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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**COMBATING TERRORISM IN THE PHILIPPINES TO  
IMPROVE U.S. HOMELAND SECURITY**

by

William E. Lowery

December 2010

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Michael Malley  
Sandra Leavitt

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.			
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> December 2010	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Combating Terrorism in the Philippines to Improve U.S. Homeland Security		<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Maj William E. Lowery		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A		<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol Number _____N/A_____	
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited		<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b>  This thesis will seek to shed light on the broader issue of whether or not the United States can enhance homeland security by fighting terrorism abroad, in the Philippines specifically, and help deepen our understanding of the dynamics at play. It will do this first by examining the key terrorist organizations operating in the southern Philippines, providing an understanding of what motivates them, how they operate, and how terrorist activity in this region impacts U.S. homeland security. Analysis of U.S. policies and efforts to minimize this activity will reveal whether or not they have enjoyed any measure of success. The efforts put forth by the United States over the past nine years have been significant, involved a sustained U.S. presence in the affected areas, and cost U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars. The second front in the global war on terrorism has not produced a direct attack on U.S. interests since 9/11. Additionally, the focus on the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has produced definitive results, but terrorist attacks in the region persist, threatening the stability of the Philippines and U.S. interests there. This thesis concludes that, while the United States has enjoyed some successes, clearly it has yet to confront the root causes of the problems in the southern Philippines. While the United States aggressively pursued the ASG, as recently as 2008, a breakdown in the peace process talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) resulted in displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents in the southern Philippines. Another breakdown could likely end up having history repeat itself unless the United States adopts a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the root causes underlying the separatist movements.			
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Homeland security, Philippines, terrorism, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Abu Sayyaf Group, counterterrorism, Mindanao		<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 93	
		<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU

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**COMBATING TERRORISM IN THE PHILIPPINES TO IMPROVE U.S.  
HOMELAND SECURITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(HOMELAND SECURITY AND DEFENSE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis will seek to shed light on the broader issue of whether or not the United States can enhance homeland security by fighting terrorism abroad, in the Philippines specifically, and help deepen our understanding of the dynamics at play. It will do this first by examining the key terrorist organizations operating in the southern Philippines, providing an understanding of what motivates them, how they operate, and how terrorist activity in this region impacts U.S. homeland security. Analysis of U.S. policies and efforts to minimize this activity will reveal whether or not they have enjoyed any measure of success. The efforts put forth by the United States over the past nine years have been significant, involved a sustained U.S. presence in the affected areas, and cost U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars. The second front in the global war on terrorism has not produced a direct attack on U.S. interests since 9/11. Additionally, the focus on the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has produced definitive results, but terrorist attacks in the region persist, threatening the stability of the Philippines and U.S. interests there. This thesis concludes that, while the United States has enjoyed some successes, clearly it has yet to confront the root causes of the problems in the southern Philippines. While the United States aggressively pursued the ASG, as recently as 2008, a breakdown in the peace process talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) resulted in displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents in the southern Philippines. Another breakdown could likely end up having history repeat itself unless the United States adopts a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the root causes underlying the separatist movements.



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Has the United States' efforts to combat terrorism abroad enhanced homeland security? Have these efforts in the southern Philippines made the U.S. homeland more secure? If so, how have they done so?

This thesis will seek to shed light on the broader issue of whether or not the United States can enhance homeland security by fighting terrorism abroad and help deepen our understanding of the dynamics at play. It will do this first by examining the key terrorist organizations operating in the southern Philippines, providing an understanding of what motivates them, how they operate, and how terrorist activity in this region impacts U.S. homeland security. Analysis of U.S. policies and efforts to minimize this activity will reveal whether or not they have enjoyed any measure of success.

## B. IMPORTANCE

United States' counterterrorism policies in the Philippines are important to analyze because history has shown terrorist activity that has taken place there has jeopardized U.S. homeland security. The most prominent example of this sort of activity is the so-called "Bojinka plot." In 1995, Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, with financial assistance from al Qaeda, planned an attack against a dozen U.S. commercial aircraft departing from Manila.<sup>1</sup> They also planned to crash an airliner into CIA headquarters. These acts directly threatened U.S. homeland security.

The Ramzi Yousef case clearly demonstrates links between the Philippines as a safe haven for terrorists and as a concrete threat to the U.S. homeland. Although it occurred well before 9/11, this case is the most well-known direct evidence of terror activity planned against the United States in the Philippines. Since then, however, other evidence has emerged. In particular, links between al Qaeda and a major separatist

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<sup>1</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, 146–7, [www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf](http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf) (accessed October 4, 2009).

movement in the southern Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as well as between the MILF and the largest terrorist network in Southeast Asia, known as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), have also been discovered since 9/11. In 2002, Philippine military forces repeatedly uncovered al Qaeda cells operating training camps in Mindanao.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will provide a thorough analysis of those cases. It will also critically review America's counterterrorism policy of focusing on a smaller but arguably more violent separatist movement in the southern Philippines, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

In 2002, President Bush ordered U.S. military forces into the Philippines in an effort to combat terrorism offshore. Since then, the U.S. has undertaken a wide range of efforts to combat terrorism in the Philippines, through both military and State Department channels. Initiatives, such as the Philippine Defense Reform Program and the Capability Upgrade Program, provided much needed training and equipment to the Philippine military. However, these successes have been limited. Much of the military effort to date has centered on suppressing activity by the ASG, the smallest of the major Muslim militant groups in the Philippines, which has rarely targeted American interests, and has the weakest ties to JI. In spite of the linkages to terrorist activity, the United States does not list the MILF as a terrorist organization.

Today, ASG has largely been contained and poses no serious threat to U.S. homeland security. However, the government of the Philippines has yet to negotiate peace in the nearly 30-year existence of the MILF. Talks are underway, and a fragile ceasefire remains in place. In spite of that, the southern Philippines remain an area outside the span of control of the government. For example, in the run-up to the May 2010 elections, a local militia massacred 32 journalists in Maguindanao in November 2009. While the government has arrested scores of suspects, the family in charge of the militia retains control over large sections of the province, including local law enforcement and judges.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James J. F. Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes, Vol 2* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "Filipino Politicians Wield Private Armies, Despite Ban," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/world/asia/21phils.html?ref=asia&pagewanted=print> (accessed February 23, 2010).

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

While the United States has provided millions of dollars in aid to the Philippine military and government through the U.S. military and organizations such as USAID, it appears to have done so without a comprehensive strategy.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States adopted an aggressive approach to combating terrorism and defeating al Qaeda. Since al Qaeda dispersed globally, the United States could not focus on the organization in the same manner as it would a conventional military force. Instead, America chose to focus on known areas where al Qaeda and its affiliates were concentrated. The targets of this policy were not limited to the Middle East and Afghanistan. In fact, the Bush Administration declared Southeast Asia to be the “second front” in the “Global War on Terrorism.” And in this region, the Philippines received the most attention. The American military worked with the Philippine military, training Filipino soldiers to engage in the enforcement aspects of the strategy. The combination of these two elements, they believed, would eventually win over the population and erode support for the Islamic extremist factions that were finding safe havens for training in the southern Philippines and challenging the Philippine state, a staunch ally of the United States. U.S. counterterrorism assistance to the Philippines has included nonmilitary components, too. These programs are intended to win the support of the population and wean them off of support provided by terrorist groups.

However, the military and nonmilitary aspects of U.S. assistance appear piecemeal and unconnected to a broader strategy of regional stability. Many military programs do not appear to be coordinated with programs that USAID and other organizations’ support. American policies may not have been as effective as they could have been because of lack of interagency coordination and execution rather than lack of funding. The apparently compartmentalized approach to these problems embraced by the main U.S. military effort, Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF – P), the primary U.S. State Department initiative, USAID, the government of the Philippines and other organizations appears to have hindered U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

As a result, this thesis will hypothesize that U.S. counterterrorism policy has been compartmentalized and therefore, it has been far less effective than it could be.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Prior to 9/11, the United States generally treated terrorism as a criminal act to be punished within the U.S. legal system. The end of the Cold War reduced the need for continued military buildup in Southeast Asia, resulting in the elimination of the “American-led security network in Asia.”<sup>4</sup> While the United States continued to engage in military and diplomatic activities with the Philippines, these focused primarily on countering the influence of China in the region, not counterterrorism. During that time, terrorists increased their presence in the Philippines and used lawless regions of the south as a springboard to train and launch attacks from. After 9/11, President Bush changed the U.S. grand strategy in Southeast Asia to focus on counterterrorism efforts, especially in the Philippines. There are varying viewpoints on the success of this strategy in contemporary literature.

Some view the terrorism in the Philippines as a threat to U.S. interests and consider the change in U.S. strategy in the Philippines after 9/11 to be correct both in assigning a high level of importance to this front and in its utilization of military means. The United States went from treating terrorist attacks as criminal acts to considering them acts of war. As a result, military operations ensued in Afghanistan and later Iraq, financial assets were frozen, the United States engaged in training programs in the Philippines and elsewhere, and many other activities at home and abroad were designed to prevent terrorist attacks from taking place on the U.S. homeland. Strategy evolved from a reactive approach, waiting for an event to occur then responding, to a proactive approach, targeting terrorists and suspected terrorists, supporters and sympathizers on American terms and, when possible, before attacks took place. The 9/11 Commission Report, released in 2003, postulated that Southeast Asia would be the “second front” in the global war on terrorism. Anticipating the conclusions of that report, shortly after 9/11, the U.S. and Philippine governments heightened cooperation efforts with one

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<sup>4</sup> John Baylis, et al., *The Globalization of World Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., (Oxford University Press: 2008).

another, primarily aimed at targeting ASG but largely ignoring possible threats posed by the MILF. The United States sought and received support from the Philippines for its position to go after al Qaeda offensively there. After 9/11, the United States gained strategic port rights in the Philippines.<sup>5</sup> However, the increased U.S. military presence remained contentious among Filipinos due to America's colonial and post-colonial history there.<sup>6</sup> It is apparent that both states have gone to great lengths to address terrorism in the Philippines, in both cases based on principles and not necessarily on the whimsical trends in public opinion.

Scholars generally agree that Islamic militant groups in the southern Philippines have been a problem for decades. Today, there are three main groups that share similar grievances, pursue their aims through violent attacks on the Philippine government, and pose a threat to the United States. McKenna explains that the MILF came about in 1984 as a result of events in Cotabato, precipitating a general mindset of Muslim separatism in Mindanao.<sup>7</sup> However, the roots of the MILF are much deeper and some argue that it was formed as early as 1981, as a breakaway group from the original Muslim separatist organization in Mindanao, the Moro-National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims in the southern Philippines goes back to the turn of the twentieth century when colonial rule transferred from Spain to the United States at the conclusion of the Spanish American War. The Spanish largely ignored the Muslims and the southern Philippines and did not try to assimilate them into their colonial empire, but Americans favored a different approach. The United States, and later the independent Philippines, insisted on assimilating Mindanao into the archipelago's unitary government. In the 1950s and 1960s, the government of the Philippines gave financial incentives to Christians to move to Mindanao in an effort to

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<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Ross and Aaron L. Friedberg, "Here Be Dragons" *National Interest* (September–October 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Eni H. Faleomavaega, "Japan's Changing Role," Political Transcript from House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, Washington, DC, June 29, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines*, (Berkeley, University of California Press: 1998), 281.



dilute the Muslim population there, relieve overcrowding in the Luzon area, provide an incentive for landless Christians to reject the Communist insurgency, and reward Christian politicians and their clan members. This Philippine government policy forced Moro-Muslims off their lands, resulting in newcomers to the region possessing unprecedented wealth and control over the still predominantly Muslim population. As a result of these dynamics, increased abuses at the hands of government-sponsored militias, and lack of justice through the judicial system, disgruntled Muslims bonded together and formed the MNLF in 1972, determined to annex the southern Philippines and establish a separate Moro state.<sup>8</sup> Following a number of violent revolts, the government and MNLF reached a series of agreements through the years. The establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) appeased MNLF leaders in 1996 and they largely abandoned further anti-government violence. By then however, MNLF had spawned a number of spin-off movements, most notably the MILF and, in 1990, the ASG.

Even with the government agreeing to establish the ARMM, Islamic militancy continued to fester in Mindanao, growing in size and aggressiveness. Jemaah Islamiyah elements are especially of concern given their direct ties to al Qaeda, which considers them and the MILF to be its “operational wing in Southeast Asia.”<sup>9</sup> They regard the southern Philippines as a “safe haven” from which to train and operate.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Philippine military forces have uncovered al Qaeda cells operating training camps in Mindanao repeatedly, as recently as 2002.<sup>11</sup> Following the resignation of President Joseph Estrada in 2001, the government began negotiations with the MILF, which has led to sporadic ceasefires and later reinitiating of hostilities. The Philippine government

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<sup>8</sup> “Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsited to Major High-Tech Systems,” 2. Moro is a multiethnic identity comprised of members of 13 distinct language groups whose homeland is in the Southern Philippines, primarily in the Mindanao-Sulu region.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Preeti Bhattacharji, “Terrorism Havens: Philippines,” *Council on Foreign Relations Online*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9365/> (accessed October 14, 2009); Andrew Feickert, “U.S. Military Operations in the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan, Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia,” *CRS Report for Congress*, January 20, 2006, 19; Francis T. Miko, “Removing Terrorist Sanctuaries: The 9/11 Commission Recommendations and U.S. Policy,” *CRS Report for Congress*, February 11, 2005, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist*, 190.

continues to negotiate with the MILF, but it has problems constraining some of the more radical elements of its organization from aiding al Qaeda affiliates, as well as upholding and implementing agreements it has made due to Filipino-Christian pressures to maintain the unequal status quo.<sup>12</sup> Philippine military forces arrested JI members operating training camps in Mindanao in 2003 and 2004.<sup>13</sup> In 2009, Larry Nicksch indicated the JI/MILF connection endures and has increased.<sup>14</sup> It makes sense that international terrorist organizations look to the southern Philippines, given the professionally organized training program operated by the MILF throughout the region that loosely parallels what one would expect to find in a state-run professional military.<sup>15</sup> Based on this information, it is apparent that terrorism has had a foothold in Mindanao, at least since the 1960s.

However, other scholars believe foreign Islamic extremist elements have disappeared from the region, and that terrorism in the Philippines is not a significant problem. RAND believes the JI/MILF connection has all but disappeared since 2004.<sup>16</sup> Nicksch summed this up best in 2007. On the one hand, the MILF condemned the 9/11 attacks and rebuffed the al Qaeda fatwa to operate against the U.S. On the other hand, evidence indicates elements of the MILF have cooperated with JI and Abu Sayyaf.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Nicksch disassociates JI from al Qaeda.

The United States has assisted the Philippine government in the form of military and nonmilitary aid, in support of existing U.S. counterterrorism policies. In 2004, America trained Filipino troops to fight against terrorist elements in the south.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Alan Sipress and Ellen Nakashima, "Al Qaeda Affiliate Training Indonesians on Philippine Island: Persistence Startles Officials in Manila," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist*, 191.

<sup>14</sup> Lunn and Nicksch, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations," 9.

