CHAPTER 2

Evolution of the armed conflict on the Moro front[1]

The contemporary armed conflict on the Moro front is the sharpest expression of the ***Moro or Bangsamoro problem***: the historical and systematic marginalization and minoritization of the Islamized ethnolinguistic groups, collectively called Moros, in their own homeland in much of the Mindanao islands, by Spain (from the 16th to the 19th century), the US (in the first half of the 20th century), and more recently by successor Philippine governments since formal independence in 1946. It might be viewed as a ***clash between two imagined nations or nationalisms***, Filipino and Moro, each with their own narratives of the conflict. For the Moro liberation fronts, it has been a conscious struggle to regain the historical sovereignty of the independent Moro nation-states called sultanates over their old homeland. For the Philippine government (henceforth, GRP) and nation-state of the 20th century, it has been a matter of defending the territorial integrity of the country against secession and dismemberment among the three main island regions of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. This has made the conflict a veritable case of "irresistible forces, immovable objects."

Historical roots

Both Spanish and American colonial regimes had to contend with small but fiercely independent sovereign nation-states (sultanates) of the main Moro ethno-linguistic tribes. Islam had arrived in Sulu in the last quarter of the 13th century and the Sulu sultanate was established in 1451, more than a century before the start of the Spanish period in 1565. The Spanish colonial period was marked by bitter Spanish-Moro wars (the so-called "Moro Wars") fought in six stages spanning four centuries. The colonialists called the Muslim natives "Moros" after their hated enemy, the "Moors," who had previously ruled Spain for eight centuries. The Spaniards fostered Christianized *indio* (Filipino) prejudice against Moros through such cultural institutions as the "moro-moro" plays.

American rule started in the Philippines in 1898 and military pacification of the Moros began in 1903 with the organization of the Moro Province, a military government distinct from that for the rest of the Philippines. Though the Moro people had remained free of Spain, by 1913 Christian and Muslim Filipinos were, by force of arms, under a single government and sovereignty. At that time, an American colonial official in charge of Moro affairs defined the Moro problem as the question of "method or form of administration by which the Moros… can be governed to their best interest… for their gradual advancement in culture and civilization, so that in the course of a reasonable time they can be admitted into the general government of the Philippine islands as qualified members of a republican national organization." One might say that the post-colonial Philippine government's definition

[1] Condensed from Santos [2005] *Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front,* background paper prepared for the PHDR 2005. The original paper with complete footnotes is available at www.hdn.org.ph.

of the Moro problem remains essentially the same, including its corresponding policy solution of national integration.

Philippine independence in 1946 marked full-fledged Filipino nation-statehood. Because Moroland was incorporated into Philippine territory, however (or annexed, as some Moro nationalists would say), this event also sealed the loss of Moro independence.

Muslim (1994) sums up the historical roots and contemporary causes of the Moro problem listing 10 foundational causes from 1898 to 1972. Historical roots include (1) the forcible/illegal annexation of Moroland to the Philippines under the Treaty of Paris in 1898; (2) military pacification; (3) imposition of confiscatory land laws; (4) indionization (or Filipinization) of public administration in Moroland and the destruction of traditional political institutions; (5) government-financed/induced land settlement and migration to Moroland; (6) land-grabbing/conflicts; and (7) cultural inroads against the Moros **[Box 2.1].** Contemporary causes are (8) the Jabidah Massacre in 1968; (9) Ilaga (Christian vigilante) and military atrocities in 1970-72; and (10) government neglect and inaction on Moro protests and grievances. The triggering event of the contemporary Moro armed struggle was President Ferdinand E. Marcos's declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972.

The contemporary conflict

The contemporary armed conflict on the Moro front may be set in periods as follows, based on qualitative changes in the situation, key issues, decisions, and developments:

1. Formative Years (1968-72)
2. Early Martial Law and Moro War of Liberation (1972-75)
3. First Peace Negotiations and Tripoli Agreement (1975-77)
4. Rest of the Marcos Regime (1977-86)
5. Aquino Administration (1986-92)
6. Ramos Administration (1992-98)
7. Recent Years: Estrada (1998-2001) and Arroyo Administrations (2001-present)

Presidential administrations are natural periods because of the differences in administration policy or approaches towards the Moro problem and the Moro liberation fronts. But there are also key developments *within* an administration that signify the beginning or end of a distinct period. This is especially so within the 20-year (1965-85) Marcos presidency, which, in terms of milestones in the Moro conflict, was marked by the 1968 Jabidah massacre, the 1972 declaration of martial law, the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, and the 1986 end of the Marcos dictatorship.

By the time of the short-lived Estrada administration and continuing into the Arroyo administration, ***three tracks had emerged, parallel though sometimes converging, which now constitute the current evolution of the Moro conflict:*** (1) the implementation of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement; (2) the GRP-MILF peace negotiations; and (3) Post-9/11 terrorism and counterterrorism on the Moro front.

