P) and discusses its potential applicability in the current Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) insurgency. The strategy used the principles found in the Diamond Model, the counterinsurgency (COIN) model that Dr. Gordon McCormick developed. The Diamond Model establishes the interactions of four key players in an insurgency environment, pinpoints the "people" as the center of gravity, and demonstrates how either the insurgent or the counterinsurgent can take actions as each competes to win the people's support. The US forces dispatched to the island province used it as a framework to advise and assist the armed forces of the Philippines in building up its capability and to launch civic action initiatives aimed at isolating the local people from the influence of the local terror group, the Abu Sayyaf.

This paper provides a thorough examination of the root causes of the MILF conflict. It shows that the Muslims in the southern Philippines have been subjected to a long history of attempted subjugation, forced assimilation, and dislocation from their ancestral territories. It also shows why the MILF rose in arms to seek an independent homeland for the Moro people. The MILF symbolizes the hopes and dreams for a better future of all Muslims in the Philippines. The Moro people aspire for a better future and see these aspirations being achieved only if they rule independently of the national government. Because of this lofty goal, a COIN strategy that provides them temporary improvements in their living conditions may not be enough to wean their support from the MILF.

Introduction

The US global war on terror (GWOT) brought the armed forces of the Philippines (AFP) and US Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) together to confront the local terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). This operation forced the ASG out of its base of operations on the Basilan Island and drove it to the neighboring island of Jolo, with the AFP and some US special operations forces (SOF) in pursuit. The authorities eventually captured several top ASG leaders. Aside from the operational dividend, the operation reinforced familiar counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics of blending military firepower and socioeconomic offensive, with the latter taking a more dominant role. The AFP and JSOTF-P undertook community development on the island and offered its people better security. This action enhanced the national government's legitimacy and curtailed the ASG's access to potential recruits, logistics, and intelligence.

Some of these same tactics broke the back of the Huk insurgency in the early 1950s. The success of this strategy demonstrates the government of the Philippines' capacity to win a war decisively against insurgency. The AFP, in fact, had employed this same COIN doctrine against the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in the early 1990s, diminishing its forces to a level law enforcement agencies could handle. The same cannot be said of the operations against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Thus, this paper attempts to address why the AFP has been so unwilling to use proven COIN doctrines against this separatist group.

No two insurgencies are the same. The operation in Basilan specifically targeted the ASG. While both MILF and ASG embrace Islam and use it to drive their respective brand of insurgency, the latter operates more like a bandit and terrorist organization.[1] Because of the nature of ASG activities, ranging from kidnappings to mass bombings and rampant killings, separating ASG followers from the people of the Basilan Island, after the AFP and SOF undertook COIN operations, was fairly easy.

On the other hand, the MILF is well recognized as an organization with a legitimate separatist agenda. Its mem-

bers share with the rest of the Filipino Muslims the same centuries-old grievances of discriminatory colonial policies, intermittent wars, subjugation by the central government, and destruction of their culture. Considering its pervasive influence over many areas in Mindanao, the MILF may not be as susceptible to the COIN strategy used against the ASG. This paper analyzes the validity of this argument.

Beginning with an overview of the past and present historical grievances that contributed significantly to the Mindanao conflict, five sections help to develop the thesis of this paper. The second section offers readers the opportunity to learn about MILF origins, aspirations, and war strategy. The third section provides a picture of the COIN operations in Basilan, followed in the fourth section by a discussion of the various strategies the AFP has used against the communist and secessionist insurgencies. The concluding fifth section presents the author's interpretation of the information presented in this paper.

Carl Baker asserts that "the conflict in Mindanao is first and foremost political and only secondarily about religion or economics."[2] A political problem requires a political solution, and the military as a government policy instrument can serve to influence the outcome of the government peace panel (GRP)-MILF peace negotiations. Indeed, a smarter war strategy, incorporating the good lessons from the Basilan experience plus other elements of national power working together in coordinated fashion, can support the objective of ending the MILF conflict.

Historical Background of the Conflict

The post-colonial conflict that began as a struggle for a separate Moro[3] homeland began with these proud people intermittently fighting against Manila-sanctioned subjugation.[4] The Muslim-dominated areas currently are the poorest in Mindanao. This war-torn region is as volatile as ever.

Southern Philippine comprises the main island of Mindanao and the more than 360 smaller islands constituting the Sulu archipelago. It is home to some 4.5 million Filipino Muslims, accounting for about 5 percent of the country's population of 85 million. Once the majority, they now domi-

nate only five of the 22 provinces of the region. Colonial policies of integrating Christian and Muslim Filipinos, which the national government continued practicing after acquiring independence, drove the former to migrate and reside in Muslim enclaves.

Islam was a thriving religion in the Sulu islands long before the Spanish conquistadores arrived. Arab traders and missionaries brought and passed on their religion to the various indigenous people at the end of the thirteenth century.[5] Accordingly, Islam provided a shared worldview that tied together these loosely dispersed tribes and differentiated them from the rest of the population.[6] Thus, when the Spaniards arrived in 1521 and attempted to subjugate the inhabitants by converting them to Christianity, the Muslims in the south offered a more organized resistance. Years of persistent campaigns to overcome Muslim resistance (the Moro Wars) caused division among Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants. Spaniards would later employ Christianized natives in their crusade, further fueling animosity between the two.[7] The deep-seated resentment between the Christian Indios[8] and Muslim Moros continued to develop during the 300 years of Spanish occupation and long after the Spaniards left.

The Americans fared better when they purchased the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Realizing the "diversity of race, religion, and habitat," the United States established distinct government structures for the Moro areas.[9] While the colonial policy of "benevolent assimilation"[10] succeeded in ending Gen Emilio Aguinaldo's guerilla resistance during the early stages of American occupation, it did not work as well in overcoming the Moros.[11] What subdued the Islamized tribes of Mindanao instead was the Bates agreement that gave the Moros some form of local autonomy in the administration of their political and cultural affairs. As Brian McAllister Linn notes, the Moros initially found US colonial authority acceptable, as it "protected both Islam and their traditions from their hereditary enemies, the Christian Filipinos."[12]

Another reason for the American success in breaking the Moro resistance was its encouraging the relocation of Christians from Luzon and the Visayas to the southern islands.[13] Though this policy initially increased tensions, the

establishment of Christian settlements on lands the Muslims considered their ancestral property ultimately helped to dilute Muslim influence and power in those areas. Employing a mix of "brutal pacification" and "pious paternalism," the Americans discharged their authority over Mindanao with better control.[14]

When the United States granted the Philippines full independence shortly after the Second World War, the central government in Manila began exercising jurisdiction and administrative control over the whole of the Philippine archipelago despite strong objections and pleas from the Moros for a separate state or retention of the status quo.[15] The Americans transferred ownership of all the territory ceded to the United States by Spain in the December 1898 Treaty of Paris. This action defined the present territory of the Republic of the Philippines that included Mindanao and Sulu islands.

Confronted with the complex dynamics of nation building, Manila continued the policy of integrating Christians and Muslims into one Filipino mainstream society. A massive wave of Christian settlers established residence in once Muslim-dominated areas over the years and slowly tilted the demographic balance. The Moros eventually found themselves the minority in many of the lands they had controlled for centuries. From 98 percent of the total population in the southern Philippines during the Spanish administration, they now constitute only 20 percent.[16] Moreover, political and economic power also changed hands as the new settlers acquired more lands and controlled most of the natural resources.