<sup>15</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (February 5, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 44.

<sup>17</sup> Larry A. Nicksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia; Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* (Winter 2008).

Following 9/11 and the declaration of Southeast Asia as the second front, U.S. foreign aid to the Philippines increased substantially, with total foreign aid doubling between 2001 and 2002 and with the Philippines receiving the largest amount of U.S. military assistance in the region. U.S. military assistance to the Philippines in 2005 grew from \$30 million to \$55 million, nearly doubling the amount of money the United States provided to the Philippines in a one-year time span.<sup>19</sup> These numbers have remained at peak levels since then. The United States has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to fund its counterterrorism policies, but it is questionable if those dollars have been spent in the most efficient manner possible.

A third school of thought believes terrorism in the Philippines is a problem for the United States that needs to be addressed, but that the U.S. policies have failed. Other observers see two shortcomings in U.S. strategies after 9/11. First, the U.S. strategy of focusing exclusively on diminishing the influence of the ASG focuses on the wrong target. Direct U.S. military aid to date has been earmarked for use against ASG only.<sup>20</sup> The ASG poses little threat to the United States and is considered to be a minor player in the problem of terrorism in the southern Philippines. In spite of the many connections the MILF has displayed with other international terrorist organizations, the United States, at the request of the Philippine government, does not list the group as an identified terrorist organization. As a result, most terrorist groups in the southern Philippines retain most of their capabilities. The National Counterterrorism Center reports the Philippines ranks eleventh globally in fatalities by country due to terrorist attacks and ninth in kidnappings. Additional research will likely indicate a disparate proportion of these take place in the southern Philippines. Given these numbers, U.S. military solutions implemented to date seem to have had little effect in reducing the impact of Islamic militancy.

The second major weakness concerns the lack of coordination between the military and nonmilitary parts of U.S. policy. While the U.S. has dedicated millions of dollars to lure MILF members out of the organization and into stable jobs within larger

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<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia; Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* (Winter 2008).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

Mindanao society, USAID has led this initiative without full coordination with U.S. military efforts.<sup>21</sup> As a result, U.S.-trained Filipino forces often carry out missions against the same people USAID aims to convert. Most likely, government leaders take much of this aid and line their pockets with it as well, depriving the larger population the benefits the aid is designed to provide. Additionally, the American military strategy to train the Philippine military to take offensive action against insurgents fails to address the rampant corruption contributing to the problems in Mindanao.<sup>22</sup> In many cases, corrupt government officials can easily influence poorly paid and overworked military forces and law enforcement officials with the financial aid provided by the United States.

These two weaknesses have been exacerbated by problems on the Philippine side. First, the ARMM remains the most impoverished region in the entire country; across virtually every economic data point provided, it ranks last in all regions of the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> This is a testament that the aid provided by the United States has failed to produce the expected results. Second, the Philippine military's strategies may hinder American counterterrorism policies. The Philippine Army prefers a softer "hearts and minds" approach in Mindanao, which RAND argues has decreased violence.<sup>24</sup> Manila gave significant concessions to the MILF, agreeing in 2007 to significantly expand the borders of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity, which provides for a primarily Muslim autonomous region in Mindanao.<sup>25</sup> Recognition of the MILF and efforts to work with it for a peace agreement have acted as a deterrent, at least for the group at large,

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<sup>21</sup> Catharin Dalpino, "Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without," *Southeast Asian Affairs 2009*, (2009): 10.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," xv–xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Arsenio Balisacan et al., "Regional Development Dynamics and Decentralization in the Philippines: Ten Lessons From a 'Fast Starter,'" *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 25, No. 3, December 2008, 303–10.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 141–2.

<sup>25</sup> Allen Hicken, "The Philippines in 2008: Peace-building, War-fighting and Crisis Management," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January–February 2009): 193.

against harboring al Qaeda affiliates.<sup>26</sup> However, as was the case with the MNLF in the mid-1990s, off-shoots of the MILF continue to engage in violence against the government.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

A case-study approach to U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines will shed light on the broader U.S. policy of fighting terrorists abroad in order to protect the homeland. Cases will include the ASG, JI, the MILF, and U.S. policy toward them. An analysis of current U.S. policies will demonstrate if they have had the desired effect of combating terrorism in the Philippines. In particular, analysis will determine if the decision to engage only the ASG with military force has been effective. It will also demonstrate if adherence to the Philippine government strategy of cooperating with the MILF has produced results in combating terrorism. Additional analysis will explore the effectiveness of USAID actions and policies in the Philippines. This thesis will also comprehensively assess if the individual strategies could be more effective if they were integrated into a single, overarching strategy.

Sufficient information in the form of secondary sources exists to conduct an analysis of U.S. counterterrorism policy in the Philippines and draw conclusions on the level of success those policies have enjoyed. Secondary sources will include U.S., Australian, and Philippine government reports, reports by organizations, such as the International Crisis Group and Asia Foundation, and academic articles and books.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis, analyzing the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines to improve homeland security, will be broken into three main sections, each one building on the previous section to culminate in providing the reader with a full understanding of threats to U.S. homeland security stemming from terrorist activity in the Philippines, U.S. counterterrorism policies as they apply to the Philippines, and an analysis of whether or not these policies have worked.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It Can be Done," *International Security* (Winter 2005–2006).

The first section will describe terrorist activity in the Philippines organized by cases. It will provide an understanding of the various terrorist groups that have operated in the Philippines and the ones that exist today. It will also highlight the ties these terrorist groups have with more international terrorist organizations, especially JI and al Qaeda, which pose a threat to the U.S. homeland. The second section will explore U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines. It will define U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines as they relate to the overarching U.S. counterterrorism strategy that aims to take the fight to terrorists before they reach the U.S. homeland. Next, the section will lay out military and nonmilitary strategy. The final section will analyze U.S. counterterrorism policies. The ASG remains alive, peace with the MILF elusive, and JI continues to evolve, leaving one to wonder if U.S. policy has failed, or that more work needs to be done. Analysis will determine if there are any lessons that can be learned for the next phase of the fight. The thesis will conclude by tying the previous sections together to give the reader a complete understanding of the complex issues presented. It will also provide a section on policy recommendations that offer viable alternatives to the status quo of U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines.

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## **II. BACKGROUND**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Terrorist activity in the Philippines has taken various forms, beginning with the formation of the MNLF in 1976 and evolving into the key players that exist today. The different terrorist organizations have spawned additional movements as demands have changed and as the government has responded through waging state violence and offering concessions. Initially, terrorist groups operating in the Philippines fought for a separate Muslim state in the southern region and to correct decades of neglect and unfulfilled promises by the government. While the government took some steps toward this goal in the 1990s through the establishment of the ARMM, newer movements rejected these concessions, believing the MNLF compromised too much in the name of peace with the government, and continue to fight for independence. In waging this fight, more recent movements have accepted support from international terrorist organizations, especially JI and al Qaeda, a move that made these movements more formidable while bargaining for peace with the government. The United States recognized the threat international terrorist ties in the Philippines poses to its homeland security after 9/11.

Muslims in the southern Philippines enjoyed relative independence for centuries. For centuries, the Spanish failed to spread their colonial roots into Mindanao and farther south, despite repeated attempts to do so. The United States gained control of the archipelago at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in the early 20th century. The United States promised the Philippines eventual independence but also sought to assimilate the entire archipelago into a single nation. When independence arrived after the conclusion of World War II, the Muslims did not attain a separatist state. Violent efforts to assimilate the Muslim masses by the government prompted the organization of Muslim groups willing to use violence themselves to achieve what nonviolence had failed to, most notably the MNLF. When the MNLF began negotiating with the Philippine government, it alienated some members of the organization, resulting in the formation of a number of breakaway groups, most notably the MILF in 1984 and the ASG in 1991. Further steps by the Philippine government in response to these organizations facilitated



the rise of international terrorist influence there. This influence remains today, although it appears to have waned in recent years. While fragmented for decades, the Muslims eventually joined forces in opposition to the new Philippine government, demanding independence. This struggle continues today, with thousands of lives lost on both sides left as a legacy in the struggle for this nation to find its identity. In recent months, however, Filipinos have come closer than ever at reaching a peaceful resolution to this decades' long conflict.

Following 9/11, U.S. policy targeted ASG. Since its formation, ASG quickly moved to implement some of the most violent tactics seen to date to achieve its initial goals of a separate Muslim state, sparking interest in the organization in the mid-1990s by JI and al Qaeda. A series of high-profile kidnappings for ransom provoked outcries of protest by the international community. Since then, however, ASG appears to have degenerated into a low-profile organized crime group more bent on gaining monetarily than pursuing its original separatist goals. Although not as violent, the MILF is the largest Muslim separatist group in the Philippines. For decades, they have developed and run training camps used by terrorist groups throughout Southeast Asia, most notably JI. Though initially dismissed by the Philippine government as a fringe movement, the MILF remains formidable today and the government has sought a permanent peace with the organization for a number of years, a process that continues today. Although JI originated in Indonesia and maintains its main force there, it and other terrorists have maintained a presence in the Philippines, utilizing it as a safe haven to train and plan operations from.

## **B. A HISTORY OF MUSLIM OPPRESSION**

The Philippines endured 300 years of Spanish imperialism before the United States defeated them in war and claimed the island nation as its own. By the time the Spanish arrived in the 15th century Islam had already taken hold in Mindanao and the surrounding islands.<sup>27</sup> The natives would not allow the Spanish to spread Christianity.

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Frake, "Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities Among Philippine Muslims," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (March 1998): 43.

As a result, the Spanish branded them with the “Moro” label, taken from their wars with Spanish Muslims, the Moors.<sup>28</sup> The Spanish recruited the newly converted Catholics to fight against the Moros, delineating a divide between two cultures that had lived together in relative peace prior to the arrival of the Spanish.<sup>29</sup> Following the Spanish-American War, the United States publicly proclaimed it would ultimately grant the Philippines independence. Its actions, however, especially early in the 1900s, seemed to contrast this promise. The Muslim population in the southern Philippines especially felt the pain of American influence. While the Spanish generally left the Muslim areas alone during its colonial period and focused its efforts on converting the rest of the nation to Catholicism, the Americans from the onset believed assimilation of the Muslims into a nationalist society would be necessary for independence.

When the United States assumed imperialist control as part of the concessions ending the Spanish American War, it promised the Philippines it would eventually grant it independence. Muslims lobbied the United States for independence, hoping it would form a separate Muslim state in modern day Mindanao.<sup>30</sup> Subversive tactics on the part of the United States (and the Spanish before the war) eroded Muslim sovereignty to a point that, in 1946, when the Philippines did achieve independence, the U.S. denied Muslims autonomy, or even the opportunity to remain a protectorate of the U.S.<sup>31</sup> The Muslims attempted to work with the Christian Filipinos, even going so far as to refer to themselves as “Filipino-Muslims” instead of “Moros.”<sup>32</sup> A series of moves by the nascent Philippine government in the 1940s and 1950s to assimilate the Muslim population instead further alienated the Muslim masses, in spite of complicit support of

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Frake, “Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities Among Philippine Muslims,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (March 1998): 43.

<sup>29</sup> Rizal Buendia, “The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines,” *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 149.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, “This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 78.

<sup>32</sup> Rizal Buendia, “The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines,” *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 149.

these policies by the Muslim elites working with the government in Manila.<sup>33</sup> From there, the government of the Philippines took direct action to assimilate the Muslims into the rest of the country, but did so without concern for their cultures, history, or way of life. Public education ignored their past and the rest of the population generally treated the Muslims as second class citizens.<sup>34</sup> Their experiences in the 1960s mirrored those of African Americans in the U.S. in many ways during that time. This culminated with the Jabidah Massacre, where Philippine military forces executed at least 28 Muslim recruits when they refused to participate in violence against Muslim Malays. The failure of the government to prosecute any of the known executioners or hold anyone accountable galvanized what had previously been loose pockets of opposition.<sup>35</sup> The Jabidah Massacre planted the seeds of insurrection that eventually led to the rise of the MNLF and more than four decades of separatist violence.

### C. INSURGENCY ORIGINS

Philippine government actions galvanized Muslim opposition. The 1968 Jabidah Massacre acted as a catalyst to foment formal opposition by the Muslims against the government, culminating in President Ferdinand Marcos' implementation of martial law in 1972.<sup>36</sup> As a result, disgruntled Muslims bonded together and formed the MNLF in 1972, determined to annex the southern Philippines and establish a separate Moro state.<sup>37</sup> Nur Misuari and Salamat Hashim rose to lead the MNLF.<sup>38</sup> In keeping with its separatist identity, the MNLF and its followers reverted to the old practice of referring to

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<sup>33</sup> Rizal Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines," *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 150.

<sup>34</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> "MILF Draft Deal Requires Cha-Cha—Gov't," *The Daily Tribune*, February 6, 2010, <http://www.tribune.net.ph/headlines/20100206hed3.html> (accessed February 9, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsited to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily*, February 5, 2002, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Rizal Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines," *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 151.

themselves as “Moros” and no longer “Filipino-Muslims.”<sup>39</sup> MNLF opposition produced conflict with the military and tragedy followed, with estimates of up to 80,000 killed, 1 million homeless and as many as 300,000 that sought refuge in neighboring Malaysia.<sup>40</sup> Following a number of violent revolts, the government and the MNLF reached a series of agreements through the years.

Having grown weary from the fighting, both sides desired peace, and peace talks began. In 1976, the Tripoli Agreement established an autonomous region in four provinces, satiating some of the opposition leaders’ desire for independence.<sup>41</sup> While the Tripoli Agreement marked an important milestone as the first real negotiations between the Philippine government and Muslim militants, at the same time it created divisions within the MNLF. Not all Muslims were satisfied. Salamat challenged Misuari for leadership of the MNLF as a result of his perceived caving in to the government, but failed.<sup>42</sup> Misuari had gained assurances from Marcos that the government would establish an autonomous region that Misuari would govern and personally benefit from.<sup>43</sup> Salamat led a breakaway group in 1977 that, in 1984, formally established itself as the MILF.<sup>44</sup> The MILF rejected the Tripoli Agreement, and later rejected its successor in 1996, which expanded the autonomous region, calling it the ARMM, but not enough to satisfy the MILF.<sup>45</sup> The MILF demanded local control of land and resources, and

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Frake, “Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities Among Philippine Muslims,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (March 1998): 47.

<sup>40</sup> Rizal Buendia, “The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines,” *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 152.

<sup>41</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, “This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 80.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Frake, “Abu Sayyaf: Displays of Violence and the Proliferation of Contested Identities Among Philippine Muslims,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 1 (March 1998): 47.

<sup>43</sup> Rizal Buendia, “The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines,” *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 154.

<sup>44</sup> “Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems,” *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily*, February 5, 2002, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

minimal national government intervention, as well as some form of reparations to account for past injustices.<sup>46</sup> In 1990, a smaller but arguably more violent separatist movement formed in the southern Philippines, the ASG.