Before discussing this current form of evolution, however, it would be instructive to discuss ***certain themes in the evolution of the contemporary Moro conflict which cut across the various periods from the formative years to the current years.*** Among these are standard bearer, main demand or aspiration, forms of struggle and features, and main GRP policy responses. In the process, also discussed are international influences and other contributory factors **[Box 2.2].**

Moro standard bearer

The main standard bearer of the contemporary Moro armed struggle, at least from 1972 to 1996, has been the ***Moro National Liberation Front*** (MNLF). The MNLF was founded in 1969 by its long-time Chairman ***Nur Misuari*** as an instrument for the liberation of the Moro nation "from the terror,

Box 2.1 Historical roots of the Moro struggle: The Lanao perspective[1]

Scholars of Philippine history are unanimous in their account of the Moro people being the most dominant and advanced groups all over the Philippine archipelago before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers. They dominated both local and international economy, particularly trade, and possessed the most advanced technology of that period, which enabled them to produce surplus and engage in foreign trade. In politics, they had the most organized and centralized form of government, albeit feudal. The Sultanates as a political organization already existed in 1450 A.D.

Furthermore, two Bangsamoro "nation-states" existed before colonizers arrived in the archipelago. The Sulu and the Maguindanao Sultanates had, by the time of Spaniard's arrival, already perfected the requisites of nationhood, namely, territory, people, government, and sovereignty. And in the history of the Bangsamoro Sultanate, citizens included the non-Moro.

The Maranaos of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City share the same collective psyche with the rest of the Moros in Mindanao in their view of the historical injustice or holocaust inflicted by the Spanish and American colonialists and the Philippine Republic.

Spanish Colonial Period (1567-1898) The Spanish invasion of the Lanao region started with a recollect mission at Bayug, near present-day Iligan City in 1637. From this location they launched an invasion of the lake basin in 1639 but when they failed to subjugate the Moros, they retreated and built a fort to block Muslim fighters to the bay of Panguil (now Iligan Bay) (Majul, 1973:140-142). Because the Spaniards were aided by their Christian Filipino (Indio) allies, the campaign solidified a deadly Muslim-Christian antagonism in the region, and established the Christian "indios" as representatives of the colonial invaders.

For 200 years, the Lanao Muslim kept on resisting the Spaniards even as Muslim power disintegrated elsewhere in Mindanao. There was little interaction across the boundary between Muslim and Christian groups, and the small number of transactions that took place were usually facilitated by third parties, normally by the Chinese. The Spaniards finally succeeded in building and holding a fort in the lake area only after heavy campaigning in 1851-1895. Still the Muslims kept the fort under constant desultory siege [Majul, 1973:312-14].

American Colonial Period (1898-1946) According to Peter Gowing [1977:84], the initial American policies in Lanao closely paralleled those of the late Spanish regime, although American officials were more concerned with impressing the Maranao with their concern for the "personal welfare and material prosperity' of the indigenes. The American policies reflected both objectives of military control and pacification. Along with the military subjugation of the area, roads were opened on the coast to entice Maranao contact with the pacified Christian population (Philippine Commission, 1901:36). While administrative separation of the Muslim and Christian spheres was maintained, the territorial boundary between the two groups was breached.

Commonwealth Period and the Philippine Republic (1946 -) Among the Muslims in the Philippines, the Maranaos were the most critical of the commonwealth government. They criticized of the government's emphasis to develop Mindanao for the benefit of the country, the assignment to the province of officials with no experience or little knowledge of Maranao culture, the Military Training Act which required a quota of young men to undergo military training outside of their province, especially if they had to serve under Christian Filipino officers. Moreover, they were hostile to government tax collection campaigns, and indifferent to the incentives given in order to increase school attendance. The increasing number of Christian settlers who farmed traditional lands, held offices, and dominated the educational system infuriated the Maranao who felt their ancient legacies were being undermined. The dissatisfaction sparked several confrontations with government forces occurred [Dansalan Quarterly Vol. III/3 (1982); Vol. VI, 1984].

This period marked the dramatic political and economic dislocation of the Muslims. During the commonwealth, but more so during the post-war decades, the influx of thousands of migrant families affected large parts of Muslim areas especially in Cotabato and Lanao. In the Kapatagan basin in the western part of what is today Lanao del Norte, for instance, the number of Christian families increased to 8,000 in 1941. By 1960 there were some 93, 0000 Christians. This greatly outnumbered the 7,000 Maranaos still living in the area, resulting in 1959 in the political division of the Lanao Province into two—Lanao del Norte dominated by Christians, and Lanao del Sur by Muslims. The Maranao found themselves a minority in areas they once dominated.

The Muslims resented the loss of their lands, including those idle but which formed part of their traditional community. This resentment grew as Muslims witnessed the usurpation by Christian settlers of vast tract of prime lands. This ignited disputes between them and the Christian settlers. The question on land ownership and land disputes between Muslims and Christians was crucial during the post-war period. Journalist T.J.S George describes the intensity of such disputes, thus:

"...Virtually every incident sprouted from land disputes, religions only lending intensity to them. After migration gained momentum, the disputes multiplied in thousands. In one month in 1962, the Commission on National Integration listed cases involving 20,000 hectares valued at P20 million…More often than not, these cases went against Muslims as they were decided under Philippine laws [Dansalan Quarterly Vol. III/3 (1982); Vol. VI, 1984].