The Moros' gradual loss of lands and increased socioeconomic marginalization fueled their discontent and feelings of inadequacy. Outside influence, particularly from neighboring Islamic countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, spurred a surge of religious renewal that brought more mosques, Madrasah (Islamic schools), and preachers to Mindanao. As W. K. Che Man notes, such developments alone stimulated the Moros' cultural awareness and sense of nationalism.[17] Compounded by their perception of an inept central government they called "Imperial Manila" that promoted prejudicial policies, the Moros alienated themselves more from the rest of the Filipino population. Thus, a volatile condition

emerged, setting the stage for the Moros to express through violent means their indignation and to reassert their historical claims to the homeland they call "Bangsamoro."

Emergence of the MILF

The Moros have fought for self-determination against the national government for close to four decades. Various groups have surfaced in pursuit of this objective, though the more prominent and resilient are the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the MILF. As some historians maintain, and as the preceding discussion suggests, the secessionist movement had its roots in the centuries-old Moro resistance against the colonial policies of forceful assimilation, which the newly independent government also later adopted. A long history of intermittent wars was a Moro collective experience that may have drawn many of them to support the struggle for separatism. Art Ryan L. Seachon argues that extreme poverty and a tradition of tribal warfare, lawlessness, and clan conflicts caused more violence that exacerbated such secessionist sentiments.[18]

While all these factors may have contributed to stirring the passions for self-rule, the "Jabidah massacre" provided the impetus for the creation of a militant organization that transformed long-standing grievances into armed rebellion.[19] The government clandestinely trained Moro recruits from the Philippine Army to reclaim Sabah from Malaysia. Later, the government was accused of ordering the murder of these troops. The incident not only gave birth to the MNLF, but it also gave rise to supporters who provided material and moral support from Malaysia. To Galula, this support reflected two of several important requisites for insurgency to blossom and survive.[20]

MNLF: The Foremost Representative of the Muslim Filipinos

Nur Misuari, a professor at the University of the Philippines, founded and led the MNLF in its guerilla war against the government. Its core fighters were the initial batch of young Moros whom the Malaysians trained in paramilitary skills. Though more secular in leanings,[21] the MNLF never-

theless obtained, in 1975, the backing of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an association of nations from the Middle East, Libya, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This recognition gave legitimacy to its cause and gained it widespread support across all social classes of Muslim Filipinos. It is also what prodded former Pres. Ferdinand Marcos to launch diplomatic measures to assuage OIC members and extend conciliatory gestures to the MNLF.[22] The unprecedented move resulted in the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976. The accord had the prospect of ending all armed hostilities by devolving governance in several Moro provinces to an autonomous body. Its implementation, however, ran into a constitutional obstacle concerning the plebiscite and was never put into effect. Regardless, it would serve as the framework for succeeding peace negotiations with the secessionist groups.

In the early stages of the separatist insurgency in the late 1960s, the government, through its AFP, undertook a full-scale war after Marcos vowed to crush the MNLF.[23] Retired soldiers who participated in that war remembered the military using the full might of its hardware, from tanks to artillery to fighter jets. Most agree that such military actions were appropriate, as they regarded the Moros as vicious enemies who decapitated captured soldiers and stuck their severed heads on stakes.[24] Military documents also revealed a predilection for employing battalion-sized infantry in sweeping maneuvers to trap Moro insurgents. The military's offensive against the Moro gained further strength with the imposition of martial law throughout the Philippine archipelago in 1972. Relentless shelling and punitive bombings became standard operating procedures against MNLF lairs declared as no-man's land. The MNLF retaliated with such familiar guerilla tactics as ambuscades, assaults on military installations and logistics, terror bombings, and random assassination of soldiers. In the first half of the 1970s, the war caused more than 120,000 military and civilian casualties and dislocated more than one million inhabitants from their homes.[25]

The breakthrough for a final peace agreement with the MNLF occurred in 1996 during the presidency of Fidel Ramos. Indonesia brokered the negotiations, unifying the GRP and the MNLF together in accepting a new blueprint for

an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) agreement. A watered-down version of the Tripoli Agreement, the new accord was designed to create a strong autonomy with the inclusion of new concessions for the MNLF. However, according to Astrid S. Tuminez, the legislative machine of the Philippine Congress tempered those concessions and, together with incompetent leaders including Nur Misuari, who had previously run ARMM, the autonomous government "has become a symbol of failure" for Moro aspirations.[26] Nevertheless, ARMM holds up to this day, and the MNLF is no longer a national security threat. Some splinter groups, however, continue challenging the government and remain unbound by the agreement.

MILF: The Breakaway Faction

The MILF broke away from the MNLF in 1984 to pursue a struggle towards an independent Bangsamoro under an Islamic form of government. The adoption of its parent's name with the slight modification emphasizes this group's Islamic orientation.[27] MILF's founder, Hashim Salamat, was a charismatic religious scholar who was educated at a university in Egypt. Likewise, the MILF hierarchy consists of Islamic scholars called "Ulamas." Regarded more as spiritual leaders than insurgents, this core of MILF officers wields considerable power and commands respect from Muslims both inside and outside the organization.[28] Their influence extends to the common people.

Salamat made no secret of his group's ultimate objective of establishing a separate Islamic state that will be governed with "complete independence or, at the very least, meaningful autonomy."[29] A close examination of his unpublished manuscript, "The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His Objectives and Responsibilities," reveals plans to employ a combination of civic and military strategies to achieve that objective—"da'wah" (Islamic outreach) and "jihad."[30] The first has the flavor of a military psychological operation. It pursues Islamic indoctrination of the populace through relentless preaching in town halls, schools, and places of worship.[31] The second strategy advocates armed struggle against perceived enemies, with the jihad serving as the vehicle for change.

Ironically, AFP intelligence sources also uncovered an MILF strategy exhorting members to avoid needless direct engagements with government troops. Unless forced to defend itself against AFP attacks, the MILF prefers minimum confrontation and desires to be free to recruit and train its army, gain a widespread following and support through da'wah, and fortify its camps. This strategy was notable when the GRP-MNLF peace process was taking place[32] and before the government pursued an "all-out war" in 2000 that shut down most MILF camps.

MILF Camps

Before the 2000 AFP offensive, 46 MILF-maintained and -operated camps (13 major camps and 33 satellite detachments) proliferated across 10 provinces in the southern Philippines. This investment in fixed facilities stands in contrast to the highly mobile nature of an insurgency.[33] These camps more resembled colonies or settlements than they did conventional military camps. They lacked physical boundaries, a requirement for effective camp administration, control, and security.[34] Some of the camps were fortified with some form of perimeter defense, such as bunkers or trenches. Others, particularly the satellite camps, were merely areas in towns where the MILF had some level of influence.[35]

The largest of these camps was Abubakar, where the seat of MILF central power also resided. It hosted "schools, mosques, Sharia courts, multi-purpose cooperatives, a military academy, an arms manufacturing center and a prison."[36] It covered tracts of lands and rolling hills where MNLF members and their families planted seed crops and raised farm animals. In other words, it was home to a thriving communal society where the elemental political, military, social, and religious infrastructures provided basic government and civic services to residents. The practice and observance of Sharia or Islamic law also encompassed all facets of life within the camp. The national government ignored media reports of the execution of Moros whom the Sharia courts had found guilty of committing criminal offenses. Thus, for many Filipino Muslims, Camp Abubakar was proof they could manage their own political, social, and

economic affairs without interference from Manila. Given this, they viewed the MILF as their rightful representation. Indeed, Abubakar was a symbol of the genuine Muslim society Salamat had envisioned.

The MILF was not particularly secretive about its camps' locations.[37] During the cease-fire that started in 1997 when the GRP and MILF were negotiating for peace, local and foreign VIPs frequently toured Camp Abubakar.[38] A son of Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddhafi even paid a courtesy visit to Salamat. The AFP Office of Strategic and Special Studies (OSSS) assessed that the MILF wanted these camps "to serve as 'landmarks' to indicate the extent of MILF territory."[39] This assessment is hardly surprising, given the MILF's political objective and the path it navigates towards achieving that end.