The government of the Philippines did not consider the MILF a serious threat to the peace process until after the 1996 agreement, when violence spawned by the MILF continued. For many Muslims, ARMM has failed to produce the promised results; it has not provided the independence to govern as promised, continues to deny promised representation in the national government and has not yet addressed land ownership issues.<sup>47</sup> These facts empowered the MILF even more and the government entered into negotiations with them in 1997.<sup>48</sup> Between 1997 and 2001, the government, while negotiating, often sent military forces into Mindanao and MILF strongholds in an effort to contain them.<sup>49</sup> In 2001, the government expelled Misuari from his position as governor of the ARMM and charged him with sedition after he led a revolt against a military outpost.<sup>50</sup> No real movement on a renewed peace process was possible up to this point.

#### **D. ROOT CAUSES**

Subversive tactics on the part of the United States (and the Spanish before the war) eroded Muslim sovereignty to a point that, in 1946, when the Philippines did achieve independence, the United States denied Muslims autonomy, or even the opportunity to remain a protectorate of the U.S.<sup>51</sup> From there, the government of the Philippines took direct action to assimilate the Muslims into the rest of the country, but did so without concern for their cultures, history, or way of life. Public education ignored

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<sup>46</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 83.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Rizal Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines," *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 156.

<sup>51</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer–Fall 2007, 78.

their past and the rest of the population generally treated the Muslims as second class citizens.<sup>52</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, the government of the Philippines gave financial incentives to Christians to move to Mindanao in an effort to dilute the Muslim population there. In the short term, this would reduce the concentration of the Muslim population in the south and in the long term intermarriage could hopefully erode the hostilities between the two religious cultures. These newcomers possessed unprecedented wealth and control over the still predominantly Muslim population.

The root cause of the issue is land ownership. Christians own most of the land today even though Muslims lived on and worked the land for hundreds of years before Christians moved there in the early 20th century.<sup>53</sup> The transplanted Christian landowners vehemently resist efforts to grant land rights to the Muslims, and have significant clout in the national government preventing movement in this area.<sup>54</sup> While Muslim elites remained complicit and even supported these government actions, the relative deprivation on the part of the Muslim masses grew increasingly pronounced during this period. The government successfully bought off MNLF leadership beginning with the Tripoli agreement. At the same time, extreme poverty persisted in the ARMM, a result of neglect by both the government and the Muslim elites. As a result, government failed to maintain law and order in the ARMM, and instead local militias grew and controlled the region. When the government acted to combat insurgents, this fact made it exceedingly difficult since the military could not count on local police for support. These conditions in particular spawned the rise of Abubakr Janjalani, leader of the ASG. He grew up in a poor household and studied in a fundamentalist mosque, distinguishing him and the ASG from previous separatist groups. He successfully recruited hundreds of mostly poor Muslims into his organization in the early 1990s.

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<sup>52</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 80.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

## E. INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST TIES

Extremist groups outside the Philippines recognized the national government's lack of control over the southern Philippines and sought to exploit those conditions to further their own goals. Al Qaeda has been extensively linked to both ASG and the MILF.<sup>55</sup> The region's instability continues to plague the government, as it works with MILF to come to a peace agreement. In pursuit of that peace, the government decided not to take action against rogue elements of MILF that allowed JI to operate and train in Mindanao.<sup>56</sup> Given the fact that the MILF is a breakaway group itself, it comes as no surprise that fringe elements take actions such as this. To its credit, MILF leadership has demonstrated to the government that these elements do not represent the group as a whole, and they have made a concerted effort to stamp out this opposition.

History has shown that terrorist activity, which has taken place in the Philippines, has jeopardized its security and spilled over from being an internal problem to being an international problem. A very prominent example of this sort of activity is the so-called "Bojinka plot." In 1995, Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, with financial assistance from al Qaeda, planned an attack against a dozen U.S. commercial aircraft departing from Manila.<sup>57</sup> They successfully conducted a dry run and a test run in a single aircraft, all planned from an apartment in Manila.<sup>58</sup> Only in a chance encounter did Philippine police come across the apartment filled with explosives to be used on multiple commercial aircraft. They also planned to assassinate Pope John Paul II and to crash an airliner into CIA headquarters in the United States. Yousef successfully evaded authorities for years before they finally caught him in 2002. This act directly served as a catalyst for the current U.S. presence in the southern Philippines that came about in early 2002 after the United States declared Southeast Asia the "second front" in their global war on terrorism.

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<sup>55</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the 'War on Terror' in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Autumn 2007): 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, 146–7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

However, links between the organizations continue to perpetuate. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Philippine military uncovered evidence of material support provided by JI and al Qaeda to the MILF and the ASG. The military also has reason to believe JI and al Qaeda received training on terrorist operations in the numerous training camps run by the MILF throughout the southern Philippines. For example, in November 2009, Mohd Azmi Ali was arrested in Singapore for allegedly swearing allegiance to the MILF in 1997 after joining JI in 1989. While training at a MILF camp in Mindanao he also allegedly provided funds to the MILF.<sup>59</sup> In spite of these associations, the United States, at the request of the Philippine government, has declined to list MILF as a terrorist organization. However, this could be a strategy on the part of the MILF to avoid the repercussions of global counterterrorism efforts.<sup>60</sup> The Philippine government has worked extensively with the U.S., and international organizations, to help broker a peace agreement.

## **F. TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS**

Islamic militant groups in the southern Philippines have been a problem for decades. Today, there are three main groups that share similar grievances, pursue their aims through violent attacks on the Philippine government, and pose a threat to the global community due to the fact that they have opened the door for larger, more dangerous international terrorist organizations to operate out of the Philippines.

### **1. Abu Sayyaf Group**

The ASG, the smallest of the major Muslim militant groups in the Philippines, has the weakest ties to JI. The ASG poses little threat and is considered to be a minor player in the problem of terrorism in the southern Philippines. While the Philippines made great strides in putting down a well-known terrorist group in ASG, it is much smaller, more isolated, and does not have the international ties MILF has. However, the Philippine

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<sup>59</sup> “MILF Draft Deal Requires Cha-Cha—Gov’t,” *The Daily Tribune*, February 6, 2010, <http://www.tribune.net.ph/headlines/20100206hed3.html> (accessed February 9, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, “Terrorism in Southeast Asia; Threat and Response,” Hudson Institute, 9, [http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2010).



military believes ties between ASG and MILF endure as a result of inter-tribal bonds that demand they assist one another when necessary.<sup>61</sup> For example, the two organizations cooperated in the execution of a series of bombings in Davao between March and April 2003, as well as an ambush of Philippine Marines in July 2007 on the island of Basilan.<sup>62</sup> While the MILF officially condemned this particular act of violence, individual members sympathetic with both groups have a demonstrated track record of waging violence in the name of both.

Originally founded in 1991, the ASG has taken arguably the most extreme separatist view regarding the future of Mindanao. In addition to an independent Islamic state, the ASG also fights to wipe out all Christian influence there.<sup>63</sup> They would like to undo the government policies of the 1950s, which inundated the Muslim population with Christians from the north. Their leader, Abdurajak Janjalani, had also indicated the group's intent to forcibly spread Islam outside of Mindanao.<sup>64</sup> While their goals and ideals tend to line up with the Quran, the methods the ASG employ to achieve them contradict with the teachings of the book, which alienates the organization from mainstream Muslims in the southern Philippines.<sup>65</sup> While the Moros seek to improve their standard of living, they generally do not subscribe to the ASG strategy.

In the 1990s, the ASG's violent tactics and outspoken agenda drew international attention, from governments and international terrorist organizations alike. The previously mentioned Bojinka plot marked the apex of ASG's power. Following that, international government crackdowns quickly eliminated critical ASG leaders and no one since then has successfully rejuvenated the ASG.<sup>66</sup> The Philippine military located and killed Janjalani following that, however. His brother filled the leadership vacuum in

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 45–6.

<sup>62</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 6-7.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 49.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>65</sup> Rizal Buendia, "The Mindanao Conflict in the Philippines," *The Politics of Death: Political Violence in Southeast Asia* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006): 165.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 50.

2000 and altered the course of ASG, focusing on fundraising via kidnappings.<sup>67</sup> The group devolved quickly from planning complex international terrorist attacks to carrying out low-level, even if sometimes high profile, kidnapping for ransom acts for fundraising. However, this strategy produced unchecked results up until 9/11, building the strength of the ASG in terms of manpower and equipment.

The Philippine government has struggled to eradicate ASG. In 2001, the Philippine military allowed the ASG rebels they had surrounded to escape, probably as a result of a payoff from the ASG as a percentage of the ransom money they had received from someone they had kidnapped.<sup>68</sup> ASG uses the profits from kidnappings to bribe corrupt military members and government officials. While the ASG remains weakened, it has carried out a series of bombings throughout the Mindanao region, especially between 2004 and 2007.<sup>69</sup> The ASG publicly considers these bombings successes attributed to the leadership of Janjalani's brother.<sup>70</sup> These bombings, however, failed to have the international implications of the Bojinka plot and no evidence indicates the group has the means to carry out a similar attack in the future. In addition to bombings and kidnappings, ASG also continues to engage in extortion and murder, primarily for fundraising purposes.<sup>71</sup> It appears today that the group acts more as an organized crime outfit than a fundamentalist group with a divine mission.

Today, the government's efforts have produced measurable results. The ASG, once boasting membership up to 1500, currently has an estimated strength of 400, with only around 100 of those willing to carry out newsworthy violent attacks.<sup>72</sup> These numbers remain fluid, often depending on the level of pressure placed on it by the Philippine military. In addition, conflicting government policies with the ASG and the

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<sup>67</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> Gershman, John. "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?" *Foreign Affairs*. July–August 1992.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 51–2.

<sup>70</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 4.

<sup>71</sup> "Review of the listing of six terrorist organizations," Parliament of Australia, 34, [http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist\\_listingsa/chapter3.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist_listingsa/chapter3.htm).

<sup>72</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 53.

MILF continue to wreak havoc on efforts to negotiate with the latter organization. Some members continue to traverse both organizations, wearing the hat of the ASG one day and that of the MILF the next, resulting in confusion for Philippine military forces directed to eradicate ASG members while avoiding confrontation with MILF members.<sup>73</sup> In one clash between the Philippine military and ASG members in 2009 the military later learned they had killed 10 MILF members.<sup>74</sup> Events such as this demonstrate the blurred lines between different Muslim separatist organizations in the southern Philippines. However, the extreme poverty and neglect of the ARMM by the Philippine government primes ASG to possibly regroup once the military pressure subsides.<sup>75</sup> The government today employs almost exclusively a military strategy to diminish the ASG, a method which has produced success in the short term, but with an uncertain future.

## **2. Moro-Islamic Liberation Front**

The MILF has fought for approximately 25 years to make the Mindanao region autonomous. They demand local control of land and resources, and minimal national government intervention.<sup>76</sup> They also advocate some form of reparations to account for past injustices.<sup>77</sup> The Philippine government has provided autonomy to some areas of Mindanao and continues to work with the MILF and other groups to reach an agreement on autonomy and ultimately end repeated periods of violence. By 2008, government negotiators, acting without real authority, promised the MILF everything they had demanded, raising hopes and expectations that, when put to the judicial test, would be dashed.<sup>78</sup> In 2008, the Supreme Court abruptly rejected the agreement.<sup>79</sup> Immediately

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<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Adams, "Philippines: Are Two Militant Groups Joining Forces?," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 17, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Review of the listing of six terrorist organizations," Parliament of Australia, 37, [http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist\\_listingsa/chapter3.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist_listingsa/chapter3.htm).

<sup>76</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 2007): 83.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> "The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Briefing No. 83, October 23, 2008, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Ali Macabalang, "Government Negotiator's Pessimism on Peace Agreement Rebuffed," *Manila Bulletin*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/238933/gov-t-negotiator-s-pessimism-peace-agreement-rebuffed> (accessed January 17, 2010).

following the ruling, both sides acknowledged failure of the agreement and went back to resolution via violence.<sup>80</sup> This had far-reaching implications, displacing nearly 400,000 Mindanao residents.<sup>81</sup> The court ruling only reinforced MILF's long-held position that the government needs to take more extreme legislative action to reduce its role in the southern Philippines.<sup>82</sup> The violence has once again ended as the parties reinitiated peace talks with Malay arbitration.

Today, the MILF continues to aggressively pursue peace negotiations. MILF spokesman Muhammed Ameen noted the importance of regional acceptance by its membership across Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago.<sup>83</sup> Local leaders in Mindanao have attempted to force disclosure and meet with government representatives but their efforts have largely been rebuffed.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, some local leaders have complained that their constituents have no desire to be part of an autonomous region, Zamboanga City in particular.<sup>85</sup> Not all government officials, however, trust the MILF.

Negotiations between the MILF and the Philippine government continue to progress. The MILF proposed to install a parliamentary system of government for Mindanao, but the government denied it, citing Constitutional violations with two separate systems of government in the country.<sup>86</sup> The MILF also proposed increasing

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<sup>80</sup> Catharin Dalpino. "Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2009): 9.

<sup>81</sup> "The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Briefing No. 83, October 23, 2008, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer–Fall 2007): 84.

<sup>83</sup> Edd K. Usman, "MILF Submits Draft Compact to Peace Process Facilitator," *Manila Bulletin*, January 23, 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/239940/milf-submits-draft-compact-peace-process-facilitator> (accessed January 25, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Ryan Rosauero, "Mindanao Peace Talks at Critical Stage," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 16, 2010, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20100216-253574/Mindanao-peace-talks-at-critical-stage> (accessed February 16, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> "Government Panel Rejects Muslim Parliament," *Manila Standard Today*, February 1, 2010, <http://www.manilastandardtoday.com/insideNews.htm?f=2010/february/1/news5.isx&d=2010/february/1> (accessed February 2, 2010).

the regional share of revenues to 75/25 in favor of the regional government.<sup>87</sup> The largest point of contention from the MILF's perspective remains the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MoA-AD) declared unconstitutional last summer.<sup>88</sup> The government has demonstrated a willingness to compromise as well. The MILF cited a key element the government included in the peace proposal, enhanced autonomy that would allow the two sides to share government responsibilities, including collecting taxes and exploiting natural resources located in Mindanao.<sup>89</sup> Although, the government noted that to enact all proposals put forth by the MILF would require a Constitutional amendment.<sup>90</sup> Having said that, the government did not rule the possibility out and indicated they first want a clearer understanding of the MILF's ultimate goals.<sup>91</sup> In December 2009, both sides agreed on seven basic tenets that would underscore both proposals, including citizenship, government structure, property rights and other items considered fundamental to any MILF agreement.<sup>92</sup> Any changes to the Constitution will likely take a significant amount of time and require buy in by the legislature. The new administration under President Benigno "Noy" Aquino has publicly indicated a desire to continue the peace process with the MILF, but has yet to engage in discussion of resolution of any of the areas of disagreement.