[1] Taken from Busran-Lao, 2005. See references for Chapter 1

oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism" and "to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsa Moro people." Born of the ***Jabidah massacre*** of March 1968 **[Box 2.3]**, the MNLF led the armed resistance in Mindanao against the Marcos martial law regime and was the main vehicle for placing the Moro cause on the national and international agenda. The MNLF's lasting contribution has been to make the name "Moro" respectable and the basis of a common identity and consciousness for 13 disparate ethno-linguistic groups of Muslims in their historical homeland of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan (or Minsupala). In practice, the MNLF tended to project the nationalist (national self-determination) and territorial (homeland) dimension more than the Islamic one.

The MNLF was and continues to be recognized as "the sole legitimate representative of Muslims in

Box 2.2 Periods and themes in the evolution of the armed conflict on the Moro front

	Formative years (1968-72)	Early martial law and Moro war of liberation (1972-75)	1st Peace negotiations and Tripoli Agreement (1975-77)	Rest of Marcos regime (1977-86)	Aquino administration (1986-92)	Ramos (1992-98)	Recent years (1998-2004)
Moro Groups (* Standard Bearer)	MIM (1968) MNLF(1969)* BMLO (1970)	MNLF*	MNLF* (Split: "New MNLF Leadership", 1977)	MNLF* (Split: MNLF—RG, 1982, MILF, 1984) BMLO (re-emergence)	MNLF* MILF ASG (1991)	MNLF* MILF ASG	MILF* MNLF (4 Factions) ASG Factions
Main Demand or Aspiration	Independence	Independence	Autonomy under the 1976 Tripoli Agreement (TA)	Independence / Implementation of TA	Independence / Implementation of TA	Autonomy under the 1996 Peace Agreement (PA)	Independent Islamic State (MILF & ASG) Implementation of 1996 PA (MNLF)
Main Policy Response	Triggering Events	Martial Law and Military Campaigns	OIC/OPEC Diplomacy & Peace Negotiations	Divide & Rule Cooptation & Coercion	1987 Phil. Constitution & RA 6734 for ARMM; "Multilateral Consensus—Building Approach"	Comprehensive Peace Process & "Six Paths to Peace" (EO 125)	"Military Victory" Position and "Pacification & Demobilization" Position; RA 9054 for New ARMM
Forms of Struggle (ranked)	Preparations for Armed Struggle	1. Armed Struggle 2. Islamic Diplomacy	1. Peace Talks w/ OIC 2. Islamic Diplomacy	1. Islamic Diplomacy 2. Armed Struggle	1. Islamic Diplomacy 2. Armed Struggle 3. Peace Talks w/o OIC	1. Peace Negos. w/ OIC 2. Islamic Diplomacy	Both Peace Negotiations and Armed Struggle
Main Features of Armed Struggle	"Ilagas" vs. "Barracudas"	Conventional & Positional Warfare	Reduction (1975) & Ceasefire (1977)	Guerrilla Warfare (MNLF) Military Build-up (MILF)	Guerrilla Warfare (MNLF) Initial Salvoes (MILF)	Cease-fire w/ MNLF; Acts of Terrorism by ASG	Cease-fire & Hostilities, Semi- Conventional to Guerrilla Mode (MILF); More & Bigger Acts of Terrorism by ASG

Box 2.3 Contemporary causes: The Jabidah massacre and the Ilaga

Among the foundational causes cited by Dr. Macapado Muslim (1994), two in particular aggravated the marginalization and unrest of the Muslim communities in the 1960s and triggered the contemporary Bangsamoro armed struggle.

1. The "Jabidah" or Corregidor massacre on March 17, 1968. At least 28 young Muslim recruits in the Philippine Army (PA) were killed by their Christian superiors on the island of Corregidor, triggering outrage at the local, national, and international levels. It also became a turning point in the political careers of the politically awakened Moro youth, including Nur Misuari and others in Metro Manila universities, leading to the formation of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). To many Moros, the acquittal of all the accused military officers involved in the massacre signalled the government's low regard for Muslim lives.

2. The subsequent massacres of Muslims and the burning of their homes and mosques by Chistian vigilante groups, particularly the Ilaga, and some units of the military from 1970-1972. The Ilaga, the most notorious among the Christian vigilante groups, was reported to have been organized by seven local Christian politicians ("Magnificent Seven") and supported by influential Christian capitalists and logging magnates. The Ilaga was the most feared by many Muslims because of what its members did to their victims (carving out ears, slashing nipples, plucking out eyes, and marking bodies with crosses).