Because the MILF wants to form an Islamic state for the Moros independent of the republic, the MILF deemed it necessary to project a modicum of that image: a self-ruled mini-state. This requires some level of legitimacy, a position the MILF's political front can always use to its advantage in any negotiation. Without it, other nations will simply regard the MILF as just another group of insurgents or, worse, terrorists challenging the legitimate government to acquire concessions. Camp Abubakar, the other landmark camps, and, as shown in the following sections, the MILF forces and its war strategy, are just some indications that the group is trying to redefine itself as capable of independent governance.

Interestingly, with all the grandstanding, the MILF never has obtained the same recognition the MNLF received from the OIC regarding the peace accord the latter has signed with the GRP. The government has been successful in its diplomatic initiatives to cut the material and financial support the MILF is receiving from Libya and Malaysia.[40] Without external backing, its ability to sustain its operational aims will be somewhat limited.

MILF's Armed Component

One important product of the 2000 AFP campaign was the creation of a more accurate picture of the MILF's capabilities and strengths. In short, OSSS described MILF

fighters as lacking in military skills, training, and discipline.[41] In the eight major battles the MILF fought to defend its camps against AFP assault, OSSS can only count one battle in which MILF fighters put up a stand strong enough that army soldiers were forced to defend. Both sides sustained heavy casualties. The battle occurred along a portion of the Narciso Ramos Highway, a major thoroughfare running east and west along the main island of Mindanao.[42] The MILF had taken a section of that road and utilized it as an outside security perimeter of Camp Abubakar. Guard details also used it as a main outpost to set up checkpoints and extort money from road users. Trenches, bunkers, concrete ditches, and gun emplacements reinforced the structures along one side of that road section, proof of the strategic value it provided to the security of Camp Abubakar.

From an estimated strength of 15,690 members with 11,280 firearms before the fall of Camp Abubakar, MILF strength has dwindled to about 11,668 members with 7,739 firearms. In the five years before the 2000 offensive, recruitment had averaged an annual rate of 25 percent of total strength.[43] Since 2008, the membership has remained relatively static with losses and gains keeping it under 250 members. The loss of its camps has indeed affected members' ability to sway people to join its ranks.

Antecedent to the "all-out war," the MILF built its forces and capabilities in preparation for a conventional type of warfare. Its armed component, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), is structured and organized in divisions like the military—at least, that is the image it sought to project. But, as the OSSS found out, some "'divisions' were mere labels" that lumped together fighters of different skills and orientation into one group.[44] The BIAF hierarchy had "a typical military structure with staff units for administration, intelligence, operations, supply and logistics, training, transportation and communications."[45] True to its religious orientation, the MILF had specific staff offices for the promotion of da'wah.

Regarding the quality of its soldiers, the BIAF was an effective force a couple of decades back. Cadres trained in Malaysia, old-timers of the AFP-MNLF 1970s war, and more than 50 veterans of the war in Afghanistan against the Soviets

comprised the bulk of its members. Some of these Afghan war veterans became friends with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members at the training camp. But as the attacking government troops in 2000 found out, that generation of MILF fighters were mostly Muslim youths, unschooled and unaccustomed to the sound and fury of battle.[46] Thus, they fled from the battle scene as the fighting heated up. In one of the battles, a soldier recounts that "We had penetrated the sides of the bunkers, and found these to be the rebel camp's weakest point. The fighting was now bunker to bunker. It was then that we saw young MILF fighters in their early teens and even younger fleeing from the bunkers and crying. I felt pain in my heart at the sight of young and innocent children going to war."[47] This information suggests a decline in the capacity of the group to engage in conventional warfare.

The 2000 AFP Campaign against the MILF

OSSS described it as a military offensive "of the grandest scale since independence in 1946."[48] Indeed, it was the first time the AFP confronted an enemy in pitched conventional battles. Most of the fighting the AFP had done before 2000 was against small groups of insurgents, members of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP, and the MNLF. These small groups employed guerilla tactics, engaged the government troops sporadically, and challenged them in brief skirmishes. The 2000 campaign took about five months to complete and exhausted two-thirds of the combat strength of the AFP.[49] Major battles that developed as the AFP took on each camp ran to several days. The shortest battle was a week, while the longest, an offensive aimed at ousting the MILF from the Narciso Ramos Highway, took 35 days.

Indeed, former president Joseph Estrada actually had advertised the objective of the campaign as such. However, the government's resolve was far greater than these short engagements suggest. The government's aim was to regain its sovereignty throughout the Moro strongholds, but the primary emphasis was on controlling all Moro camps. Though the MILF rebels undertook conventional warfare to defend their camps,[50] the asymmetry of numbers and the

hardware of the warring forces dictated from the start the likely winner of the campaign. The MILF just was no match for the superior forces of the AFP in a conventional war. It was precisely the kind of warfare soldiers are trained to fight. Even most of their equipment was designed to operate in this environment. Thus, MILF fighters were doomed from the beginning when the AFP brought the full might of its conventional forces to bear.

But the capture of Camp Abubakar, which officially ended the campaign, did not come close to decisively defeating the MILF.[51] That the MILF did not put up a strong defense for the camp suggests a conscious move to transfer the match to new yet familiar ground—guerilla warfare. Though the AFP drove the MILF fighters out of their camps, the AFP also forced them to adapt Mao Tse-tung's "fish swimming in the water" technique.[52] Now full-time insurgents, they were difficult to distinguish from the Muslim population. Drawing some lessons learned from the joint Philippine–US counterterrorism effort in Basilan may be useful in this respect.

The Target and the OEF—Philippines

The decades-old conflict in Mindanao never has attracted as much attention and concern from the United States before as it has recently. The United States viewed the conflict as an internal matter that should be left to the discretion of the Philippine government.[53] This comes as a surprise, given that, only half a century ago, the Philippines was also beset with the same domestic problem of rebellion that the United States helped in suppressing. To this day, American involvement in the Huk rebellion is still being heralded as a successful post-war foreign internal defense (FID) operation.

The Huk insurgency proved more than just the effectiveness of two governments cooperating to fight a common Maoist enemy. It evidenced that insurgencies indeed can be defeated given the appropriate COIN methods, those emphasizing winning the "hearts and minds" of the masses.[54] Some valuable lessons that came out of that campaign include the employment of intensified psychological operations, effective propaganda, and intelligence sharing. The first caused dissension in the ranks; the second squelched the

ideas it touted to expand its mass base; and the third neutralized most of its leaders.[55] These basic anti-insurgency principles were integrated in the training of local security forces that boosted confidence and developed capacity for self-reliance.[56]

The current GWOT brought American FID specialists again to the Philippines. Though the causes of the conflict are different, the warfare remains unconventional and is reminiscent of the Cold War containment of communism that brought Col Edward Lansdale and his FID team to the Philippines at the height of the Huk rebellion. The following discussion shows the JSOTF-P that is assisting the AFP in battling certain terrorists[57] is also employing some elements of the same Lansdale-inspired COIN measures. Albeit with fancy names, enhanced intelligence sharing is now known as intelligence fusion, while propaganda has been replaced by the doctrinal term *information operations* (IO). In any case, the basics of intelligence, psychological operations, and propaganda are characteristic elements of a sound COIN strategy.