### **3. Other Islamic Extremists**

The Ramzi Yousef showcased to the global community that the Philippines has a problem with international terrorist organizations. Since then, however, other evidence has emerged. In particular, links between al Qaeda and a major separatist movement in

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<sup>87</sup> "Terrorist Groups' Member Detained," *Asia One News*, January 14, 2010, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20100114-191716.html> (accessed January 17, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> "Terrorist Groups' Member Detained," *Asia One News*, January 14, 2010, <http://www.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20100114-191716.html> (accessed January 17, 2010).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Patricio Diaz, "Peace Pact Still Possible?" *Minda News*, February 16, 2010, [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=7633&Itemid=92](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7633&Itemid=92) (accessed February 16, 2010).

the southern Philippines, the MILF, as well as between MILF and the largest terrorist network in Southeast Asia, JI, have also been discovered since 9/11.

Al Qaeda and JI for years have coordinated activity with the ASG and the MILF. In the 1990s, al Qaeda trained as many of 120,000 Muslims in camps to wage jihad across the globe, including in the Philippines.<sup>93</sup> Since then, al Qaeda has evolved its method of operating from a centralized system designed to effect large, high-impact attacks to a decentralized system of more than twenty dispersed groups responsible for carrying out smaller, more easily executed local attacks.<sup>94</sup> Efforts on the part of governments internationally since 9/11 have significantly weakened al Qaeda. As a result, it is now attempting to regroup in regions of instability where it can recruit and train. JI is representative of the altered strategy by al Qaeda, which provides critical funding and training to support attacks carried out by JI against Western targets.<sup>95</sup>

The 9/11 Commission Report cites numerous historical examples of how the southern Philippines has been a hotbed of terrorist activity, linking attacks planned both regionally and in some instances, those that directly target the United States<sup>96</sup>. Al Qaeda rekindled its ties with the ASG and MILF after 9/11 as part of its strategy to operate out of Southeast Asia to carry out further attacks against the United States.<sup>97</sup> In 2002, Philippine military forces repeatedly uncovered Al Qaeda cells operating training camps in Mindanao.<sup>98</sup> The MILF continues to operate a 5000 acre training camp in Mindanao that President Estrada tried and failed to overrun.<sup>99</sup> Varying accounts of cooperation between Al Qaeda and MILF persist. For example, in 2003 the Philippine government

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<sup>93</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia; Threat and Response," Hudson Institute, 1, [http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, 58-9, 147, 366.

<sup>97</sup> Larry A. Niksch, "Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 5.

<sup>98</sup> James J. F. Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes, Vol 2*, (Greenwood Publishing Group), 2006.

<sup>99</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

successfully prevented execution of a coordinated attack targeting the U.S. Embassy in Manila and a number of other Western targets in the capital city when they arrested MILF leader Muklis Yunos, funded and supported by al Qaeda and JI.<sup>100</sup>

Additionally, Philippine military forces arrested JI members operating training camps in Mindanao in 2003 and 2004.<sup>101</sup> The JI/MILF connection endures and has increased.<sup>102</sup> The rogue elements continue to cooperate with international terrorist organizations in spite of pleas by the MILF leadership to cease and desist. It makes sense that international terrorist organizations look to the southern Philippines, given the professionally organized training program operated by the MILF throughout the region that loosely parallels what one would expect to find in any state run military.<sup>103</sup> Based on this information, it is apparent that international terrorism has had a foothold in Mindanao, at least since the 1960s.

JI represents possibly the greatest terrorist threat in Southeast Asia. Originally formed in 1993, JI embraces a 1940s ideology to turn Indonesia into an Islamic state and borrowed organizational strategy from an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>104</sup> This ideology ultimately envisions a regional Islamic state integrating Indonesia, Malaysia, parts of Thailand, and the southern Philippines.<sup>105</sup> This helps explain the close ties between JI, ASG and MILF. At its peak just prior to 9/11, JI had an estimated 7,000 members, 2,000 of which were active participants in terrorist activity. Since 9/11, however, antiterrorism efforts on the part of the Indonesian government have resulted in the arrest or death of approximately 300 of its members.<sup>106</sup> Unfortunately, it

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<sup>100</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Threat and Response," Hudson Institute, 5, [http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2010).

<sup>101</sup> James J. F. Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes, Vol 2*, (Greenwood Publishing Group: 2006), 191.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Lunn and Larry A. Niksch, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 15, 2009, 9.

<sup>103</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

<sup>104</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 87.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 89–90.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

took the bombings in Bali in October 2002, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 200 people, for the Indonesian government to even recognize that JI existed.<sup>107</sup> Analysis of JI's mode of operations reveals that it prefers bombings like Bali as its main mechanism of waging jihad.<sup>108</sup> JI remains a formidable regional presence in both Indonesia and the Philippines.

Islamic militancy continued to fester in Mindanao in the 1990s and after 9/11, growing in size and aggressiveness. JI elements are especially concerning given their direct ties to al-Qaeda, which considers them and the MILF to be its "operational wing in Southeast Asia".<sup>109</sup> JI regards the southern Philippines as a "safe haven" to train and operate from.<sup>110</sup> Four of its key leaders reportedly remained in the southern Philippines in 2008, planning and coordinating future attacks with ASG and MILF elements.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, Philippine military forces uncovered Al Qaeda cells operating training camps in Mindanao repeatedly in 2002.<sup>112</sup> As recently as 2007, the Philippine government has linked al Qaeda to a series of coordinated bombings carried out by ASG in General Santos City, Kidapawan and Cotabato.<sup>113</sup> The larger problem the Philippine government faces today is that MILF faces a similar dilemma its predecessor, the MNLF, faced in 1984; various factions of the organization have begun breaking away and acting out on their own.

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<sup>107</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Threat and Response," Hudson Institute, 6, [http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/terrorismPDF.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2010).

<sup>108</sup> "Review of the listing of six terrorist organizations," Parliament of Australia, 30, [http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist\\_listingsa/chapter3.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/pjcaad/terrorist_listingsa/chapter3.htm).

<sup>109</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, 92.

<sup>110</sup> Preeti Bhattacharji, "Terrorism Havens: Philippines," *Council on Foreign Relations Online*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9365/>; Andrew Feickert, "U.S. Military Operations in the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan, Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 20, 2006, 19; Francis T. Miko, "Removing Terrorist Sanctuaries: The 9/11 Commission Recommendations and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress*, February 11, 2005, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," 95–6.

<sup>112</sup> James J. F. Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes*, Vol 2, (Greenwood Publishing Group: 2006), 190.

<sup>113</sup> Oliver Teves, "Philippines Attack: Bombings Kill Seven, Injure 40; Al Qaeda Link to Blasts," *The Advertiser*, January 12, 2007.



## **G. CONCLUSION**

For centuries Muslims in the southern Philippines thrived in relative independence, largely free from colonial influence. They farmed their lands, participated in the local political process, and preserved their culture. It is no wonder then that the paradigm shift marked by the onset of a new colonial power that sought to assimilate them into a foreign culture deemed superior to their own that they fought against it. The native people of the southern Philippines voiced their preferences consistently in the early 20th century. In spite of the U.S. colonial power opting for assimilation instead of separation, the Muslims continued efforts to build bridges. In return, Muslims asked to maintain the standard of living they had grown so familiar with over the course of more than 300 years, land to farm, participation in the local political process and cultural preservation. The relationship between Muslims and their colonizer remained precariously peaceful in the early 20th century.

However, following the conclusion of World War II, conditions for Philippine Muslims changed. At a time when conventional wisdom concluded they would enjoy unprecedented freedoms and opportunities, the new Catholic-dominated government in Manila had other ideas. In efforts to unite the country, the nascent Philippine government had two paths it could go down. First, it could allow the Muslims access to the national political body, providing them a forum in which they could voice grievances and a process through which the national government could address them. Second, it could adopt a Catholic-centric unitary government seeking to assimilate the many cultures of the 7,000 plus islands into a single culture. The government chose the latter path, attempting to convert a society that had no desire to convert and, when that failed, to marginalize the society through the systematic dilution of the representative population. In the span of a couple of decades, the southern Philippines went from a 90 percent Muslim population to a 20 percent Muslim population following government incentives provided to Catholics. The government gave Catholics land the Muslims believed belonged to them and access to resources unavailable to Muslims, enabling the new migrants to the south opportunities for unprecedented wealth at the expense of the native population.

For decades Muslims endured these injustices, occasionally protesting and rebelling but, divided amongst themselves, not realizing any material gains with these actions. However, the Jabidah massacre in 1968 marked a turning point for Muslims, uniting them against a common enemy, the national government. While the event that sparked revolt occurred more than four decades ago, Muslims remain united in efforts to separate from the country. Considering the fact that Muslims tried all other alternatives to assimilate politically while preserving religious and cultural identity, it is not surprising that they believe separation is the only option left available to them. While it may not be too late for the national government to convince Muslims the political climate has changed, such that they can successfully participate in the political process and voice their grievances, this will take significant persuasion, and action, on the part of the national government. The bridges Muslims tried to build starting a century ago have long been taken out. It is up to the national government to try and rebuild them.

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### **III. U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES DEFINED**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Prior to 9/11, the U.S. generally treated terrorism as a criminal act to be punished within the U.S. legal system. The United States' response to terrorist attacks previously against the World Trade Center, the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City and the attack of the USS Cole off the coast of Yemen typified how America dealt with terrorist attacks in the 1990s. In each case, the United States engaged local law enforcement and the FBI, conducted trials and worked with other countries to identify and capture the criminals involved in the attacks.

At the same time, the United States engaged in a gradual dismantling of its military and defense forces. The lack of a superpower threat resulted in the closure of dozens of bases at home and abroad, and the reduction in the size of the U.S. military force. In the early 1990s, the United States closed its naval base in Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base, withdrawing thousands of U.S. military forces stationed in the Philippines since the conclusion of World War II. The end of the Cold War reduced the need for continued military buildup in Southeast Asia, resulting in elimination of the "American-led security network in Asia."<sup>114</sup> While the United States continued to engage in military and diplomatic activities with the Philippines, these focused primarily on countering the influence of China in the region, not counterterrorism.

However, following the 9/11 attacks the United States adopted an aggressive approach to combating terrorism and defeating al Qaeda as part of a new overall U.S. counterterrorism strategy. Since al Qaeda was globally dispersed, the United States could not focus on it in the same manner as it would a conventional military force. Instead, America chose to focus on known areas where al Qaeda and its affiliates were concentrated. The United States transitioned from treating terrorist attacks as criminal acts to considering them as acts of war.

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<sup>114</sup> John Baylis, et al., *The Globalization of World Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., (Oxford University Press: 2008).

After 9/11, the United States first implemented this new strategy with evolved U.S. military policies, which commenced operations in Afghanistan and later Iraq. It then froze financial assets of known or suspected terrorists and supporters. The United States then engaged in training programs in the Philippines, and implemented many other strategies designed to prevent terrorist attacks from taking place on the U.S. homeland. In other words, U.S. military strategy evolved from a reactive approach to a proactive approach. The 9/11 Commission Report, released in 2003, postulated that Southeast Asia would be the “second front” in the war on terrorism. The United States believed pursuing radical Islam in Southeast Asia would put it a step ahead of the terrorists, given the fact that Indonesia contains the largest Muslim population in the world and Islam remains active throughout the region, largely in some of the poorest parts of the region.

U.S. nonmilitary policies involved both the use of internal organizations such as USAID, as well as cooperation with international organizations. The U.S. signed an agreement with the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for regional cooperation in a 2002 ASEAN-U.S. Joint Declaration to Combat Terrorism, formalizing military relationships with all countries in the region.<sup>115</sup> President Bush altered the strategy in Southeast Asia from trying to check a rising China to focusing on counterterrorism efforts, especially in the Philippines. Shortly after 9/11, the U.S. and Philippine governments increased cooperation efforts with one another, primarily aimed at targeting the ASG, thought to have the closest ties to al Qaeda and JI. The United States sought and received support from the Philippines for its position to offensively go after al Qaeda affiliates there. It is apparent that both states have gone to great lengths to address terrorism in the Philippines.

## **B. CT POLICIES FOR THE PHILIPPINES**

As a result of terrorist activity in the Philippines directly affecting U.S. homeland security, the United States has implemented a two-step approach to combat terrorism there. First, the United States significantly increased cooperation efforts with the

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<sup>115</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, “The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the ‘War on Terror’ in Southeast Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 85.

Philippine military. The American military worked with the Philippine military, training Filipino soldiers to maintain law and order. The military component wields the stick part of a typical “carrot and stick” strategy in terms of waging violence against insurgents, but it also utilizes U.S. military forces to improve domestic law and order capabilities. Second, U.S. counterterrorism assistance to the Philippines involves nonmilitary components. The United States intends the nonmilitary components to address the underlying causes of grievances by Philippine Muslims. They are largely humanitarian approaches designed to fight poverty and increase educational opportunities for the Muslim population.

In May 2010, President Obama’s administration released a new National Security Strategy that outlined his intent for the country’s long-term objectives. The new strategy reinforces the United States’ commitment to Southeast Asia and the Philippines, but alters some elements and includes additional ones not mentioned in the 2006 National Security Strategy. The following statement best highlights the old and new regarding America’s commitment to Southeast Asia, “We are working together with our allies to develop a positive security agenda for the region, focused on regional security, combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, climate change, international piracy, epidemics, and cybersecurity, while achieving balanced growth and human rights.”<sup>116</sup> The 2010 strategy includes human rights and climate change while deemphasizing the importance of spreading democracy, as the 2006 strategy did, stating its intentions as follows, “Forging new international initiatives and institutions can assist in the spread of freedom, prosperity, and regional security.”<sup>117</sup> President Obama’s administration has tailored its policies and expenditures to meet the intent of the new strategy, as will be discussed shortly.

In addition to actions on the part of the United States, other countries with vested interests in peace for the Philippines engaged to stabilize the south. As one of the Philippines’ largest trading partners, Japan has a vested interest in engaging with a

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<sup>116</sup> President Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 42.

<sup>117</sup> President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 4, 2006, 40.

stabilized country, and it has invested enormous amounts of money to aid the Philippines. Japan's Support Package for Peace and Stability in Mindanao earmarked more than \$400 million between 2005 and 2010 to develop the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).<sup>118</sup> That money has benefitted more than 200,000 residents of the ARMM, built four elementary schools and twelve medical clinics, as well as funded a number of other initiatives designed to improve conditions in the ARMM.<sup>119</sup> In total, Japan has sent almost \$3 billion in aid to Mindanao in efforts to combat poverty and stabilize the island.<sup>120</sup> As an incentive for the peace talks between the Philippine government and the MILF, Japan has more recently provided close to 400 million Philippine pesos (~\$8 million) to construct a training center and establish a high school computer literacy program.<sup>121</sup> Given Japan's limited military capacity, it makes sense that the aid it has provided has been humanitarian in scope.

Additionally, Australia has provided large amounts of money to combat poverty and stabilize the southern Philippines. It has attempted to tie humanitarian aid to outcomes and peaceful resolution as an incentive to both sides in the separatist dispute. Following the 1996 peace agreements with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Australia provided approximately \$1.5 million to rebuild areas affected by the conflict.<sup>122</sup> They have been the largest donor to United Nations programs benefitting the Philippines, providing 1.3 billion pesos (~\$30 million) there, as well as more than 4 billion pesos (~\$80 million) between 2008 and 2009 to help educate and stabilize the ARMM.<sup>123</sup> Part of this also included \$161,000 to construct a counterterrorism center for local police

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<sup>118</sup> "Japan Supports Mindanao's Human Resource Dev't Efforts," *Business World*, (December 30, 2004): 20.