Ilaga atrocities started in Muslim villages of the then two Cotabato provinces (North Cotabato and South Cotabato), then spread to the province of Lanao del Sur, particularly the municipality of Wao (one of the centers of Christian Filipino migration), and to several Muslim towns in Lanao del Norte, Bukidnon and Zamboanga del Sur. For two years, practically all Muslim areas in Mindanao were under siege by the Ilaga.

Ilaga atrocities included the massacre of 70 Muslims and the wounding of 17 others inside a mosque and a nearby school in the barrio of Manili in Carmen, North Cotabato, on June 19, 1971. There were several more incidents like the Manili massacre but the government's failure to stop these led many Muslims (including some government officials) to believe that the military was involved. In fact, many Muslims believed that the Ilaga members were actually government soldiers made to appear as Christian civilian armed elements.

Simultaneous with the reported Ilaga atrocities were the massacres of Muslims reportedly by units of the Philippine Constabulary and the Philippine Army. They also happened in many areas where the Ilaga operated, like the Muslim towns in Cotabato and Lanao del Norte, and likewise went unpunished. Among such incidents were the January 19, 1971, massacre of 73 Muslims in Alamada, North Cotabato, and the November 22, 1971, massacre of 37 Muslims in Barrio Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte. An additional 22 Muslims were wounded and 140 reported missing in the second incident.

Ilaga atrocities against the Muslims and the military converted several Muslim areas into "killing fields," while the rest were used as evacuation centers. The Muslims in these areas and those of neighboring towns were forced to leave their farms and homes, many of which were subsequently looted and occupied by Christians. Muslim lawyer-delegates to the 1971 Constitutional Convention listed, among the Muslim areas vacated, burned and occupied or to be occupied by incoming Christian settlers the municipalities of Alamada in North Cotabato; Upi and Ampatuan in Maguindanao; Bagumbayan, Isulan, Columbio, and Palembang in Sultan Kudarat province; and Wao, Lanao del Sur. Also targeted were all Muslims along the national highway in Lanao del Norte, a distance of over 100 kilometers; all Muslims living in several municipalities along the National Highway and in several small villages along the seacoast of Zamboanga del Sur; and all Muslims living in several municipalities in Bukidnon.

The Ilaga and military atrocities had a strong radicalizing effect on the Moro masses, even in areas where the Ilaga had not operated like Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi. Muslim residents outside the centers of atrocities felt the gravity of the situation as thousands of evacuees flooded their areas. As more atrocities plagued Muslim areas in 1971 (especially in the few months preceding the November 1971 election), village-level self-defense units started to develop, especially in Mainland Mindanao where the Ilaga depredations were spreading.

How the Ilaga brutalities and military attacks emotionally touched many Muslims is illustrated by an interviewee of Dr. Muslim in Cotabato. The interviewee traced the beginning of his involvement in the contemporary struggle to the massacre of some 70 Muslims in Manili, Carmen, North Cotabato, on June 19, 1971. Then a government employee, he went to the area on hearing of the incident, and saw the bodies of the victims, mostly old men, women, and children. What touched him most, however, was the sight of a little girl among the few who survived sucking the breast of her dead mother. Right there, he made the decision to help fight the Ilaga and the government. After helping haul the bodies and before going home, he bought big quantities of rice, salt and other basic food items which his family would require while he was away. He and his relatives were among the small and isolated armed groups that resisted the Ilaga and the military in Cotabato during the pre-martial-law period. And as the violence escalated after the declaration of martial law, he joined the then-fledgling MNLF. Until now, he is a mujahideen.

This mujahideen did not have relatives among the Manili massacre victims. But if he was moved, how much more the children, siblings and parents of these and other victims. This is one reason why the MNLF did not find difficulty recruiting men and women when it began to assume leadership of the Moro resistance.

Taken from Busran-Lao, 2005

Southern Philippines (Bangsamoro people)" by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and is the signatory party to the ***1976 Tripoli Agreement*** and ***1996 Jakarta Accord*** to address, if not solve, "the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines." Following the Jakarta Accord, the MNLF has been at the helm of the regional government of the ARMM.

In 1977, the failure of negotiations on the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement (discussed below) led to a split in the MNLF. Misuari, in response to the failure, wanted to revert to armed struggle for independence, but his Vice-Chairman ***Salamat Hashim*** was for exhausting the peace process for autonomy under the Tripoli Agreement. Hashim's group officially declared itself a separate organization in March 1984, calling itself the ***Moro Islamic Liberation Front***. ***The split, which would shape the later course of the Mindanao conflict and peace process,*** was based on differences not only in political strategy (armed struggle vs. peace negotiations) and objectives (independence vs. autonomy) but also more fundamentally in ideological orientation (secular-nationalist vs. Islamic revivalist), leadership styles (centralized vs. consultative), and ethnic allegiances (Tausug vs. Maguindanao), reflecting the respective spheres of the historical Sulu and Maguindanao sultanates, respectively. At least since the advent of the Estrada administration in 1998, the MILF has been the main standard bearer of Moro aspirations, stated by the Second Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly as "an Islamic ideological paradigm …the framework of our vision to establish a new nation in fulfillment of the quest to reassert our right to self-determination and freedom."