Basilan: Target Area

From renewed interest in Mindanao after 9/11, the Island of Basilan became the testing ground for the application of this indirect approach. Hundreds of US soldiers, mostly from the special operations forces, set up camp in this remote southern Philippine island in February 2002.[58] Before the JSOTF-P operations, the island had been, since the early 1990s, home to the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group. ASG members used Basilan as a sanctuary for planning and launching their bombing, beheading, and kidnapping activities. Strategically located, it also served as a getaway location for terrorists operating in mainland Mindanao whom the AFP forces were tracking or pursuing. Terrorist training camps operated in this once quiet place without much interference from local authorities. Periodically, the Philippine Air Force would conduct strike-bombing operations aimed at blasting away these camps, but the camps survived.[59] Many JI members travel to this island to obtain terror and guerilla warfare training.[60]

Basilan is approximately 40 miles east to west and 25 miles north to south. It is the biggest island in the Sulu ar-

chipelago. A plain along the coastal perimeter, it slopes gently up towards the hinterlands. The center is dotted with lush hills that dominate the landscape and with dense canopied jungles that provide perfect natural cover for terrorists. Major cities are near the coasts, where most of the more than 496,000 inhabitants live. Many people live off produce from rubber and coconut trees that stand on vast tracts. Economically, the island is viable for sustained growth, but years of government neglect have marginalized the population (predominantly Muslims) and have driven most of them to poverty. Cities and towns are accessible only with difficulty due to inadequate transportation infrastructures. Because the presence of the ASG and past military operations against them made the island ungovernable, basic government services like health care are scarce. In addition, years of civil unrest and intermittent wars resulted in the closure and relocation of businesses to islands that are more hospitable. Taking these factors into account, Basilan Island falls under what Sean Anderson calls a "gray area."[61] Such territories, "over which unstable, weak national governments have but minimal control," are open invitations for terrorists to conduct their activities freely.[62]

Abu Sayyaf: The Target Terror Group

The primary target of the JSOTF-P in Basilan and, lately, in Sulu, is the Abu Sayyaf Group. Literally, the "Bearer of the Sword," ASG is arguably less of an insurgency and more of a terrorist organization. Gregory Wilson notes that "the connection between terrorism and insurgency is now well established, and in fact, there is tremendous overlap between the two. However, the distinction is still necessary, as it has implications in the employment of countermeasures and in conflict resolution.[63] Both insurgents and terrorists use terror and guerilla tactics to undermine the legitimacy of the existing government by demonstrating its inability to protect the population and maintain order. The difference is that insurgents are more inclined to employ guerilla tactics. Their terror acts are less frequent, but they are more careful in their targeting to promote their cause versus raising the ire of the locals. If they do terrorize, military and police forces

are more often their targets.[64] Whether they use guerilla or terror tactics, insurgents engage less in attacking civilians.

Terrorists, on the other hand, conduct more attacks against civilian targets, often to achieve such short-term concessions as ransom money, personal revenge, and prisoner release rather than to attract popular support.[65] The effectiveness of earning mass-base sympathy through terror means, however, is debatable. Bard O'Neill states that al-Qaeda's conduct of "transnational terrorist acts like bombings and skyjackings" has not produced measurable proof of effectiveness in attracting passive or active supporters.[66] Nevertheless, terrorists direct their attacks primarily at innocent civilians and tend to avoid unnecessary contact with the military.[67]

The ASG's actions fall more into the second category. The AFP describes this group as fundamentalist in religious orientation and radical in its interpretation of the tenets of Islam, especially the jihad.[68] To ASG jihadists, everything is fair game. Armed struggle is the chief means of attaining their goal of an independent Mindanao state, governed by Islam in its unadulterated form—a theocracy.[69] Interestingly, ASG firmly believes that Allah accepts and even encourages all methods of terrorism in the advancement of jihad.[70] Philippine Army soldiers who fought against this group observed that it "systematically and deliberately targeted civilians, specifically Christian religious leaders, Christian schools, foreign and local tourists, wealthy individuals, places of worship, Christian villages, and public places, in all their activities. These attacks (kidnappings, killings, abductions, extortion, bank raids, and raids on villages) were intended to spread fear, chaos, and sow terror among the people, specially [sic] Christians, in order to get rid of them."

In a well-documented study, the International Crisis Group (ICG) is more candid in describing the character of this organization, saying, "The ASG is not an insurgency in the same sense as the MILF or MNLF, or even a clearly delineated organisation. It is best understood as a network of networks, an alliance of smaller groups around individual charismatic leaders who compete and cooperate to maximize their reputation for violence. The greater the violence,

the bigger the pay-off, in terms of higher ransom payments and foreign funding."[71]

ICG further adds that members of this group continue to embrace and practice a militant form of Islam as a way of life and in pursuit of their fundamental objective. A dangerous assumption among military pundits in the AFP is that the ASG started out as a militant religious organization and assumed a criminal character after the loss of its founder. Such postulation runs the risk of erroneously relegating the task of confronting this group to law enforcement forces. In contrast, ICG contends that ASG's criminal activities have been a standard operating procedure since its inception.[72] Based on the foregoing, there is no mistaking the real identity of the ASG—a terrorist organization rather than a guerilla force.

The Basilan Model—COIN Strategy against the ASG

The Basilan Model acquired its name following the successful operations that drove the ASG out of its sanctuary in Basilan. It used the Diamond Model, the strategic COIN principles developed by Dr. Gordon McCormick (fig. 1).[73] The diagram shows the Diamond Model as a network representation of four principal actors and the interplay of forces among them in an insurgency environment. The diamond shape demonstrates symmetry of action and effect in what Wilson calls a "zero-sum game."[74] Thus, either COIN or an insurgent force can use this model by applying its principles.

In the diagram, both insurgent and COIN forces (all government instruments of power) are targeting the population for support (segment 1). To further illustrate, let us say the military is conducting a medical mission in a town controlled by insurgents. One individual who views soldiers as abusive may, after receiving medical care, suddenly "change his heart" and find them caring and competent. That person won over to the military's side will be a corresponding loss to the insurgents, hence the zero sum. As a corollary to that, a stray artillery shell that explodes near the town and injures that same person has the effect of reinforcing his view of an abusive military and has the simultaneous effects of creating a new active supporter for the insurgents and a new enemy for the military. Insurgents will also take parallel actions to

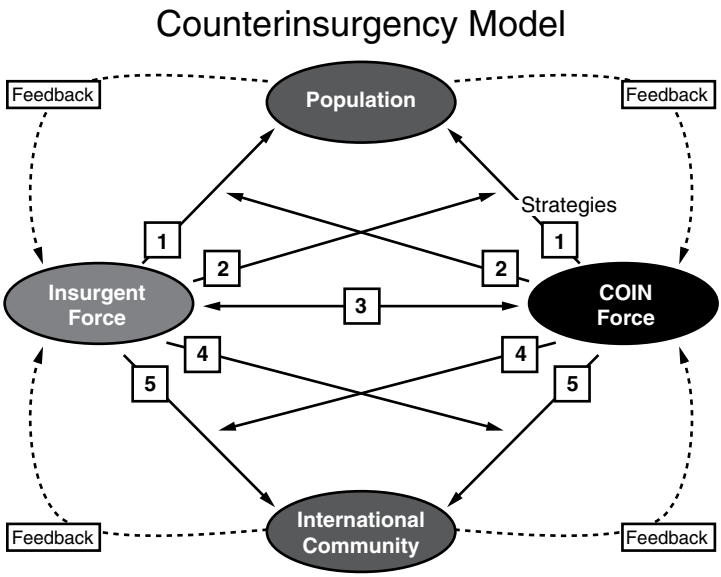

Figure 1. **COIN Diamond Model**. (Reprinted with permission from Gordon McCormick, *The Shining Path and Peruvian Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, Document No. P-7297)

lure people into their ranks. One familiar insurgent tactic is to organize peasant groups and teach them livelihood skills. Segment 2 shows insurgent and COIN forces attacking each other's hearts and minds strategy. The idea is to undermine the other's image in the minds of the population. Thus, a media broadcast of the person who suffered an army artillery hit has the effect of setting back tenfold any progress civil-military goals achieved. Success in segments 1 and 2 often leads to feedback from the population that translates into actionable intelligence. Where information is concerned, the insurgents have the initial upper hand because they usually live with the local population.[75] It is therefore the government forces' objective to counter the imbalance by pursuing efforts that contribute to the success in segments 1 and 2. Once those goals have been achieved, the COIN force is in the position to attack the insurgent force along segment 3. Actionable intelligence as a product of segments 1 and 2

allows COIN forces to correctly identify and attack the insurgent force.