<sup>119</sup> "Japan Ambassador Okays Aid to RP," *Business World*, (March 12, 2003): 24.

<sup>120</sup> "Japan Supports Mindanao's Human Resource Dev't Efforts," *Business World*, (December 30, 2004): 20.

<sup>121</sup> "Japan Bares Aid," *Business World*, (June 18, 2009): S1/11.

<sup>122</sup> Helengrace C. Garcia, "Aussie Aid Agency Vows Additional Support to Mindanao After Peace Pact," *Business World*, (December 21, 2007): S1/6.

<sup>123</sup> "Australia to Send Aid for Families in Philippines South," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political*, September 18, 2008.

officials.<sup>124</sup> In fact, the Philippines have relied on a number of its regional neighbors to support it as it struggles to restore peace to the south. For years now, Malaysia has acted as the main mediator facilitating the peace talks between the MILF and the government.

It is important to note other international efforts to combat terrorism in the Philippines. The United States has close allies pursuing the same ends it pursues, though they have approached it with a very different strategy. Comparing and contrasting the different strategies presents an opportunity to develop a comprehensive, multi-national strategy to the benefit of all concerned. While it would appear on the surface that the aid provided by Australia, Japan, and the United States (which will be detailed next) complement each other, in reality the countries have not worked together on these projects. Each country has different incentives motivating them, and use different approaches to achieve their ends.

### **1. Military Strategy**

The U.S. military plays a supporting role to the Philippine military in Mindanao and the rest of the south under the JSOTF-P. As a result of strict rules of engagement, U.S. forces cannot engage in offensive combat actions in the country. Instead, their role, according to Garry Reid, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Combating Terrorism, is as follows, “The mission of JSOTF-P is to support the ... Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in their fight against terrorism in the southern Philippines.”<sup>125</sup> In this supporting role, the JSOTF-P provides advice and resources to the AFP. The Philippines adopted the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) in 2002. The plan incorporates diplomatic, informational, psychological and security operations with the goal of eliminating insurgencies by both Muslim separatists and communists. The NISP seeks to achieve this objective in a series of steps, aided by the United States and others. These steps are: (1) defeat armed insurgent organizations, (2) dismantle their infrastructures, (3) defend and protect the local population, (4) establish government

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<sup>124</sup> “Australian-Funded Police Intelligence Centre to Open in South Philippines” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political*, January 25, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Garry Reid, “Statement for the Record,” *Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities*, March 10, 2010, 7.



control in insurgent controlled areas, (5) address the root causes of insurgency, (6) marginalize insurgents and isolate them from the population, and (7) persuade the population to ally with the government.<sup>126</sup> The objectives in the NISP closely resemble U.S. nation building strategy. The United States has implemented this strategy with varying levels of success in the past fifty years. When the United States has fully embraced the nation building strategy in a truly integrated fashion, it has found success. As an example, the surge in Iraq in 2007 reversed the insurgent trend when the United States embedded military training teams in districts and villages, demonstrating to the local population their intentions to remain long-term, secure the population and drive and keep out insurgents. After a few months, this strategy eventually turned many insurgents to the side of the coalition and populations ultimately rebelled against the insurgents. However, when the strategy has fractured or become compartmentalized, it generally has failed. For example, in Iraq shortly after Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) the United States attempted to rebuild infrastructure, only to find insurgents sabotaging equipment and construction projects. The insurgents would then melt back into society.

In 2002, President Bush ordered U.S. military forces into the Philippines in an effort to combat terrorism offshore. Standing up JSOTF-P, the United States deployed 150 Special Forces to accompany Filipino military patrols in the southern Philippines, as well as 500 conventional forces to support the operations.<sup>127</sup> Soon after, the United States increased this footprint to more than 2,000.<sup>128</sup> U.S. military forces supported a 4,000 strong contingent of Filipino soldiers sent to counter the insurgents.<sup>129</sup> The AFP would eventually expand their force to 7,000. JSOTF-P has trained Filipino military forces in activities, such as “operations intelligence fusion, unit interoperability, logistics,

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<sup>126</sup> Major Ricky P. Bunayog, “The Raid of a CAA Detachment: Lessons Learned, Foresight, and Call to Action,” *Army Journal*, January–March 2007, 7.

<sup>127</sup> “Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems,” *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

<sup>128</sup> Renato Cruz de Castro, “The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge Against an Emerging China Challenge,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 31 no. 3 (2009): 406.

<sup>129</sup> Steven Rogers, “Beyond the Abu Sayyaf,” *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2004.

and aspects of engineering, equipment, and maintenance.”<sup>130</sup> The Philippine military took this training and applied it offensively against the ASG. By 2006, the military issued ultimatums to ASG members to put down arms or face military action. The “Oplan Ultimatum” identified 500 ASG members and by March 2007 resulted in the death of 79 and capture of 28.<sup>131</sup> This marked the first long-term U.S. military presence in the Philippines, since withdrawal of forces in the early 1990s, and since the passage of a Philippine Constitutional mandate outlawing a permanent foreign military presence in the country. While there are no signs of the United States removing its military forces from the Philippines any time soon, their role as a supporting, noncombat force to the AFP makes their presence more palatable to Filipinos wary of a repeat of decades of imperialism.

In addition to reestablishing a military footprint in the Philippines, the United States provided materiel support to the Philippine military. U.S. military forces deployed to the Philippines with logistics support, intended for Philippine military forces to increase their effectiveness.<sup>132</sup> For example, the Philippines accepted 16 UH-1 Huey military aircraft to expand their operational capabilities through U.S. military assistance programs.<sup>133</sup> These initiatives marked the beginning of an effort by the United States to modernize the Philippine military, intended to expand its capacity to oppose the insurgency on its own.

As the United States gradually improved the equipment used by the Philippine military, it also slowly spread the scope of the U.S. military mission there. In 2004, the United States expanded military operations and trained Filipino troops to fight against terrorist elements in the south.<sup>134</sup> The United States also received strategic port rights

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<sup>130</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, 136.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>132</sup> “Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsuitable to Major High-Tech Systems,” *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

<sup>133</sup> Renato Cruz de Castro, “The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge Against an Emerging China Challenge,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 31 no. 3 (2009): 408.

<sup>134</sup> Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia; Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* (Winter 2008).

from the Philippines around the same time.<sup>135</sup> When the United States restored the ties broken with the Philippines in the early 1990s, it made it easier for the U.S. military to operate unimpeded, as well as to channel support and funding to the Philippine military. The Philippine military increased its forces in the southern Philippines to 7,000 in 2005 and worked with U.S. support to carry out continued offensives against the ASG.<sup>136</sup> JSOTF-P continued to provide training, logistics support, and aerial intelligence reconnaissance in efforts to support Philippine led offensives designed to locate, identify and weaken the ASG.<sup>137</sup> Years of military action and hundreds of millions of dollars have had the desired effect of weakening the ASG.

In addition to the military expenditures the United States provided in the Philippines, it injected direct military aid funds. The Philippines received the largest amount of U.S. military assistance in the region, which grew from \$30 million to \$55 million between 2005 and 2006, nearly doubling the amount of money, in terms of military aid, the United States provided to the Philippines in a one-year time span.<sup>138</sup> Initiatives such as the Philippine Defense Reform Program and the Capability Upgrade Program provided additional training and equipment to the Philippine military. For example, under these programs in 2006, the U.S. Navy agreed to provide \$49 million to help fund the Philippines Coast Watch South project, including acquisition of Cyclone class patrol boats the Philippine military would use to secure the waters of the southern Philippines.<sup>139</sup> The U.S. military footprint in the southern Philippines has continued up to the present day.

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<sup>135</sup> Robert S. Ross and Aaron L. Friedberg, “Here Be Dragons” *National Interest*, September–October 2009.

<sup>136</sup> Larry A. Niksch, “Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,” *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 12.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Catharin Dalpino, “Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009, 10.

<sup>139</sup> Renato Cruz de Castro, “The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge Against an Emerging China Challenge,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 31 no. 3 (2009): 416.

By 2007, the U.S. military had cemented relations with the Philippine military as well as the local population in the south. Programs like those already mentioned acted as a springboard from which the U.S. military launched humanitarian endeavors in Mindanao.<sup>140</sup> The annual Balikatan exercise incorporated humanitarian efforts alongside the offensive military operations, gradually warming locals to the long-term presence of the U.S. military.<sup>141</sup> The JSOTF-P also engaged directly in humanitarian projects. They built roads, piers, schools, and markets while also providing medical assistance.<sup>142</sup> The Philippine government believed the combination of the strong arm of the military to suppress opposition and the humanitarian arm to aid locals would eventually win over the population and erode support for the Islamic extremist factions.

By 2009, the U.S. military footprint in the Philippines had expanded considerably. Headquartered in Zamboanga, JSOTF-P has forward operating bases throughout Mindanao, Sulu and Jolo.<sup>143</sup> Although the total U.S. military force has reduced in size, 600 military personnel still remain in the region.<sup>144</sup> In spite of the increased attention the United States has given the Philippines, it has come with a number of strings attached. Nearly ten years in, JSOTF-P acknowledges it has had challenges and shortcomings. U.S. Army Colonel William Coultroup, JSOTF-P Commander until July 2010, highlights his concerns with the ASG, stating that, “even though they’ve been reduced, until you can neutralize them and prevent these safe havens, the concern is that they will regenerate later on.”<sup>145</sup> Additionally, in spite of the many humanitarian projects, targeted to areas infested with insurgents in efforts to win over the local population, recruiting efforts by

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<sup>140</sup> Eric C. Ramos, “RP-US Balikatan Exercises: A Peace-Building Tool for Mindanao?,” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, (2005).

<sup>141</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, “The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the ‘War on Terror’ in Southeast Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Autumn 2007): 88.

<sup>142</sup> Larry A. Niksch, “Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,” *CRS Report for Congress*, July 26, 2007, 14.

<sup>143</sup> Renato Cruz de Castro, “The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge Against an Emerging China Challenge,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 31 no. 3 (2009): 415.

<sup>144</sup> Fred W. Baker, “Gates Visits Philippines to reaffirm US Commitment,” *Armed Forces Press Service*, June 1, 2009.

<sup>145</sup> Simon Montlake, “US Faces Slog Against Philippine Militants, Even with Winning Strategy,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 19, 2010.

the insurgents remain successful.<sup>146</sup> The U.S. military has taken similar approaches in nation-building strategies in other parts of the world successfully, suggesting that perhaps some elements of nation-building may be missing or incomplete with the JSOTF-P strategy. It also raises questions as to the effectiveness of the strategy outlined in the NISP, in particular whether or not the AFP, with U.S. support, has successfully marginalized and isolated insurgents from the local population, in light of Col Coultroupe's comments.

## **2. Nonmilitary Strategy**

While the United States tends to deploy military forces as a tool of first resort, it has also relied on the State Department and USAID, especially in support of humanitarian aid for the Philippines. However, State Department resources pale in comparison to the Department of Defense (DoD). In terms of personnel alone, the DoD currently employs 1.7 million men and women in the armed forces, while USAID only employs 2,000.<sup>147</sup> While the departments each carry out very different mission sets, the geographic area they cover is the same, USAID often provides nonmilitary aid in many regions the DoD has no footprint in. USAID also has the ability to go into a country with resources on behalf of the United States without the stigma of imperialism or occupation that many identify with military forces. As a result, they USAID often completes humanitarian projects like the JSOTF-P has been doing, but without fear of alienating locals or risk of insurgent attacks. The United States agreed to supply \$190 million in nonmilitary aid over five years to support the Philippine government's "hearts and minds" approach to negotiating with the MILF and convincing the ARMM population the government supported them.<sup>148</sup> U.S. foreign aid to the Philippines increased substantially, with total foreign aid doubling between 2001 and 2002. This approach has provided aid and funding for construction projects in the southern Philippines in an

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<sup>146</sup> Simon Montlake, "US Faces Slog Against Philippine Militants, Even with Winning Strategy," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 19, 2010.

<sup>147</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, 2009, 26.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Lunn and Larry A. Nicksch, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 15, 2009, 14.

attempt to increase the standard of living and provide jobs. The U.S. intended this aid to lure MILF members out of the organization and into stable jobs within larger Mindanao society.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, U.S. leaders have emphasized the importance of humanitarian projects in local communities to forge relationships and rebuild trust with the local people.<sup>150</sup> These programs are intended to win the support of the population and wean them off of support provided by terrorist groups. The United States has remained committed to the Philippines, as these numbers have remained at peak levels since then.

The method of funding by the State Department since 9/11 has changed, largely as a result of it getting more familiar with local conditions on the ground and how to interact with the Philippine government. The United States emphasized spending in the southern Philippines in particular, earmarking as much as 70 percent of all State Department aid to the country for that region.<sup>151</sup> Total State Department spending in the Philippines between 2001 and 2002 went from \$49 million to \$95 million.<sup>152</sup> The initial increase went in large part toward preventing the Philippine military from deteriorating; the report does not mention Department of Defense efforts to achieve the same goal.<sup>153</sup> Spending increased over the course of the next three years. In 2004, the State Department spent more than \$130 million in the Philippines.<sup>154</sup> However, nonmilitary expenditures for programs such as building new schools, supplying computers to schools or improving electric grids, decreased significantly from 2002 levels, which peaked at more than \$50 million. By 2004, this funding program had reduced to \$20 million.<sup>155</sup> For example, they provided Economic and Support Funds to assist in compelling local

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<sup>149</sup> Dalpino, Catharin, "Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer–Fall 2007, 87–8.

<sup>151</sup> *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2010*, May 28, 2009, 263.

<sup>152</sup> *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2003*, April 15, 2002, 267.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2004*, February 13, 2003, 558.

<sup>155</sup> Compiled from *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2004*, February 13, 2003, 558 and *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2006*, February 15, 2005, 344.

separatists to put down arms and return to farming.<sup>156</sup> However, the State Department does not distinguish between separatists fighting for the MNLF, MILF or ASG. This contrasts with the Defense Department's focus on eliminating ASG, cooperating with MILF on a peace agreement and aiding in the integration of the MNLF into mainstream society.

State Department spending in support of the Philippines peaked in 2005. By then, they committed \$135 million, representing an increased expenditure almost three times that of pre-9/11 levels. Since then, however, the State Department has gradually reduced aid to the Philippines. In 2007, the State Department committed more than \$90 million in aid to the Philippines.<sup>157</sup> The State Department has consistently focused Philippine aid efforts in large part on Mindanao with goals designed to "support conflict resolution in Mindanao, fight corruption and improve governance...."<sup>158</sup> To this end, aid directed toward improving the quality of life for people living in the southern Philippines increased once again, to more than \$40 million that year.<sup>159</sup> They also spent approximately \$38 million as part of its long term plan to rebuild the Philippine military.<sup>160</sup> Once again, the report does not mention any coordination with the Department of Defense on the nature of this program.