MNLF fragmentation continued in March-June 1982 with the emergence of the Maranao-based MNLF-Reformist Group (MNLF-RG) and the re-emergence (after the breakdown of the Tripoli Agreement) of the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO). Both groups died natural deaths in the mid-1980s, however, marking the definitive passing away of the traditional Muslim elite leadership over the Moro struggle.

In fact, Bangsamoro generational change has been a critical variable in the whole Mindanao conflict and peace process, and "the upcoming generation will be the most influenced by the unfolding international tendencies in the Muslim world." The ***Abu Sayyaf*** group was formed mainly by ***Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani*** in Western Mindanao in 1991 after being exposed to radical Islamism abroad and particularly the *jihad* against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They represent a younger and more radical Bangsamoro generation disgruntled with the MNLF leadership. They have wanted an independent Islamic state for the whole of Mindanao and use extremist, terrorist methods against Christian civilians—thus ***antedating "9/11" by at least one decade.*** How the Bangsamoro successor generation "relates to the existing configuration of MNLF, MILF, and Abu Sayyaf options, or whether it will develop new options of their own, is an unknown quantity of great importance."

Main demand or aspiration

The main demand or aspiration represented by the two Moro liberation fronts since 1968 has alternated between *independence* and *autonomy*. In the current conjuncture, the MILF represents the "independence track" for the Moros while the MNLF represents the "autonomy track."

From the 1968 Jabidah massacre up until 1976, independence was the agenda of the new Moro movement. The ***Tripoli Agreement*** of December 23, 1976, mediated by the OIC, changed the dispute issue from independence to autonomy, and is ***the most significant juncture in the evolution of the GRP-MNLF peace process.*** It became the main term of reference between the GRP and the MNLF for the next 20 years and led to autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines within Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity. Thirteen provinces and all the cities and villages therein would be covered but these would be subject to a plebiscite among the

people there. Foreign policy, national defense, and mines and mineral resources would be under the central government but nine substantive issues would be tabled for later discussion and detailed in a final agreement. A provisional government appointed by the President was to be established. The GRP was to take all necessary constitutional processes to implement the agreement.

The implementation of the Tripoli Agreement was immediately problematic. In March 1977, Marcos issued Proclamation 1628, creating two regional autonomous governments—thereby dividing into two groupings and reducing by three the 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement—and then subjecting this to a plebiscite in April. The MNLF rejected this new arrangement, leading to a breakdown in the peace talks, the cease-fire and the autonomy process. Tempered by diplomatic support from the OIC, however, the trajectory of the MNLF was still to push for the Tripoli Agreement's implementation.

The eventual ouster of Marcos in 1986 and the assumption of Corazon C. Aquino to the presidency led to a cease-fire, a resumption of peace negotiations, and the ***Jeddah Accord*** of January 1987. The accord actually deviated from the Tripoli Agreement by entertaining an MNLF proposal for full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan (23 provinces all in all) "subject to democratic processes." However, the accord was overtaken in February 1987 by the ratification of the ***1987 Philippine Constitution***, which had provisions for an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao "within the framework of this Constitution and the national sovereignty, as well as territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines." This had the most strategic and far-reaching consequences, for better or for worse, on the Mindanao peace and autonomy process because certain parameters for the autonomous region were now embedded in the fundamental law of the land. Again, the MNLF rejected it for having no part in its formulation. It unsuccessfully suggested the suspension of the plebiscite as far as the proposed constitutional provisions on autonomous regions were concerned.

Under the Ramos administration the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement or ***Jakarta Accord*** was signed on September 2, 1996. This was deemed as the final and full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement although, again, it was a deviation. In lieu of the MNLF-desired provisional government, it conceptualized a transitional implementing structure and mechanism: Phase 1, three-year extendible transitional Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) to give the MNLF the chance to prove itself over a now 14-province Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD); Phase 2, congressional action and a plebiscite on a new organic act incorporating the Peace Agreement on the substance of autonomy (to replace that of the existing ARMM); and the operation of the new Regional Autonomous Government. In the meantime, a GRP offer *outside* of the formula was accepted by the MNLF for an alliance with the ruling party, enabling the MNLF to gain control over the existing ARMM through elections held immediately after in September 1996.

The MILF found the latter agreement wanting. Not only was it a deviation from the framework of the Tripoli Agreement; it was not a solution to the Bangsamoro problem. In elaborating on this single talking point for its peace talks with the GRP, the MILF said "Finding a *political* and lasting solution to this problem will form part of the agenda in the forthcoming formal talks between the GRP and the MILF panels, *with the end in view of establishing a system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people*." (italics supplied).

It is no secret that the ***maximum objective of the MILF is an independent Islamic state,*** although this is not presented as its position in the current peace talks (as the GRP would clearly not negotiate on this as a starting point). The MILF would leave it to the Bangsamoro people to be the final arbiter for acceptance of a suitable system or political solution.