Representing the lower half of the diamond is the external support COIN or insurgents receive from outside sources. In segment 5, both forces are targeting the international community to obtain material or moral support. A major outside military power may provide FID to either COIN or insurgents. As in segment 2, the COIN and insurgent forces can employ measures to disrupt the other's relationship with the international community along segment 4. As in the upper half of the diamond, the side that achieves success in legs 4 and 5 can strike a decisive blow against the other along segment 3.

Balikatan 02–1: Shoulder-to-Shoulder Exercise

The 1,300 American troops deployed to the southern Philippines in February 2002 comprising the Balikatan 02–1 found themselves undertaking a unique mission much different from the current GWOT efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. While US military forces are directly involved in combat operations in those countries, their role in the Philippines is limited to that of "advising and assisting" the AFP forces.[76] In the words of a US special forces (SF) officer, "It was a unique mission, because in one sense SF was 'training, advising, assisting, and maintaining,' but the location was a combat zone where AFP soldiers were fighting the Abu Sayyaf Group."[77] It is interesting to note, however, that the initial plan of the Bush administration was to send US troops to engage the Abu Sayyaf directly in combat and to dispatch an elite team of Delta Force personnel to rescue an American missionary couple the terrorist group was holding.[78] Though not expressly stated, the Philippine constitutional provision banning the permanent basing of a large contingent of foreign troops in the country could lead to all sorts of interpretations preventing US troops from participating in actual combat. Had the Philippine government's hands not been tied by this constitutional restriction, the COIN operations in Basilan could have taken a different turn.

Exercise Balikatan 02–1 was the first bilateral training exercise between the Philippines and the United States performed in a "hot area." Since the 1990s, both countries

have conducted combined peacetime exercises in the relative safety of camps and in designated field training areas vetted for security. Previous exercises involved the mobilization and use of conventional forces and equipment routinely aimed at enhancing operability between participating teams.[79] Exercises emphasizing COIN doctrines and tactics were confined to the army and involved only a small group of special forces counterparts. Thus, Balikatan 02–1 was a unique experience because it took a form similar to on-the-job training (OJT) with American soldiers serving as FID specialists (training supervisors) to their Filipino counterparts (apprentices). The mission (job) was threefold and became the basis for conceptual planning towards developing lines of operations[80] aimed at affecting the center of gravity, which is, as prescribed in the Diamond Model, the People. These missions or lines of operation are "building AFP capacity, focused civil-military operations, and information operations."[81]

The first mission focused on improving the AFP troops' skills and ability to undertake COIN operations against the ASG. Efforts along these lines correspond to actions taken in segments 1 (establishing security to gain popular support) and 3 (direct action against the enemy) of the Diamond Model. The JSOTF-P, through SF cadres who were embedded in select battalion units of the Philippine Army (PA),[82] provided training in "combat lifesaving skills, night-vision goggle (NVG) use, small-unit tactics, maritime interdiction operations, close-air support, and leadership development."[83] Though not allowed to engage the enemy, SF teams nevertheless went along with PA patrolling units to conduct on-scene training and advice.[84] The newly acquired life-saving skills, the use of NVGs, and the availability of US helicopters for immediate medical evacuation increased the Filipino soldiers' motivation to conduct more patrols day and night.[85] Thus, improvements in combat capability created a secure environment for Basilians and increased the fighting troops' willingness to confront the ASG.

AFP intelligence specialists also received training on basic intelligence fusion and analysis of raw information acquired from different sources.[86] Timely and reliable intelligence provided the means to undertake direct action against ASG by obtaining knowledge of its members and their movements, its location, its organizational structure,

and its tactics. In COIN operations, collection of intelligence and security of the populace are mutually exclusive. As David Galula points out, "Intelligence is the principal source of information on guerillas and intelligence has to come from the population, but the population will not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken."[87] In time, Basilians found reassurance in their physical safety and slowly volunteered information to the AFP and US security forces.[88] Also, as part of the capacity building, both the AFP and the JSOTF-P, the latter utilizing its "robust reach-back capability" in commanding such a wide array of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets as space-based systems and unmanned aerial vehicles, combined their intelligence efforts and transformed them into actionable intelligence.[89] James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson acknowledge the importance of these ISR assets in small wars for real-time intelligence gathering and for offsetting terrorist advantages during night-time movements.[90] However, experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq point to human intelligence (HUMINT) as a proven and time-tested COIN method of collecting grass-roots information about insurgent enemies who normally live with the populace.[91] During the rescue of the Burnhams,[92] an AFP HUMINT embedded in the ASG ranks provided the initial location of the hostage takers while ISR imagery gave their movements to the pursuing rescue teams, resulting in the killing of ASG representative Abu Sabaya.[93]

Establishment of security in villages in Basilan afforded the US civil affairs (CA) specialists, together with their Filipino counterparts, the ability to proceed in undertaking humanitarian assistance and community development projects.[94] The second mission of focused civil-military operations (CMO) was actions taken to support segment 1 of the Diamond Model and was intended to draw support for the national government from the local populace by showing concern for their basic welfare and needs. The focused element of the CMO projects means resources were tailored and allocated to address the root causes of popular dissatisfaction that tend to attract local support for the terror group.[95] Thus, the CA team visited different villages and towns to conduct a two-week demographic survey.[96] Assessment results gave the team knowledge on projects whose implementation

would have a significant impact on Basilians. Thus AFP engineering units and US Navy Seabees constructed and repaired roads and built bridges to enable people to travel to different towns more conveniently and merchants to market their agricultural produce cheaply and efficiently.[97] The construction teams also drilled manual-pump water wells to address the shortage of clean and potable water. They restored electricity to some areas that had lost electrical power due to storm damage. Additional schools were built. Combined Filipino and US MEDCAP and DENTCAP teams conducted medical and dental treatment and health care services.[98] Many of the patients who benefitted never had seen a doctor or a dentist.[99] After only a year, these medical missions and infrastructure projects quickly improved life in Basilan, transformed the government image from one of inefficiency to one of competence and concern, made the people trust the AFP more for protection, and empowered townspeople to demonstrate their intolerance of the presence of ASG terrorists in their island province.[100]

The information operations effort in Balikatan 02–1 took on the aspect of influencing the minds of the local populace to gain their allegiance to the government (segment 1 of the Diamond Model) and to break their support for the ASG (segment 2). PSYOPS thus became a significant element of the JSOTF-P COIN strategy of communicating to the local people the intentions and goals of the AFP and the US military in Basilan.[101] IO teams executed actions aimed at increasing public awareness of the peace and development efforts of the Balikatan exercise and making the people realize the downside of continuing to harbor terrorists in their communities.[102] The active use of print and broadcast media and the Internet promoted positive messages of COIN activities to a wide audience. Creative designs of leaflets, posters, print ads, and handbills translated in different southern Philippine dialects supported the US government's rewards program.[103] The IO campaign also included the proper and careful handling of the Philippine media, which is generally biased against US presence in the country.[104] The Philippines have a diverse culture and, aware of this, PSYOPS teams undertook a study of the history and culture of the different areas targeted for information campaigns.[105] The resources expended on the IO campaign sup-

ported the gains of the two other lines of operation of the Balikatan 02–1 and contributed to the overall objective of weaning the local populace from ASG influence. Referring to the reality on the ground in Basilan, the command sergeant major of JSOTF-P said, "The battle in the Philippines is a battle against an idea."[106]

Past Philippine COIN Strategies

Just a few years after the Philippines gained full independence, the Huks posed a serious challenge to the security of the state and the existence of the national government. After the Huk insurgency was contained in 1955, succeeding insurgencies came into being in the late 1960s, namely, the CCP and the different secessionist groups in the southern Philippines. Different administrations employed various strategies to address these insurgencies. All used a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic means, though none was as successful as Magsaysay. This section provides a short description of some of these strategies.