The State Department once again ramped up spending in the Philippines in 2008. Expenditures for that year totaled almost \$125 million.<sup>161</sup> It continued to spend significant amounts of money training Philippine police forces to maintain law and order in Mindanao. However, the State Department began pulling away from direct support of the Philippine military, marking a transition to full military support from the Department

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<sup>156</sup> Compiled from Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2004, February 13, 2003, 558 and Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2006, February 15, 2005, 300.

<sup>157</sup> Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2007, February 13, 2006, 676.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>159</sup> Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2007, February 13, 2006, 369.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2010, May 28, 2009, 263.

of Defense instead.<sup>162</sup> USAID continued to expend its nearly \$30 million budget to improve living conditions in Mindanao.<sup>163</sup> State Department expenditures continued with this strategy of increased emphasis on humanitarian projects and combating poverty in Mindanao until the latest budget request.

The current budget request for the State Department represents significant shifts in strategy in its approach to the Philippines. While it is slightly down from the 2010 peak expenditure of just over \$140 million, the request remains high at \$132 million.<sup>164</sup> However, the 2011 budget request eliminates almost all funding in support of the Philippine military, noting that the Department of Defense will continue to support the Philippine military.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, it significantly increases expenditures on development assistance with a renewed focus on the country at large. These programs appear to shift away from a focus on education and improved infrastructure in Mindanao toward national green energy initiatives, environmentally friendly infrastructure improvements and human trafficking.<sup>166</sup> If approved, the 2011 budget will mark a significant departure from the ten-year-old strategy of the post-9/11 State Department. None of the three identified areas in the 2011 budget request have been given this level of priority in the past. However, it clearly maintains course with the new 2010 National Security Strategy described earlier. Interestingly, throughout analysis of the State Department budgets, end of year outlays significantly surpassed initial budget requests, sometimes by as much as 50 percent. This is likely a result of conservative baseline budget requests followed up with an injection of funds as Congress each year approved one-time Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) funds. It remains to be seen whether or not aid to the Philippines will continue to receive these additional fund injections in the future.

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162 Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2010, May 28, 2009, 265.

163 Ibid.

164 Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2011, March 12, 2010, 296.

165 Ibid., 300.

166 Ibid.



In total, the State Department has invested more than \$1 billion in the Philippines, most of which it has directed toward the conflict areas in the south. While this seems like a significant amount of money, it is one-third the amount Japan has sent. Given the priority the National Security Strategy has identified for Southeast Asia as the “second front,” it seems the State Department would expend more resources there. In fairness though, the Philippines has received the largest portion of State Department expenditures in Southeast Asia. The larger issue may be that the federal government has not sufficiently funded the State Department to meet its charter. However, State Department fiscal year requests for the Philippines have consistently been fully funded and in some cases funded further through contingency dollars. In light of this, perhaps the State Department could take a more ambitious approach on its end to achieving its objectives in the Philippines.

### C. CONCLUSION

The U.S. counterterrorism strategy in the Philippines has relied on a two-pronged approach of military and nonmilitary initiatives. In 2006, the State Department began coordinating through USAID with JSOTF-P on some humanitarian efforts intended to improve water supply, sanitation road infrastructure and fishing.<sup>167</sup> Improved coordination has ensured USAID funds have been spent in areas secure from insurgents. The United States designed these policies to work together to minimize the incentives the ASG and MILF use to recruit moderate Muslims into their ranks, mainly poverty and lack of education. For more than eight years, U.S. policies have been in effect with the same end-state in mind. The tactics and strategies undertaken initially have remained relatively constant and changed little during this period.

The United States has worked with the Philippine government to execute its strategies but has not really coordinated efforts with Japan, Australia and Malaysia. All players desire the same thing but use different approaches to achieve it. None of these other countries have military forces or capabilities that could replace that of the United

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<sup>167</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, 178.

States, but they have aggressively pursued humanitarian efforts that the United States could take into consideration with both its military and nonmilitary strategies. In fact, detailing the U.S. strategy to combat terrorism in the Philippines raises a number of questions and concerns. Has the United States taken the most effective approach to the situation in the Philippines? Why have U.S. efforts not accounted for the efforts of their neighboring allies, such as Japan and Australia? Would a more inclusive approach help defray costs to the United States and at the same time strengthen the position of all countries involved? Will the new course outlined in the 2010 National Security Strategy remedy perceived shortcomings? The United States undoubtedly remains committed to its eight-year old mission of stabilizing the southern Philippines, but analysis of the strategy to date, as well as the new turn imminent with the 2010 National Security Strategy and backed by the 2011 budget request, has the potential to offer an alternative approach to the situation. American military forces and USAID workers perform admirably, the nation's leaders owe it to them to provide a well-thought out blueprint for success with achievable objectives with an end-state in mind.

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## **IV. ANALYSIS OF U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Since 9/11, the United States has sustained a substantial military presence in the Philippines and provided a wide range of economic assistance. But, have these efforts made the U.S. homeland more secure? Have U.S. efforts to combat terrorism abroad enhanced homeland security?

Islamic militant groups in the southern Philippines have been a problem for decades. These groups have evolved over the years, escalating and de-escalating violence as the government changed its attitude toward the different organizations. Even with the government agreeing to establish the ARMM, Islamic militancy continued to fester in Mindanao, growing in size, diversity and aggressiveness. Through a coordinated effort, U.S. and Philippine military forces have marginalized some elements of Islamic militancy. It appears, though, that U.S. policies to date have been piecemeal, uncoordinated, and failed to address the root causes that attract terrorists there. As a result, the ASG remains alive, peace with the MILF elusive, and JI continues to evolve. In order to achieve success in the future, it is crucial that the United States adopt a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes that have turned the Philippines into a safe haven for terrorist operations.

### **B. POLICY SUCCESSES**

To properly assess whether U.S. counterterrorism policies in the Philippines have been successful, it is necessary to define what criteria those policies should meet in order to achieve success. First, U.S. policies should have an impact on the most prominent and most dangerous terrorist organizations in the Philippines. Successful U.S. policy would noticeably reduce the ability of those organizations to train and operate. Additionally, they would have to limit their operations, as well as their cooperation with international terrorist organizations, such as JI and al Qaeda. Finally, the policies should have such an effect that the public perceives they have achieved their stated goals.

Today, U.S. and Philippine military forces have largely contained the ASG, and it no longer poses a substantial threat to U.S. homeland security, a notable success for both militaries. The ASG, once boasting membership up to 1500, currently has an estimated strength of 400, with only around 100 of those willing to carry out newsworthy violent attacks.<sup>168</sup> Eight years of U.S. promoted military offensives have paid off regarding efforts to marginalize the ASG. The Department of Defense believes its approach focusing on the ASG has found success, arguing it has brought “security to previously contested areas.”<sup>169</sup> The United States to date can consider this a tactical victory.

The Philippine government has requested the United States not designate the MILF as a terrorist organization, or confront it in the same manner they have the ASG for fear that doing so would undermine the ongoing peace process between the MILF and Philippine government. The Philippine Army prefers a softer “hearts and minds” approach in Mindanao, which RAND argues has decreased violence.<sup>170</sup> This approach appears to have worked at the strategic level regarding relations with the MILF. In December 2009, both sides agreed on seven basic tenets that would underscore both proposals for a long-term peace agreement, including citizenship, government structure, property rights and other items considered fundamental to any MILF agreement.<sup>171</sup> In order to promote the peace process, the Philippine government has funded an information campaign designed to publicize the progress and gain support from the general population of Mindanao.<sup>172</sup> Recognition of the MILF and efforts to work with it for a peace agreement have acted as a deterrent, at least for the group at large, against harboring al Qaeda affiliates.<sup>173</sup> At the local level, however, the military and MILF

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<sup>168</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” 53.

<sup>169</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 12, 2010, 28.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” 141–2.

<sup>171</sup> Patricio Diaz, “Peace Pact Still Possible?,” *Minda News*, February 16, 2010, [http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=7633&Itemid=92](http://www.mindanews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7633&Itemid=92).

<sup>172</sup> “Info Campaign on Peace Talks to be Launched,” *Sun-Star Manila*, February 7, 2010, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/manila/info-campaign-peace-talks-be-launched>.

<sup>173</sup> Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It Can be Done,” *International Security* (Winter 2005–2006).

leadership struggle to contain rogue elements. However, the MILF distances itself from attacks carried out by the rogue elements, publicly condemning them. It remains to be seen if the U.S. policy of restraint regarding the MILF will pay off.

U.S. policy has also encouraged regional cooperation by the Philippines with its ASEAN partners, which has produced notable results in reducing terrorist attacks. A 2008 report contends that the cooperative efforts by the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore eliminated terrorist-related bombings for a three-year period in Manila, largely as a result of those governments freezing assets, which prevented the funding of terrorist operations.<sup>174</sup> The United States has demonstrated willingness in the past to take an inclusive approach with allies to solving the problem of terrorism in the Philippines. However, this appears to represent the exception, and not the rule in terms of U.S. counterterrorist policy there.

### **C. POLICY CHALLENGES**

Even with the Philippine government agreeing to establish the ARMM, Islamic militancy continued to fester in Mindanao, growing in size, diversity and aggressiveness, even as conditions on the ground have evolved. The 9/11 Commission Report cites numerous historical examples of how the southern Philippines has been a hotbed of terrorist activity, linking attacks planned both regionally and in some instances, those that directly target the United States<sup>175</sup>. Following the resignation of President Joseph Estrada in 2001, the government began negotiations with the MILF, which led to sporadic ceasefires and commencement of hostilities. The Philippine government continues to negotiate with the MILF, but has problems constraining some of the more radical elements of its organization from aiding al Qaeda affiliates.<sup>176</sup> This appears to be an indication that appeasing one group will not necessarily translate to satisfying the larger movement. The Philippines lived through this history when it signed the agreement

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<sup>174</sup> “Philippines: Anti-terror Drive Leaves Militants With no Funds to Plan Attacks,” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific–Political*, February 6, 2008.

<sup>175</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, 58–9, 147, 366.

<sup>176</sup> Alan Sipress and Ellen Nakashima, “Al Qaeda Affiliate Training Indonesians on Philippine Island: Persistence Startles Officials in Manila,” *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2003.

to establish the ARMM with the MNLF. When the MNLF laid down arms, dissatisfied elements, primarily in ASG and MILF, rose up and waged even greater violence than the MNLF had. Addressing the grievances of the population at large may make more sense. Actions taken by the Philippine government appear to have been misguided and, in any event, have failed to stabilize the southern Philippines and stay terrorism there.

Additionally, the threat of terrorism in the Philippines has witnessed increased diversity as international terrorist groups discovered they could plan and operate out of the lawless pockets of the south. JI elements are especially concerning given their direct ties to al Qaeda, which considers them and the MILF to be its “operational wing in Southeast Asia”.<sup>177</sup> JI regards the southern Philippines as a “safe haven” to train and operate from.<sup>178</sup> Philippine military forces continued to uncover al Qaeda cells operating training camps with the MILF in Mindanao repeatedly, as recently as 2002.<sup>179</sup> Philippine military forces arrested JI members operating training camps in Mindanao in 2003 and 2004.<sup>180</sup> In 2009, Niksch indicated the JI/MILF connection endured and has increased.<sup>181</sup> It makes sense that international terrorist organizations look to the southern Philippines, given the professionally organized training program operated by the MILF throughout the region that loosely parallels what one would expect to find in any state run

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<sup>177</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, 92.

<sup>178</sup> Preeti Bhattacharji, “Terrorism Havens: Philippines,” *Council on Foreign Relations Online*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9365/>; Andrew Feickert, “U.S. Military Operations in the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan, Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia,” *CRS Report for Congress*, January 20, 2006, 19; Francis T. Miko, “Removing Terrorist Sanctuaries: The 9/11 Commission Recommendations and U.S. Policy,” *CRS Report for Congress*, February 11, 2005, 15.

<sup>179</sup> James J. F. Forest, *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes, Vol 2*, (Greenwood Publishing Group: 2006), 190.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>181</sup> Thomas Lunn and Larry A. Niksch, “The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations,” *CRS Report for Congress*, January 15, 2009, 9.

military.<sup>182</sup> International terrorism has apparently had a foothold in Mindanao, at least since the 1960s. During this time, the MILF in particular has built significant infrastructure to develop and train its recruits.

The southern Philippines remain an area outside the span of control of the government, and organizations there continue to threaten stability in the Philippines. For example, in the run up to the May 2010 elections, a local militia massacred 32 journalists in Maguindanao in November 2009. The government has arrested scores of suspects, but the family in charge of the militia retains control over large sections of the province, including local law enforcement and judges. Throughout the southern Philippines the government relies on locally run dynastic militias to maintain law and order, and to keep MILF in check. When elements of the militias go rogue, which happens often, the government has no effective means of response. These militias flourished under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. President Aquino has vowed to eliminate them but has yet to detail a plan to achieve that goal. Eradicating these militias will be difficult considering they profited greatly under President Arroyo and built up formidable forces with excellent equipment and training.

Basic American involvement in solving this dilemma has challenges. Mindanao's Muslims have not forgotten early American acts of violence in attempts to assimilate them.<sup>183</sup> The increased U.S. military presence has remained contentious today due to the colonial history.<sup>184</sup> Muslim militants remember the U.S. denied them independence in 1946.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, the Iraqi invasion in 2003 alienated large segments of the Muslim

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<sup>182</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsited to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

<sup>183</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the 'War on Terror' in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 86.

<sup>184</sup> Eni H. Faleomavaega, "Japan's Changing Role," Political Transcript From House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, Washington, DC, June 29, 2009.

<sup>185</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer-Fall 2007, 78.



population in Southeast Asia, ultimately limiting government cooperation.<sup>186</sup> This American animosity persists today in the southern Philippines in spite of the comparatively small U.S. military footprint there.

Varying accounts of cooperation between Al Qaeda and the MILF persist, encouraged by corrupt local government officials, highlighting nonmilitary struggles by the Philippine government. Government corruption in the Philippines has enabled factions of the MILF to coordinate training and operations with JI.<sup>187</sup> The Philippine government decided not to take action against rogue elements of MILF that allowed JI to operate and train in Mindanao.<sup>188</sup> This is especially worrying considering that the government has the opportunity to use any affiliation with JI as leverage in the peace process. JI's presence in the Philippines matters because it has worked in the past with al Qaeda on numerous terrorist attacks. These facts set the stage for continued cooperation on training and planning operations conducted from the southern Philippines by these terrorist organizations as long as the corruption remains. External persistence further reinforces the argument that the government needs to address the grievances of a population, not a group.

Another notable nonmilitary struggle has been the inability of the government of the Philippines to negotiate peace in the more than 25 year existence of the MILF. In 2008, government negotiators, acting without real authority, promised the MILF everything they had demanded, raising hopes and expectations that, when put to the judicial test, would be dashed.<sup>189</sup> In 2008, the Supreme Court abruptly rejected the agreement.<sup>190</sup> Immediately following the ruling, both sides acknowledged failure of the

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<sup>186</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the 'War on Terror' in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 85.

<sup>187</sup> Preeti Bhattacharji, "Terrorism Havens: Philippines," *Council on Foreign Relations Online*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9365/>.