Forms of struggle and main features of the armed conflict

The MNLF has waged three forms of struggle that would alternate in primacy during the various periods of the Moro conflict: **armed struggle, Islamic diplomacy,** and **peace negotiations.** These same forms would be used by the MILF during its turn as Moro standard bearer.

Armed struggle

The formative years of the Moro conflict saw depredations by and skirmishes between Christian vigilantes called "Ilagas" (see Box 2.3) and Muslim vigilantes called "Barracudas" and "Blackshirts." The series of Ilaga and military atrocities against Muslims in Mindanao from 1970 to 1972 caught international attention and raised concern in the Muslim world, especially when reported as acts of genocide. One particular BBC radio broadcast on the Manili massacre of 1971 drew the interest of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar al Ghadaffi. In March 1972, the OIC took official notice of the matter and in a resolution at the 3rd ICFM in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, it expressed "serious concern for the plight of Muslims living in the Philippines."

It would take President Marcos's martial-law proclamation in September 1972 to bring out the MNLF in open rebellion. An early thrust of martial law was the collection and confiscation of firearms from civilians, which, in the context of the two previous years of Ilaga and military atrocities, could only spark Muslim resistance. Exactly a month after martial law was declared, some MNLF Maranao forces (without the official go-ahead of the Central Committee) led an attack on GRP forces in Marawi City in Lanao del Sur, the so-called ***Marawi Uprising***. The "Moro war of liberation" then officially began in Misuari's Tausug heartland, Jolo Island, in November 1972. The Jolo offensive was followed by another in the Maguindanao heartland of Cotabato in Central Mindanao in February 1973.

To counter the MNLF offensive, President Marcos created the Central Mindanao Command (CEMCOM) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The fighting that ensued was considered the ***most serious threat to the security of the state,*** with the MNLF displaying all the earmarks of a military operation by an organized army, giving residents of Cotabato City a taste of war on their front steps. This was followed by another major MNLF assault on Jolo in February 1974, leading to the bloodiest battle between the MNLF and the AFP.

The Jolo and Cotabato battles were just the milestones among many battles in the "New Moro

Box 2.4 Counting costs of the protracted war in Southern Philippines 1969-1996

For the 7-year period from 1969 to 1976, Dr. Inamullah Khan, secretary-general of the World Muslim Congress, estimated the human costs of the conflict on the Moro front as follows:

Area	Dead	Wounded	Displaced
Cotabato	20,000	8,000	100,000
Lanao	10,000	20,000	70,000
Sulu, Tawi-Tawi	10,000	8,000	100,000
Zamboanga	10,000	10,000	40,000
Basilan	10,000	8,000	40,000
TOTAL	**60,000**	**54,000**	**350,000**

Loss of property was also estimated at between P300 million and P500 million.[1]

[1]Che Man, *Muslim Separatism* 114, citing Inamullah Khan, "The Situation in the Philippines" (typescript, 1979); Parouk Hussin, "The Marcos Regime Campaign of Genocide" in Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino, *Philippines: Repression and Resistance* (Utrecht, The Netherlands: Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino, 1981) 257-60; and Felipe B. Miranda, "The Military" in R.J. May and Francisco Nemenzo (eds.), *The Philippines After Marcos* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

War." The AFP mounted counteroffensives with a series of major military operations, from "Operation Sibalo" to "Operation Bagsik." The ***mainly conventional and positional war*** in 1973-74 saw the bloodiest fighting in the Philippines since World War II. It reached its peak and a stalemate in 1975. The veritable civil war also saw the worst violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by both sides **[Box 2.4].**

Islamic diplomacy and peace negotiations

No longer able to ignore the situation, the OIC in June 1974 urged the GRP to enter into peace negotiations with the MNLF. This signaled a new arena of struggle and Islamic diplomacy**,** with the OIC as the object of a diplomatic contest between the GRP and MNLF. In fact, after the 5th ICFM resolution in 1974, the contest was ***more diplomatic than military.*** Fighting had tapered off by 1975, and more so with the cease-fire in 1977. By the late 1970s, war tactics shifted to lower-intensity guerrilla and counterguerrilla mode.

Even before the OIC official involvement, however, the MNLF was approaching leaders of Muslim countries for support. The GRP would play catch-up, deploying its Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in what is perhaps the best evidence of the internationalization of the conflict.

Islamic diplomatic (and petroleum) pressure and the military stalemate led to peace negotiations between the GRP and the MNLF, another form of struggle. As described earlier, peace negotiations under Marcos were held from 1975 to 1977 featuring the Tripoli Agreement; under Aquino in 1986 and 1987 leading to the Jeddah Accord, and under Ramos from 1992 to 1996 resulting in the Jakarta Accord. In between negotiations, there was a "no war, no peace" situation, with occasional resumption of hostilities notwithstanding cease-fire agreements during each episode, especially under Marcos. While there were no negotiations, the conflict would be played out in the diplomatic circuit and to a lesser extent in the military field. OIC resolutions would almost perfunctorily call for further negotiations on and implementation of the Tripoli Agreement.