The Huk Campaign

The Hukbalahap (short for Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon, or National Armed Force against the Japanese) started as a resistance movement against the Japanese occupiers.[107] After World War II, it continued as a resistance movement against government inefficiency, corruption, and lack of coherent policy for land reform. Then Secretary of National Defense Ramon Magsaysay introduced a strategy he dubbed "All-Out Friendship or All-Out Force," which employed COIN principles and techniques similar to those discussed previously.[108] A guerilla leader during the Japanese occupation, he probably saw what fueled the rebellion and took actions to contain it.[109] His objective was clear from the start: to cut the Huk guerillas' main source of strength by steering the growing popular support away from them and directing it towards the established government.[110] Thus, when he initially ordered his troops to conduct "large-scale conventional sweep operations" that caused harm to civilians caught in the crossfire, he immediately shifted to aggressive small unit tactics in engaging

the insurgents.[111] Interestingly, his lines of operation have the same elements as that of the JSOTF-P.

With the military aid and training assistance provided by the US government, Magsaysay propped up the Philippine military capability. Key officers and enlisted soldiers received training in leadership and professionalism that abated inefficiency and abuses in the ranks.[112] Equipment came from World War II stocks that were easy to operate and maintain.[113] Therefore, the AFP became more effective and confident in fighting the Huks. The Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) became Magsaysay's vehicle for implementing his CMO offensive. EDCOR was an ingenious resettlement and socioeconomic assistance program conceived to counter the Huks' slogan of "Land for the Landless."[114] The program helped to sway peasant sympathies away from the Huks and enticed active members to return their allegiance to the government. Magsaysay also introduced the rewards program as part of his IO campaign. The large sums offered for the arrest of Huk leaders helped to sow dissension within the Huks' organization.[115] His "Cash for Guns" program was so effective it resulted in the surrender of 50 percent of the Huks' firearms. Lastly, Lawrence M. Greenberg concludes that the success of COIN operations resulted in large part from Magsaysay's dynamic and persistent leadership.[116] In the eyes of many Filipinos now and then, he was and is a true icon of honesty, dedication, and sincere servitude. His presence in the forefront of the COIN campaign against the Huks contributed to the enhancement of the government's legitimacy.

Marcos and Operations Plan Katatagan (Operation Plan Stability)

In the early 1980s, President Marcos was saddled with the rising tide of communist insurgency in many areas throughout the Philippines. Walden Bello states that "the brutal and corrupt dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos was driving people into the hands of the NPA."[117] Homegrown communism and its negative impact to the region-wide efforts of containing communism in Southeast Asia moved the US government to pressure Marcos to create a strategy to defeat the CCP.[118]

Philippine defense officials devised Operations Plan (OPLAN) Katatagan, which sought to apply the same COIN strategy that defeated the Huk insurgency. The plan, in fact, had the markings of the United States all over it and required compliance with some US demands to rid the military of its corrupt and abusive practices to become "a more effective counterinsurgency force."[119] Consequently, several Filipino military personnel flew to the United States to receive training in CMO, PSYOPS, and COIN courses.[120] Emphasis was placed on the purchase of US COIN equipment to enable Filipino troops to move, shoot, and communicate instead of acquiring external defense articles like fighter jets. The plan also called for consolidating the capabilities and resources of the military and other government agencies to stamp out the problem of lawlessness and the lack of social services that fueled the insurgency.[121]

Marcos, despite his formidable ability to compel line agencies to coordinate their actions in support of OPLAN Katatagan, was still unsuccessful in containing the growth of the communist insurgency. According to Leonardo I. Peña, the plan did not differ much from the hearts and minds strategy of the Magsaysay COIN plan.[122] It failed to produce positive results because, unlike Magsaysay, Marcos was more focused on maintaining power than faithfully addressing the insurgents' grievances.[123] Nor did the repressive nature of his governance and the radicalization of his military following years of military rule succeed in enlisting the population's support for the security and development goals of his plan.

Post Martial Law Lambat-Bitag (Net-Entrapment) Plan

Lambat Bitag sought to rectify errors in OPLAN Katatagan. Though both plans contained aspects of security and development in their lines of operation, they differed in the execution of the security component. OPLAN Katatagan, the latter plan, involved the employment of tactical actions in the form of "strike campaigns, or what is commonly known as 'search and destroy' operations, clearing operations, mopping up operations, sweeping operations, etc."[124] Lambat Bitag, on the other hand, purged the plan of the "search and destroy" tactics and incorporated the

four-stage clear-hold-consolidate-develop (C-H-C-D) operations concept.[125] The clearing stage involved the immersion of a special operations team (SOT)[126] into the influenced community to eradicate the insurgents' political mass-base structure through intensive PSYOPS, civic-action, and intelligence efforts.[127] The holding stage utilized the AFP-administered paramilitary units called the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGU) to serve as auxiliary territorial guards in cleared communities.[128] The CAFGU supported the local police by providing perimeter security. The consolidation stage cast the military in a supporting role to the local executives responsible for providing basic government services.[129] The development stage overlapped the consolidation stage and usually involved the participation of NGOs and other private entities in implementing poverty alleviation projects.[130]

The consolidate and develop stages required involvement of other governmental agencies, whereas the Lambat Bitag plan lacked the national character or authority needed to compel agencies to coordinate and work with the military. Unlike the Magsaysay and Marcos COIN campaigns, Lambat Bitag was an AFP unilateral conceptualization. Thus, the AFP was often reduced to performing the task of civic and community development by expanding its CMO efforts.[131] Notable among these CMO projects were dental and medical missions, academic tutoring through the Army Literacy Patrol System, road repair, construction of schools and markets, and assistance in establishing small-scale businesses.[132]

An important aspect of this COIN strategy was the continuous indoctrination and education of soldiers in leadership, core values, human rights, and the overall campaign objectives.[133] Such education was particularly necessary for all SOT members who performed immersion missions to engage and work with the people in the target communities. According to Roy T. Devesa, in the six years since 1987, when Lambat Bitag was implemented, the communist-insurgents' ranks diminished exponentially from 25,000 to only about 5,000 in 1994.[134] Likewise, a steep decline also occurred in the number of communist-influenced villages, from 8,500 to 450 within the given period.[135] Accordingly, the success of this COIN strategy prompted the AFP to prematurely declare victory against the CCP and to relegate the

national task of internal security operations (ISO) to law enforcement agencies in 1996.[136] It would take the AFP two years to realize and admit this blunder. Thus, in 1998 the AFP took back its responsibility for the ISO and has held it since.