<sup>188</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the 'War on Terror' in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 82.

<sup>189</sup> "The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Briefing No. 83, October 23, 2008, 6.

<sup>190</sup> Ali Macabalang, "Government Negotiator's Pessimism on Peace Agreement Rebuffed," *Manila Bulletin*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/238933/gov-t-negotiator-s-pessimism-peace-agreement-rebuffed>.

agreement and went back to resolution via violence.<sup>191</sup> This had far-reaching implications, displacing nearly 400,000 Mindanao residents.<sup>192</sup> The court ruling only reinforced the MILF's long-held position that the government needs to take more extreme legislative action to reduce its role in the southern Philippines.<sup>193</sup> Since then, though, things have stabilized, with Malaysian arbitration and talks underway, and a ceasefire currently in place. However, further compounding these problems, some local leaders have complained that their constituents have no desire to be part of an autonomous region, Zamboanga City in particular.<sup>194</sup> While the government cannot realistically expect unanimous support, the more universal it is, the more likely they can sustain peace. This will likely involve negotiations beyond just the MILF.

#### **D. HAS IT WORKED?**

Considering the U.S. strategy to combat terrorism in the Philippines, it seems to have had some successes. The two militaries have marginalized the threat posed by the ASG and it conducts mainly fringe operations on isolated islands today. Additionally, it appears that Philippine government negotiations with the MILF, supported by the United States as the preferred strategy in dealing with this particular separatist organization, have deterred it from welcoming al Qaeda and JI in recent years. While it is important to applaud these successes, it appears they are symptoms of a much larger problem; much remains to be done.

The very fact that the United States has military forces in the Philippines compounds the problems there. To begin with, the increased U.S. military presence remained contentious due to the colonial history; the United States violently put down

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<sup>191</sup> Catharin Dalpino, "Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009, 9.

<sup>192</sup> "The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao," *International Crisis Group*, Asia Briefing No. 83, October 23, 2008, 1.

<sup>193</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer-Fall 2007, 84.

<sup>194</sup> Ben R. Rosario, "Don't Rush Peace Accord, Leaders Say," *Manila Bulletin*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/241627/don-t-rush-peace-accord-leaders-say>.

numerous rebellions by acclaimed Philippine revolutionary Emilio Aguinaldo.<sup>195</sup> Filipinos today still hold Aguinaldo in high regard for his efforts at the turn of the 20th century to gain independence from American and Spanish colonial powers. International terrorist organizations often exploit situations like that in the southern Philippines in hopes of wearing down the United States and breaking public will.<sup>196</sup> Al Qaeda and JI have demonstrated a commitment to this strategy in the southern Philippines.

Much of the U.S. military effort to date has centered on suppressing activity by the ASG, the smallest of the major Muslim militant groups in the Philippines, which has rarely targeted American interests, and has the weakest ties to JI. While the United States has made great strides in putting down a well-known terrorist group in ASG, it is much smaller, more isolated, and does not have the international ties the MILF has. The United States, at the request of the Philippines, has avoided confrontation with the MILF as much as possible and not placed them on its list of terrorist organizations, in spite of the many connections the MILF has displayed with other international terrorist organizations. As a result, many terrorists in the southern Philippines have retained most of their capabilities. While avoiding confrontation may be politically expedient, the U.S. military footprint has only scratched the surface of combating terrorism in the Philippines. The MILF has distanced itself from rogue elements, as well as connections to JI and al Qaeda, but the links continue to persist. Additionally, when the MILF have reacted negatively to the peace talks, the results for the people have been devastating, making one question how much “buy-in” the MILF really has with the local population.

Additionally, the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) has had its hands tied in terms of its ability to operate. Rules of engagement only allowing them to train Philippine forces to combat terrorism, combined with the restriction of operations against MILF, have put JSOTF-P in a precarious situation, especially when hostilities might break out locally and they cannot determine whether or not the opposition comprises of ASG or MILF forces. JSOTF-P forces perform

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<sup>195</sup> Eni H. Faleomavaega, “Japan’s Changing Role,” Political Transcript From House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, Washington, DC, June 29, 2009.

<sup>196</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, 2009, 109.

admirably; doing whatever job they are tasked to do. Unfortunately, the Vietnam-like rules of engagement unnecessarily put U.S. forces at risk with no real definition of mission completion.

Analysis of U.S. strategies reveals three shortcomings. First, the U.S. strategy of focusing exclusively on diminishing the influence of the ASG focuses on the wrong target. Direct U.S. military aid to date has been earmarked for use against the ASG only.<sup>197</sup> The ASG poses little threat to the United States and is considered to be a minor player in the problem of terrorism in the southern Philippines. In spite of the many connections the MILF has displayed with other international terrorist organizations, the United States, at the request of the Philippine government, has not identified the group as a terrorist organization.

As a result, most terrorist groups in the southern Philippines retain most of the capabilities they had before that time. The National Counterterrorism Center reports the Philippines currently ranks eleventh globally in fatalities by country due to terrorist attacks and ninth in kidnappings, arguably with a disproportionate share coming from the south. Fatalities have remained relatively constant in terms of the ranking, but the number of fatalities has trended steadily upward, from 144 in 2005 to 241 in 2009.<sup>198</sup> Kidnappings, on the other hand, skyrocketed after 2005, primarily due to increased conflict between the government of the Philippines and the various separatists groups in the south. In 2005, only 25 people were kidnapped.<sup>199</sup> By 2007, however, nearly 500 were kidnapped in that year alone.<sup>200</sup> The numbers have subsided somewhat since then,

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<sup>197</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia; Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* (Winter 2008), 180.

<sup>198</sup> Compiled from NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2005 Report on Terrorism*, April 11, 2006, 15, NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2006 Report on Terrorism*, April 30, 2007, 25, NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2007 Report on Terrorism*, April 30, 2008, 26, NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2008 Report on Terrorism*, April 30, 2009, 26, and NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2009 Report on Terrorism*, March 19, 2010, 18.

<sup>199</sup> NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2005 Report on Terrorism*, April 11, 2006, 18.

<sup>200</sup> NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2007 Report on Terrorism*, April 30, 2008, 29.

with 143 kidnapped in 2009, but U.S. involvement has yet to bring the numbers back to 2005 levels.<sup>201</sup> Given these numbers, U.S. military solutions implemented thus far seem to have had little effect in reducing the impact of Islamic militancy.

The second major weakness concerns the lack of coordination between the military and nonmilitary parts of U.S. policy. While the United States has dedicated millions of dollars to lure MILF members out of the organization and into stable jobs within larger Mindanao society, USAID has led this initiative without full coordination with U.S. military efforts.<sup>202</sup> As a result, U.S.-trained Philippine forces often carry out missions against the same people USAID aims to convert. Rampant corruption at the local level contributes to other problems as well.<sup>203</sup> Government leaders line their pockets with much of the money given by USAID, depriving the larger population of the benefits the aid is designed to provide. In many cases corrupt government officials can easily influence poorly paid and overworked military forces and law enforcement officials with the financial aid provided by the United States. As a result, they often compete, sometimes violently, over jurisdiction because of the potential to profit from illegal activity there.<sup>204</sup> Currently, military and law enforcement are easily susceptible to bribes from MILF and others to look the other way when criminal activity takes place, or to even join their cause against the government.

Rather than increasing cooperation between military and economic assistance, the 2011 State Department budget seems to represent further compartmentalization of efforts. The decision to shift support for the military to the Department of Defense makes sense, but military efforts should continue to contain State Department elements, especially USAID. Additionally, the disparity in the budgets between the two departments, with the Defense Department funded at 210 times the level of the State Department creates an

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<sup>201</sup> NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center, *2009 Report on Terrorism*, March 19, 2010, 21.

<sup>202</sup> Catharin Dalpino, "Southeast Asia in 2008: Challenges Within and Without," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009, 10.

<sup>203</sup> Peter Chalk et al., "The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment," *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, xv–xvii.

<sup>204</sup> John Gershman. "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?" *Foreign Affairs*. July–August 1992.

“imbalance” in the ability of the State Department to keep up with the Defense Department’s goals.<sup>205</sup> The Defense Department itself acknowledges the need to improve the capacity of the State Department in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, noting that “Years of war have proven how important it is for America’s civilian agencies to possess the resources...needed to operate alongside the U.S. Armed Forces during complex contingencies at home and abroad.”<sup>206</sup> The population the United States hopes to win the hearts and minds of remains wary of a U.S. military presence regardless of its stated intent. USAID, integrated with the military, has a better chance of moving public opinion toward the side of the government.

Third, the United States’ approach has failed to address one of the conditions that enable terrorist activity to persist, namely corruption within the Philippine government. Government corruption by the Philippines appears to be one of the root causes that have bred terrorist activity in the ARMM. For example, organized separatism did not begin until the occurrence of the Jabidah Massacre, which served as a focal point for diverse Muslim groups in the southern Philippines to rally against. The American military strategy to train the Philippine military to take offensive action against insurgents fails to address the rampant corruption contributing to the problems today in Mindanao.<sup>207</sup> In many cases, corrupt government officials can easily influence poorly paid and overworked military forces and law enforcement officials with the financial aid provided by the United States.

These three U.S. policy weaknesses have been exacerbated by problems on the Philippine side. First, the ARMM remains the most impoverished region in the entire country; across virtually every economic data point provided it ranks last in all regions of

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<sup>205</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, Oxford University Press, 2009, 298.

<sup>206</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 12, 2010, 69.

<sup>207</sup> Peter Chalk et al., “The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment,” *RAND National Defense Research Institute*, 2009, xv-xvii.

the Philippines.<sup>208</sup> This is particularly noticeable with respect to the relative deprivation of the ARMM compared to its neighboring Mindanao regions. The Islamic militants easily contrast the conditions in ARMM with the neighboring regions in Mindanao to Muslims as a recruiting tool, citing the fact that the ARMM has the “worst poverty, income inequality, infant and maternal mortality rates, and literacy levels” in the country.<sup>209</sup> For example, while the per capita GDP in the ARMM is the lowest in the country, at only 24 percent of the average for the Philippines, neighboring Northern Mindanao has the third highest regional per capita GDP, at 104 percent of the average.<sup>210</sup> Additionally, the GDP growth rate of the ARMM between 1985 and 2005 actually decreased an average of .9 percent annually, while neighboring Central Mindanao enjoyed the highest growth rate of all regions in the Philippines, at 6.6 percent annually.<sup>211</sup> Philippine government policies have contributed to this.

The ARMM has failed to produce the promised results. It has not provided the independence to govern as promised, continues to deny promised representation in the national government and has not yet addressed land ownership issues.<sup>212</sup> One explanation for this is that the transplanted Christian landowners vehemently resist efforts to grant land rights to the Muslims, and have significant clout in the national government preventing movement in this area.<sup>213</sup> Locals continue to clash over land. For example, in Maguindanao province a breakaway group of the MILF, the Lawless Moro-Islamic Liberation Front Group (LMG) attacked a barangay captain and Citizens Armed Forces

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<sup>208</sup> Arsenio Balisacan et al., “Regional Development Dynamics and Decentralization in the Philippines: Ten Lessons From a ‘Fast Starter,’” *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 25, No. 3, December 2008, 303–10.

<sup>209</sup> John Gershman. “Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?” *Foreign Affairs*. July–August 1992.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, “This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines,” *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer–Fall 2007, 82.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

Geographic Unit (CAFGU) field commander over property disputes.<sup>214</sup> Additionally, 25 of 68 validated family militias operate in the ARMM, promoted by the government with weapons provisions or concessions.<sup>215</sup> These militias have backfired on the central government, which originally encouraged them under President Arroyo, as a cost effective means of maintaining law and order. Instead, they have usurped power and instilled their own radical version of law and order.<sup>216</sup> As a result of these circumstances, the aid provided by the United States has failed to produce the expected results. It simply does not get to the people that need it the most.

Second, the Philippine government's strategies may hinder American counterterrorism policies. The government first entered into negotiations with the MILF in 1997.<sup>217</sup> However, between 1997 and 2001 the government, while negotiating, often sent military forces into Mindanao and MILF strongholds in an effort to contain them, undermining the peace movements and acting as a de facto recruiting tool for the MILF.<sup>218</sup> In 1997, the MILF began its campaign of violence shortly after the establishment of the ARMM, concluding the government's peace process with the MNLF. Negotiations with the MILF initially were intermittent and nonexistent during President Joseph Estrada's term. In 2000, President Estrada executed aggressive military operations against the 15,000 strong MILF, which ultimately failed to produce the desired effects; the military experienced significant losses while the MILF gained valuable training and experience.<sup>219</sup> President Estrada's policies created significant distrust on both sides that complicated the peace process later.

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<sup>214</sup> "Kapitan Samdan Sa Pag-atake Sa Mga Rebelding Moro," *Cebu Sun Star*, January 14, 2010, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/davao/kapitan-samdan-sa-pag-atake-sa-mga-rebelding-moro>.

<sup>215</sup> Solita Collas-Monsod. "Calling A Spade...." *Business World*. January 28, 2010.

<sup>216</sup> Ruth Pollard. "In the Shadow of Arroyo's Warlords." *Sydney Morning Herald*. December 12, 2009.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>218</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, "This Land is Our Land: Moro Ancestral Domain and its Implications for Peace and Development in the Southern Philippines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer-Fall 2007, 83.

<sup>219</sup> "Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsited to Major High-Tech Systems," *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).



Following the resignation of President Estrada in 2001, the government resumed negotiations with the MILF, which has led to sporadic ceasefires and commencement of hostilities. In 2001, the conflict stabilized when Malaysia entered into the peace process negotiations acting as a mediator, which signaled a stabilizing in the relationship between the government and the MILF.<sup>220</sup> Manila offered significant concessions to the MILF, agreeing in 2007 to significantly expand the borders of the proposed Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE), which provides for a primarily Muslim autonomous region in Mindanao.<sup>221</sup> The BJE goes farther than the ARMM in granting autonomy to the region but requires amending the Philippine Constitution to make it legal. However, the peace process fell apart again in 2008 when the Supreme Court declared the latest agreement unconstitutional, resulting in violence waged on both sides once again.

As was the case with the MNLF in the mid-1990s, off-shoots of the MILF continue to engage in violence against the government. For example, the government decided not to take action against rogue elements of the MILF that allowed JI to operate and train in Mindanao.<sup>222</sup> Even though the MILF leadership has demonstrated to the government that these elements do not represent the group as a whole and they have made a concerted effort to stamp out this opposition, links between them perpetuate. This situation demonstrates that simply mollifying the MILF will not necessarily eradicate the larger problem of terrorism in the Philippines.

Finally, the military and nonmilitary aspects of U.S. assistance appear piecemeal and unconnected to a broader strategy of regional stability. The current approach targets a number of worthy areas, but does so without a comprehensive approach. For example, USAID has built schools in areas where it believed it could safely, not necessarily in areas that need new schools. Many military programs do not appear to be coordinated with programs that USAID and other organizations support. American policies may not

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<sup>220</sup> “Special Report: Philippine Counter-Terrorism Campaign Faces a Challenge Unsited to Major High-Tech Systems,” *Defense and Foreign Affairs Daily* (2002).