The short-lived 1977 cease-fire arising from the Tripoli Agreement validated the military stalemate and hostilities would resume with the breakdown in the post-Tripoli talks. Particularly bloody episodes such as the Patikul massacre in October 1977 wiped out Brig. Gen. Teodulfo Bautista and his men, and the Pata incident in February 1981, left 2,000 civilian casualties in the familiar pattern of massacre and counter-massacre.

A new situation for questions of war and peace between the GRP and the two Moro liberation fronts ensued with the February 1986 EDSA "People Power Revolution." This was dramatically illustrated by a protocol-breaking meeting between the new President Aquino and MNLF Chairman Misuari held in Jolo in September 1986 (which resulted in the Jeddah Accord). Soon thereafter, the MILF launched a five-day tactical offensive (the "MILF 5-Day War") leading to its own truce and meetings with President Aquino. Thus the MILF successfully conveyed the message that "it was not a pushover organization, but a power to reckon with."

Even as it had just clinched the final peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996, the Ramos administration pursued peace talks with the MILF, which led to a general cease-fire agreement in July 1997. Nonetheless, a pattern of recurrent hostilities started such as in Buldon in January 1997 and in Rajamuda in June 1997. There were also hostilities with the Abu Sayyaf, which surfaced towards the end of the Aquino administration. The Abu Sayyaf and the Islamic Command Council (ICC) breakaway group from the MNLF, made their presence strongly felt with the raid of Ipil town in the Zamboanga peninsula in April 1995, killing more than 50 people, looting banks, and burning almost all buildings in the town center.

Main GRP responses

The GRP response or approach to Moro unrest has, through the years, been characterized by **military counteroffensives** on the one hand, and ***rehabilitation, reconstruction*** and ***development*** interventions on the other. A good example of this was the policy response in the 1970s when ***Proclamation No. 1081*** of martial law and its ensuing military campaigns were "complemented" by a ***Reconstruction and Development (RAD) Program in Muslim Mindanao*** launched in 1973. The latter failed, however.

GRP responses have also been characterized by ***unilateralism***, especially during the Marcos and Aquino administrations. For example, Marcos's proclamation creating two regional autonomous governments in 1977 represented a unilateral "implementation" of the Tripoli Agreement, lending credence to the observation that Marcos never sincerely intended to implement it as signed. Another major example was the ratification of the ***1987 Philippine Constitution*** with provisions for an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao as the constitutional process for the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement although not in accordance with it. Early on, the Aquino administration had, even more than the Marcos regime, adopted a policy to de-internationalize the MNLF, avoid reference to the Tripoli Agreement and OIC mediation, and discourage negotiations to bide time for a new Congress to be elected and to enact an organic act for the autonomous region in accordance with the new constitutional provisions.

Because the Aquino administration had to deal with a military establishment averse to peace with the Moro (and communist) rebel groups, it shifted to a new strategy called the ***"multilateral consensus-building approach"*** which downgraded bilateral negotiations with rebel groups. One form this took was the multisectoral Mindanao Regional Consultative Commission (March-September 1988), which was, however, subjected to meddling from the executive department. In the end, many of the provisions it drafted for the organic act did not find their way into the final law (RA 6734, the Organic Act for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao). In the November 1989 plebiscite, only four out of the 13 provinces listed in the Tripoli Agreement voted to join the ARMM.

The multilateral consensus-building approach was carried on by the Ramos administration that created the National Unification Commission (NUC) in September 1992. Nationwide consultations conducted by the NUC, especially at the provincial then the regional levels up to May 1993, were the basis of its recommendations for a subsequent comprehensive peace process. The core of this was the "***Six Paths to Peace***" framework, eventually institutionalized through ***Executive Order No. 125*** in September 1993. The third path was "peaceful, negotiated settlement with the different rebel groups."

By the time of the current years of the Estrada and Arroyo administrations, ***three competing policy positions*** had crystallized. In the analysis of Dr. Paul Oquist of UNDP, these three competing positions existed across the years in Filipino society, in the governments, in the armed forces, and in civil society at the Bangsamoro, Mindanao and national levels. The three positions are: "***pacification and demobilization,***" consisting of negotiating concessions necessary to achieve the cessation of hostilities and demobilization of rebel combatants; "***military victory,***" advocating the military defeat of the MILF and NPA, the political defeat or marginalization of the MNLF, and the extermination of the Abu Sayyaf and other terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom groups; and the "***institutional peace-building***" position advocating the short-, medium- and long-term construction of policies and institutions for peace in the economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological spheres through participatory and consultative mechanisms.

These positions have combined in different proportions, especially the first two positions. For instance, ***Executive Order No. 3*** of February 2001 defining government policy for comprehensive peace efforts, might look like an "institutional peace-

building" position on paper but in practice—by the GRP peace negotiators and by the Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security (COC-IS) under ***Executive Order No. 21*** of June 2001—it has been the "pacification and demobilization" and sometimes the "military victory" positions. All three of the competing positions are at play in the Mindanao peace process and they all have significant sources of support in civil society and government. None of these stakeholders, including the AFP and the MILF, are monolithic in relation to these positions.