Note that Lambat Bitag focused on the suppression of the communist insurgency, not the separatist movements in the southern Philippines. In fact, Peña states that MILF and ASG members increased during those years the AFP pursued entrapment of the communists.[137] He adds that the GRP was reluctant to employ the same COIN plan against the MNLF and MILF because the GRP was engaged in peace talks with them.[138] However, there could be other underlying reasons the AFP never employed strategies that blend kinetic and non-kinetic methods against the Moro insurgents. The conclusion addresses this issue.

Conclusion

Not until 2002 and the launching of OPLAN Bantay Laya (Freedom Watch) did the AFP develop a strategic plan to address all insurgencies in the country. This new plan is essentially the same as the OPLAN Lambat-Bitag, except it emphasizes a comprehensive and coordinated solution to the insurgency problem by uniting government agencies, NGOs, and other civil groups to work with the AFP. This time, the authority comes directly from the Office of the President. Establishing area-coordinating centers in every region allows for central planning and execution near operational environments. The plan also provides for the implementation of modified SOT more attuned to the culture in the southern Philippines. As mentioned earlier, past COIN strategies focused mainly on defeating the communist insurgencies. Sound as these strategies were, their application never was tested against the MILF or even the MNLF. COIN operations against these two Moro rebel groups involved mostly kinetic methods.

One possible reason for this apparent lack of enthusiasm toward COIN methods in confronting the MILF is that the AFP did not consider it a bona fide guerilla group. The AFP spoke of its armed component, the BIAF, more as a semi-conventional force because, while the MILF attempted to

project the BIAF as a large and well-organized force capable of engaging in conventional battles, its members occasionally conducted guerilla operations against AFP troops and military installations. Its inventory of weapons consisted mostly of light arms with a few heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and 60mm and 81mm mortars. In a conventional contest against the AFP, these weapons were considered inferior. During the AFP-MILF showdown, these weapons afforded the latter the capability to inflict damage upon armored troop vehicles and tanks. There were reports before the 2000 offensive that the MILF possessed surface-to-air missiles, but those rumors proved false. But the most obvious aspect of the MILF strength is its camps. AFP intelligence obtains positive identification of all camps before troops set out to seize them. Effective insurgents are highly mobile. They set up camps but only temporarily. They also take actions to prevent counterinsurgent authorities from discovering them and their hideouts. The MILF in contrast transformed some of their camps into fortified territories and openly gave out their locations, as if these camps were tourist destinations. After the AFP overran these camps, the MILF found haven in the thick grasslands of Central Mindanao. Some members took refuge in communities that are under their influence and continue to undertake operations to consolidate their mass base. They are now full-blown insurgents dispersed in highly mobile units and frequently carry out ambushes on patrolling troops or raids on AFP installations.

Another likely reason the AFP preferred bombing and large-scale sweeping maneuvers to suppress the Moro rebel groups has something to do with the prevailing perception of the Moros. Soldiers who have not seen action in Mindanao acquire their information from veterans in the field. Gruesome stories about Moros beheading captured soldiers and putting the decapitated heads on display reinforced the historical depiction of Moros as brutal and fanatical warriors. Spaniards in the colonial period portrayed them as "pirates, slave traders, and violent warriors."[139] Colonial Americans, on the other hand, viewed them "as 'wild' or as 'non-Christian tribes' that needed to be civilized."[140] These distorted images of the Moros and the historical animosities between Christians and Muslims have survived to this day

and sometimes feed into the consciousness of the majority of the soldiers. Few soldiers from outside this region understand the cultural and historical causes of the Moro rebellion. Thus, in a Christian-dominated military organization, military planners are likely to miscalculate when designing and implementing countermeasures or seeking to win hearts and minds.

The above discussion established Abu Sayyaf as operating more of a terrorist than an insurgent group. The difference underscores the ASG's predisposition to conduct terror activities with wanton abandon and extreme brutality. Its actions have often raised the question of whether it uses Islam as mere cover to justify engaging in lucrative kidnappings and other forms of banditry. The MILF, on the other hand, though not above performing guerilla acts, is more careful in selecting targets and even takes great lengths to employ its extensive IO networks to justify terror acts swiftly. Except for the renegade members of the group, there has been no major report of mainstream MILF atrocities against civilians. MILF members employ guerrilla tactics occasionally against military and police forces to demonstrate the helplessness and inefficiency of the national government. Other than that, the MILF is quietly content with mobilizing its mass base through da'wah, building its strength, fortifying and transforming its camps into viable communities, broadcasting its messages through public relations and the Internet,[141] and consolidating its forces and supporters throughout the southern Philippines.

The foregoing arguments show that the ASG has long been alienating Basilians because of years of bombings, beheadings, and kidnappings. O'Neill points out that "relying on terrorism as a means to garner popular support runs the risk of its prolongation and intensification which may be counterproductive," as it induces suffering in the people and destroys the insurgent's image of a reliable and competent alternative to the national forces.[142] Some suggest the JSOTF-P was positioned to gain significant support from the residents of Basilan because of ASG abuses. Surveys confirm this support, with 60 percent of Mindanao Muslims showing approval for the exercise.[143] Fear, of course, may contribute to the initial reluctance of the local residents to support the combined AFP and JSOTF-P contingent. Never-

theless, that was easily overcome as the AFP gradually built its capability and showed competence in taking charge of the situation.

Driving a wedge between the MILF and its supporters may be a different story in the application of the Diamond Model. The MILF has long been a symbol of Muslim unification and resistance against forced assimilation by the Manila-based rulers. Centuries-old grievances of Moro marginalization and dislocation have established a minefield of potential Muslim supporters who can easily identify with the MILF cause of creating a Bangsamoro homeland. According to Astrid S. Tuminez, "Many educated and politically active Moros express a longing to return to self-rule," similar to the Sultanate system of government of the old southern Philippines.[144] She added that the MILF before was fixated on establishing an independent state but now is more open to the idea of a "strong Moro autonomy" with little "interference from Manila."[145] If a majority of Moros who actively and passively support the MILF share this cause, this may be a strong indication of a national aspiration distinct from Filipino nationalism.

Bard O'Neill argues that "nationalist appeals" can be a strong cause for mobilizing popular support and establishing cohesion in insurgency movements because they can always bring up culturally divisive grievances and also point to the present rulers as the cause of their suffering and marginalization.[146] With Moros having cultivated a sense of living as second-class citizens in their own land,[147] the feeling of subjugation is further exacerbated. When nationalist feelings predominate over mundane grievances, a focused CMO may not be enough to sway popular support away from the MILF. At the tactical level, MILF supporters may respond with gratitude to such humanitarian and community development efforts, but, unless improvements in their lives can be sustained and the Moros are given more opportunities for social mobility, application of the Diamond Model may fail in the strategic sense.

Tuminez inquires, "Does the government have a credible plan for enhancing Moros' sense of Filipino citizenship?"[148] Michael Hecter partly answers that question in his book, *Containing Nationalism*. He suggests the importance of containing nationalism or at least mitigating nationalism's

powerful appeal for mobilization by re-engineering or creating institutions that address the specific needs of the people and strengthening them so that they maintain an image of fairness without favoring anyone in particular.[149] In other words, a successful COIN strategy against a group like the MILF should complement actions that would give Moros a sense they belong within mainstream Filipino society.

Notes

(Notes appear here in shortened form. For full details, see appropriate entries in the bibliography.)