<sup>221</sup> Allen Hicken, “The Philippines in 2008: Peace-building, War-fighting and Crisis Management,” *Asian Survey*, 49, Issue 1 (2009): 193.

<sup>222</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, “The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the ‘War on Terror’ in Southeast Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 82.

have been as effective as they could have been because of lack of interagency coordination and execution rather than lack of funding. Additionally, U.S. military policy has limits based on the Philippine Constitution which dictates that no foreign government can stage a permanent presence in the nation. The temporary arrangement with U.S. military forces in the country has lasted more than eight years and the Philippine government increasingly faces pressure to eliminate the U.S. military footprint in keeping with the Constitution. The apparently compartmentalized approach to these problems embraced by JSOTF-P, USAID, the government of the Philippines and other organizations hindered U.S. counterterrorism efforts, and, therefore, it was ineffective.

The United States has also limited its involvement in the role its allies have played, which has resulted in attempts at solving the issues to have had limited results as well. The international agreements implemented with ASEAN failed to address the root causes limiting cooperation between ASEAN nations. Varying standards of living, ethnic diversity, religious diversity between the nations, and limited military and police capabilities have hindered full implementation of the agreements.<sup>223</sup> As an example, it is difficult for countries like Indonesia and Malaysia with majority Muslim populations to strategically target extremists based on limited intelligence without alienating the masses. Additionally, Singapore has a thriving economy while those of Vietnam and the Philippines struggle by comparison. The United States has the ability to level the playing field between the different nations, but has yet to act.

Given the length of time the United States has had to implement this strategy, it may be time to acknowledge that it has likely resulted in attacking the symptoms and not the underlying problems. Essentially, even if peace with the MILF does come about, and ASG is weakened to the point that it becomes irrelevant, that does not guarantee that some other breakaway group will not rise to replace these groups. As long as the circumstances that bred the MILF and ASG remain, the problem is unlikely to be solved.

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<sup>223</sup> Amitav Acharya and Arabinda Acharya, "The Myth of the Second Front: Localizing the 'War on Terror' in Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2007, 84.

## **E. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The United States should develop a comprehensive strategy in conjunction with the Philippines to combat the root causes that make Mindanao a safe haven for terrorists. To begin with, U.S. policy should expand military efforts beyond the ASG to, at a minimum, addressing the rogue elements of the MILF. JSOTF-P, while training Philippine military forces in the area already, should continue to do so, but with a surge in Philippine military presence to secure the region and discontinue reliance on family militias. At the same time, JSOTF-P should also train local law enforcement and operationalize the police force. The U.S. military has enjoyed significant success doing this in the surge in Iraq, and with the Marines in Vietnam under the Combined Action Program (CAP) where they embedded with local military and law enforcement in villages, eventually winning the trust of the villagers and denying Vietcong valuable recruiting sources and staging bases.

Along with a freer hand for the JSOTF-P, the United States should also increase the footprint of nonmilitary humanitarian agencies, especially USAID. The latest State Department budget contains adequate resources for USAID. Leadership within USAID and JSOTF-P must work more closely together in separatist hotbeds. The JSOTF-P can enter these regions with Philippine military forces, clear out insurgents, establish safe zones, and guarantee the safety of USAID workers while they construct badly needed hospitals, schools and infrastructure. A deliberate presence over a period of months will demonstrate to the local population that they can count on the government to perform its duties in securing their villages. Once this is established, locals will return to their daily routines, recruiting into local police forces will increase and businesses will once again thrive, all of which will force the separatists into survival mode in the jungles, a lifestyle only the most hardcore will be willing to endure. This method of counterinsurgency has demonstrated success in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan in the areas they have been tried. While all of those models had issues, most significantly the failure to persist, a host of leadership failures unrelated to the success of the CAP in Vietnam ultimately led to failure. In Iraq in 2005 the Marines implemented a CAP program nearly identical to that initiated in Vietnam with remarkable results, especially in Fallujah where in a matter of

months they turned the corner on one of the most embedded insurgent groups in the country, with a platoon of Iraqi National Guard forces in the lead.<sup>224</sup> This represents just one of many examples of tactics employed on the ground by U.S. forces utilizing local capabilities to turn the tide, in environments arguably much more difficult to operate in than the southern Philippines. The southern Philippines is distinct from these in that the violence is much less comparatively, meaning USAID can go in more aggressively than it could in the other countries. A program based on CAP principles in the Philippines would utilize local forces best equipped to gather intelligence on the ground and more quickly gain support from the local population, resulting in a snowball effect as military and police recruit additional locals into service against the separatists. This program would also likely better position the Philippine government at the negotiating table in the ongoing peace process with the MILF.

Additionally, the U.S. government should provide incentives in the form of higher wages and benefits to both military and law enforcement. The United States could facilitate this in the same manner it increased salaries for military and police in Afghanistan through direct payments to members of those forces, which would ensure the money gets to the individuals it is intended for and does not wind up in the pockets of corrupt government officials. Currently, military and police forces are easily susceptible to bribes from MILF and others to look the other way when criminal activity takes place, or to even join their cause against the government. Higher salaries would force separatist groups to either substantially increase these payments, a prospect difficult to foresee given the dwindling funding resources as a result of U.S. efforts there, or it would force the separatists to come up with riskier, alternative strategies to achieve their objectives. Alternative strategies would likely involve direct contact with United States or Philippine military forces, a scenario advantageous for military forces since their greatest challenge is usually locating separatists.

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<sup>224</sup> Zachary J. Iscol, "CAP India," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 90, No. 1, January 2006, 57–60.

In the spirit of multilateral cooperation, the United States should also facilitate the integration of efforts undertaken by other countries to improve circumstances in the southern Philippines. Tying together these individual efforts into a single strategy will provide a synergy not seen in the history of that country. It will show Filipinos that they have international support, and place increased pressure on the government to take the situation more seriously. Japan, Australia, the United States, and others have collectively invested billions of dollars in the Philippines and all have a vested interest in seeing the conflict resolved.

Ultimately, U.S. policy should focus efforts on fighting causes, not symptoms. The main characteristics that enable terrorism to flourish in the southern Philippines are poverty, corruption, and an overreliance by the Philippine government on powerful families that dictate local government policies and maintain law and order with their family militias. To that end, some local leaders have complained that their constituents have no desire to be part of an autonomous region, Zamboanga City in particular.<sup>225</sup> While the government cannot realistically expect unanimous support, the more universal it is, the more likely they can sustain peace.

The United States should work with the Philippine government to grow the economy in the region. For example, investment funds to properly irrigate rice fields, since only half of all rice fields have proper irrigation, would permanently increase rice production 50 percent per field (from two crops to three crops annually) and reduce reliance on seasonal rains in El Niño years when the country experiences below-average rainfall. Less than 15 percent of the rice fields in the ARMM have irrigation systems in place, the lowest percentage of irrigation in the country and far below the national average of 45 percent.<sup>226</sup> The United States should invest in a manner that circumvents the corrupt government officials, ensuring the aid actually gets to where it needs to go. These types of investments would be temporary in nature and provide a “hand up” to

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<sup>225</sup> Ben R. Rosario, “Don’t Rush Peace Accord, Leaders Say,” *Manila Bulletin*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.mb.com.ph/articles/241627/don-t-rush-peace-accord-leaders-say>.

<sup>226</sup> Arsenio Balisacan et al., “Regional Development Dynamics and Decentralization in the Philippines: Ten Lessons From a ‘Fast Starter,’” *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 25, No. 3, December 2008, 305.

farmers too poor to invest in the technology on their own. It would also spur demand for jobs, offering employment opportunities to young men who often join terrorist organizations as a way to feed their families, not so much out of ideology.

Since much of the recommended policy positions involved direct investment on the part of the United States, that should send a message to the Philippine government that they need to combat corruption. Challenges abound to eradicate the corruption that exists with the humanitarian programs in place today. Therefore, the United States and any other external body investing in the region should tie funds to performance measures, followed up with demands. Using the example of the rice fields, demonstrating the effects of the money provided would be straightforward; if 100 acres costs \$10,000 to irrigate, the United States should then follow the yields produced in the fields they funded for irrigation. Direct grants to farmers from the granting agency could best enable this. President Aquino based his election on reducing corruption and should now follow through. This would signal to the international community that the government is serious about restoring its status as a key player in Southeast Asia. Along with that, reducing corruption must involve elimination of clan militias that control vast expanses of the southern Philippines. President Aquino can look to former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay as a model of how to properly combat corruption and lead his country through similar trials. Magsaysay successfully put down the Huk Rebellion in the 1950s through careful allocation of U.S. aid to increase pay for military members and ensuring they had basic provisions in rural areas, preventing them from alienating the local population there by stealing from the very people they had been dispatched to protect.<sup>227</sup> While the Huk Rebellion involved Communist insurgents against the Philippine government, in many ways the techniques used on both sides parallel those witnessed today. Philippine leaders simply cannot expect to stabilize the country when it they have allowed this basic function of government to run amok.

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<sup>227</sup> Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq*, Yale University Press (2009): 103.

While the Philippines continues to negotiate with MILF, it must take the steps necessary to make long-term peace happen, with pressure from the United States if necessary. This will likely involve changes to the Philippine Constitution to facilitate the level of autonomy demanded by the MILF. Given the fractious relationship with Muslims created by government policies, increased autonomy is appropriate and will allow the Muslims the level of independence needed to embrace their religious values and stabilize the region on their end. The government has taken some steps to rebuild the bridges it destroyed decades ago, such as the peace agreement with the MNLF, and should use that and collaboration with local Christian groups as a catalyst to establish long term peace. At the same time, the government must allow the resource rich ARMM to retain the profits derived from the region. For decades, the central government has ensured profits from the area funnel to Manila, but then have trickled very little back to improve infrastructure and the local economy. Autonomy must include allowing the local population to retain the profits from the work they do to harvest local resources. While this will reduce funds to government coffers, lucrative natural gas and oil deposits discovered off-shore in recent years should more than compensate for losses in the ARMM. Stability in the southern Philippines will also serve to entice foreign investment, likely producing a “win-win” situation for the region and the central government.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

The threat posed by terrorism in the Philippines to U.S. homeland security is more diverse and serious than the U.S. believes. The U.S. has displayed a disproportionate focus on ASG while ignoring the threat posed by the MILF and without addressing the real grievances Muslims have held for decades. The United States may find that focusing more attention on other threats besides ASG would be prudent and that pursuing long term peace with the MILF by addressing their grievances makes sense for the security of the United States and the Philippines, but only attacks the symptom if not followed up with broader regional stabilization plans to eradicate the constant influx of breakaway groups. Muslims in the southern Philippines have grievances, such as corruption and a disparate level of poverty in comparison to the rest of the country, and have fought for decades to be heard. However, the Philippine government and people have grown weary

of waging war against one another and support the ongoing negotiations. Those negotiations are not expected to necessarily fix the root causes of the strife in the first place though. It is likely that another organization would rise as the MILF is placated, in the same manner that the MILF rose at a time when the MNLF was placated by the government.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States appropriately carried the fight to the enemy. However, the United States has implemented a near-sighted strategy in the Philippines, dealing with only one small piece of the greater international terrorist threat in the region that has been dubbed the second front in the global war on terror. It has enjoyed some success but requires a broader, longer term outlook. Given the proper strategy, the U.S. can successfully confront the second front, and win the war there, thus denying al Qaeda, and those who would seek to do the U.S. harm, a staging area it has relied upon for decades. The best chances for success though, likely lie in the integration of approaches used within the U.S. government, and with neighboring countries that have invested significant amounts of money. These nations all have the same goal of stabilizing the southern Philippines and eradicating terrorism there. Together, they can achieve it.



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## **V. CONCLUSION**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Have the United States' efforts to combat terrorism abroad enhanced homeland security? The efforts put forth by the United States over the past nine years have been significant; they involved a sustained U.S. presence in the affected areas and cost U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars. The second front in the global war on terrorism has not produced a direct attack on U.S. interests since 9/11. The focus on the ASG has produced definitive results, but terrorist attacks in the region persist, threatening the stability of the Philippines and U.S. interests there. Have these efforts in the southern Philippines made the U.S. homeland more secure? If so, how have they done so? While the United States has enjoyed some successes, clearly it has yet to confront the root causes of the problems in the southern Philippines. While the United States aggressively pursued the ASG, as recently as 2008, a breakdown in the peace process talks between the Philippine government and the MILF resulted in displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents in the southern Philippines. Another breakdown could result in having history repeat itself by leading to a new expansion of or a new proliferation of insurgent and terrorist groups, unless the United States adopts a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the root causes underlying the separatist movements.

### **B. OVERVIEW**

Over a period of centuries, Muslims in the southern Philippines adopted a distinct identity separate from that ingrained into the rest of the population through more than 300 years of Catholic influence resulting from Spanish colonial power. Muslims in the Philippines believed they would realize their aspirations of an independent nation with the country's liberation from Spain following the Spanish American War. However, the conclusion of World War II produced a different outcome, and the young government floundered for decades in futile attempts to assimilate this unique population and convince them to adopt a national identity over their centuries old Muslim lineage.

Instead, the government of the Philippines engaged in a series of botched policies that further alienated the Muslim population from the rest of the country. Eventually, these policies prompted some Muslims to organize against the government in efforts to gain for themselves what two imperial powers had failed to provide—independence. While the Philippines will not likely ever grant the southern Philippines complete independence, the violence waged by the separatists has produced significant successes from their perspective, especially with the 1996 establishment of the ARMM. Extreme swings in government policies based on changing leadership have eroded the legitimacy of government agreements in the eyes of the Muslims as well. Given the very mixed track record of the Philippine government, along with the United States’ own tattered history in the Philippines, it is unreasonable to expect that either can win over the Muslim population in the short term.

Following decades of abstaining from involvement in domestic matters between the Philippine government and the Muslims, the United States once again found itself in the middle of the tumultuous relationship following 9/11. Substantial evidence indicated that the southern Philippines were a hotbed of international terrorist activity and possibly the epicenter of the second front of the global war on terrorism. As a result, the United States once again thrust military forces into the region as its standard tool of first resort in hopes of quickly resolving a crisis that had simmered for decades. As it quickly discovered, however, circumstances presented a much more complex situation than originally realized.

The United States has spent billions of dollars and committed thousands of military and civilian forces to resolve the problems in the southern Philippines, but it entered without a coherent strategy or full understanding of what was wrong and what needed to be done to fix the problems there. The strategy, while well-meaning, was piecemeal and uncoordinated with interservice and international agencies. This compartmentalized approach has served merely to shift the location, methods and players involved. It has not severed the head from the snake as designed. However, the United States has demonstrated the ability to quickly turn the tide in events similar to this and has the capacity to do so in this theater without significantly increasing its resource

commitment. If the United States embraces the strategies it used successfully in Iraq during the surge to marginalize the separatists and synchronizes efforts already undertaken by USAID, the DoD and allied nations it stands a much better chance of gaining the support of the local population and permanently solving the crises that have plagued the southern Philippines for generations.

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