1. International Crisis Group, "Philippines Terrorism," 1.
2. Baker, "Looking Forward in Mindanao," 45.
3. Spaniards saw resemblance between the Muslims of Sulu and the Moors (Muslims from North Africa who conquered Spain in the 8th century) in their viciousness and fighting style and thus labeled the former "Moros."
4. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 1.
5. Majul, *Muslim in the Philippines*, 63.
6. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 22.
7. Briefing presented by Dr. Nestor M. Nisperos.
8. *Indios* is a pejorative label the Spaniards used to refer to Philippine inhabitants.
9. Linn, *Philippine War*, 226.
10. Pres. William McKinley instituted this policy in the administration of Philippine state affairs. Benevolent assimilation "downplayed the military side of pacification" and instead emphasized civil affairs. See ibid., 200.
11. Ibid., chapter 9.
12. Ibid., 226.
13. Aijaz, "Class and Colony in Mindanao," 6.
14. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 4.
15. Martin and Tuminez, "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines," 2.
16. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 4.
17. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism*, 89.
18. Seachon, "Insurgencies in History," 16.
19. Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 20.
20. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 25–30.
21. Unlike the MILF, which pursues an independent Islamic concept of state and government, the MNLF is more inclined to establish a democratic system of government separate from the national government. The MNLF recognizes the Philippine constitution and was able to strike a peace deal with GRP based on that framework. The MILF, however, does not, and this is one major reason the current peace talks between the GRP and the MILF always hit a snag. (See interview of the late Hashim Salamat in the 23d issue of *Nida'ul Islam* magazine at http://www.islam.org.au, April–May 1998. Also see Liss, "Abu Sayyaf and US and Australian Military Intervention in the Southern Philippines," available from http://www.globalcolab.org/Nautilus/

australia/apsnet/policy-forum/2007/abu-sayyaf-and-us-and-australian-miltary-intervention-in-the-southern-philippines.

22. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 4.
23. Abat, *The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao*, 25.
24. Personal encounters with soldiers who fought the MNLF in the 1970s.
25. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 1.
26. Ibid., 8–9.
27. Vitug and Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon*, 122.
28. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 5.
29. Salamat, *The Bangsamoro Mujahid*.
30. Ibid.
31. International Crisis Group, "Southern Philippines Backgrounder," 9.
32. Bacani, "The Mindanao Peace Talks," 5.
33. Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Field Circular, *Knowing the Terrorists*.
34. AFP OSSS, *In Assertion of Sovereignty*, 22.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 11.
37. Ibid., 28.
38. Ibid., 13.
39. Ibid., 28.
40. Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)."
41. AFP OSSS, *In Assertion of Sovereignty*, 124.
42. Ibid., chapter 5.
43. Ibid., 24.
44. Ibid., 20.
45. Ibid., 19.
46. Ibid., 124.
47. Ibid., 121.
48. Ibid., 115.
49. Ibid., 116.
50. Ibid., 125.
51. Ibid., xxviii.
52. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, 28.
53. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 13.
54. For a detailed discussion on the counterinsurgency employed against the Huks, see Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection*.
55. Ibid., 117–32.
56. Ibid.
57. The completion of Balikatan 2002 in Basilan did not end the presence of US troops in Mindanao. Instead, the JSOTF-P mission was extended to an indefinite period and expanded to the island of Jolo and in Western Mindanao. See Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf," 12. See also Jacinto, "RP, US Troops Finish School Building in Sulu," available from http://www.gmanews.tv/print/124775.
58. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," 19.
59. The author participated in many strike-bombing operations against the ASG in Basilan in 1995.
60. AFP Field Circular, *Knowing the Terrorists*.

61. Anderson, "US Counterinsurgency vs. Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism," 225.

62. Ibid.

63. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 2.

64. O'Neil, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 36.

65. Ibid., 34.

66. Ibid., 104.

67. Ibid., 36.

68. AFP Field Circular, *Knowing the Terrorists*.

69. Ibid., 1.

70. Ibid., 3.

71. International Crisis Group, "The Philippines," 7.

72. Ibid.

73. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 4.

74. Ibid., 5.

75. Corpus, *Silent War*, 111–12.

76. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," 18.

77. Ibid.

78. Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf," 10.

79. AFP J8, *Education and Training*.

80. Line of operation, according to Dr. Jeff Reilly, "is the visualization of a campaign's concept of operations that links tactical and operational objectives to the end state." See Reilly, *Operational Design*, 27.

81. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 6.

82. Small and independent groups of special operations specialists called the liaison coordination element (LCE) "advise and assist" in the AFP battalion (numbering between 4,000–5,000 troops) level in combat planning and intelligence fusion. Ibid., 9.

83. Eckert, "Defeating the Idea," 18.

84. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 7.

85. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," 22.

86. Ibid., 21.

87. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 50.

88. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 8.

89. Ibid., 9.

90. Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, 430.

91. Ollivant and Chewning, "Producing Victory," 57–58.

92. Martin and Gracia Burnham were American Christian missionaries who were kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf while vacationing in a tourist resort in Palawan Island in May 2000. Only Gracia came out alive from the AFP rescue effort. See Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf," 4.

93. Lecture at Wood Auditorium, Air Command and Staff College (ACSC). Found in Walley, "Civil Affairs," n. p.

94. Ibid., 30.

95. Ibid., 32.

96. Ibid., 31.

97. Ibid., 37.

98. Ibid., 34.

99. Ibid.
100. Eckert, "Defeating the Idea," 19.
101. Ibid., 20.
102. Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation," 10.
103. Briscoe, "Wanted Dead or Alive," 28–29.
104. Ibid., 27.
105. Eckert, "Defeating the Idea," 21.
106. Ibid., 16.
107. Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection*, 15.
108. Valeriano and Bohannan, *Counter-Guerilla Operations*, 23.
109. Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection,* 146.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid., 86.
112. Ibid., 108.
113. Ibid., 148.
114. Valeriano and Bohannan, *Counter-Guerilla Operations*, 177.
115. Joes, *Modern Guerilla Insurgency*, 79.
116. Ibid., 145.
117. Bello, "Counterinsurgency's Proving Ground," 162.
118. Ibid., 166–69.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid., 167.
121. Hernandez, "Institutional Response to the Armed Conflict," 10.
122. Peña, *Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy*, 42.
123. Ibid.
124. Corpus, *Silent War*, 108.
125. Devesa, *An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology*, 36.
126. "SOT is a concept originated by Capt. Alex B. Congmon of the Philippine Army designed to dismantle the CPP/NPA political structure in one enemy guerilla front. Initially, clearing operations in affected communities involved the killing of insurgents. Years of failed COIN, however, made the Philippine Army (PA) realized the importance of dismantling the political structure of the insurgents to prevent the continued mobilization of mass-base support in the community despite the elimination of key leaders of the movement. The PA is primarily responsible in the conduct of SOT. SF constitutes the bulk of a team numbering between 7–8 members. Members are specially trained in intelligence, PSYOPS, and CMO. See Corpus, *Silent War*, 189–91.
127. Ibid., 174.
128. Ibid., 175.
129. Ibid., 176.
130. Ibid., 177.
131. Devesa, *An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology*, 36.
132. Ibid.
133. Peña, *Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy*, 43.

134. Devesa, *An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology*, 36.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid., 36–37.

137. Peña, *Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy*, 44.

138. Ibid.

139. Martin and Tuminez, "Toward Peace in the Southern Philippines," 7.

140. Ibid.

141. Before the 2000 AFP offensive, the MILF had opened the door in most of its camps to government officials, diplomats, and journalists. It also has posted several Web sites on the Internet to communicate its messages to a broader public. The *YouTube* archive has a number of video clips containing interviews of key MILF personalities.

142. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 103.

143. Abinales, "American Military Presence in the Southern Philippines," 2.

144. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 7.

145. Ibid.

146. O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 170.

147. Tuminez, "The Past Is Always Present," 11.

148. Tuminez, "Ancestral Domain in Comparative Perspective," 12.

149. Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, 136–56.

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