The relative influence of these positions has varied dynamically across time, and shifts have occurred not only from one administration to the another but also within one administration. Perhaps the best example of this in relation to the MILF front was the shift from the "all-out war" policy of President Estrada in 2000 to the "all-out peace" policy of President Arroyo in 2001, and then back again to an "all-out war" policy in 2002-03.

All told, there has been no policy consensus, coherence and consistency from the GRP side. Thus, the "extreme protraction of the peace process" —just about as protracted as the protracted people's wars themselves.

Three tracks in the current evolution of the GRP-Moro conflict

Three tracks comprise the current form of the armed conflict on the Moro front: (1) implementation of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement; (2) GRP-MILF peace negotiations; and (3) Post-9/11 terrorism and counterterrorism on the Moro front.

Implementation of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement (1996-present)

This might be referred to simply as the ***"MNLF track."*** It represents a Moro stream of **integration** into the Philippine political and economic mainstream. Although the established autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines is a limited one, there are still gains for the Bangsamoro people—in terms of recognition, representation, participation, access and power-sharing—from the final peace agreement and its implementation. The MNLF has adopted the path of "Liberation through Peace and Development," away from armed struggle. It has basically demobilized from combatant mode but has not disarmed, an arrangement mutually acceptable to both sides. With the MNLF integration of about 7,250 MNLF members into both the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP), or at least half of whatever force strength it had, one can say that the MNLF has been substantially defanged. Not completely, though, because some fighters, a lot of arms and a mass base still remain. The MNLF counts some 80,000 ex-combatants.

For two successive terms from 1996 to the present, the MNLF has been at the helm of the regional government of the ARMM. Some MNLF leaders have also successfully run for local government positions but not yet successfully for national positions. Invariably, they have found out that it is harder to run a government than to rebel against it. For some time, they were also at the helm of special regional development bodies like the SPCPD and the Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA) until these were abolished. At the ground level, some MNLF mass base communities have become "peace and development communities" benefiting from livelihood, cooperative and other projects, with main funding support from international and foreign development organizations.

However, the MNLF feels that the peace process particularly Phase 1, is being concluded unilaterally by the GRP without satisfactorily implementing important socioeconomic development requirements, including a verbal commitment to a so-called "Mini-Marshall Plan" for the SZOPAD. The MNLF blames the GRP for not providing the resources for this component, in the face of the economic needs of its ex-combatants, not to mention the non-MNLF poor in their areas **[Box 2.5].** As for Phase 2, which was signaled by ***R.A. 9054, New Organic Act for the ARMM***, the MNLF sees this as violating or not including aspects of the peace agreement, such as that

Box 2.5 Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Mindanao: A view from the communities

1. ODA in Mindanao. The 2002 MEDCO ODA update states that ODA programs and projects "continue to strengthen Mindanao's drive towards economic development and poverty alleviation by meeting the island's infrastructure requirements and ensuring effective governance."

It lists 24 ongoing projects exclusively for Mindanao, worth US$964.9 million. Among them are the World Bank-assisted Mindanao Rural Development Project (MRDP), aimed at increasing agricultural production, efficiency and diversification of rural economic activities, and the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) Social Fund, now the ARMM Social Fund (ASF) Program.

The MEDCO update also cites a NEDA-PIS report indicating that the total estimated value of ODA commitments and pipeline projects in Mindanao reached US$ 261.2 million and US$816.7 million.

2. Issues on the Impact of ODA Projects. While a more systematic discourse on the impact of ODA-assisted programs and projects is needed, some questions are being raised by community-based organizations and advocacy networks.

2.1 Are people's realities counted? As part of a comprehensive package of political, economic and cultural reforms, projects are supposed to boost confidence and trust in the peace process among peace stakeholders, whether armed or unarmed. Participation of the broader populace in these projects is thus an essential to achieving goals beyond the material gains resulting from these projects.

In September 1999, the CO Multiversity completed an External Monitoring and Assessment of the SZOPAD Social Fund (SSF) to explore local stakeholders' perspectives on projects implemented up to August 1999. Most of the findings point to the need to make the projects more participatory, relevant and needs-based. Some findings:

- On knowledge of the SSF: There was an uneven response from the nonbeneficiaries of the SSF projects in terms of knowledge and information. Except for the Maguindanao and Cotabato areas, little information about the SSF reached them. Most nonbeneficiaries understood that this was an MNLF project and therefore only MNLF members were qualified to benefit. Thirty percent of respondents said the MNLF members who benefited from the SSF were younger ones who did not participate in the long struggle and that those who were in the revolution remained poor, unable to get a share of the peace dividend.
- On project appraisal: The project proponents tended to be the family or close connections of the state chairs and/or the zone commanders because, initially, information and proposals were coursed through these two institutions. According to the SSF, however, this was necessary since the mandate of the Fund was to fast-track the delivery of assistance. As a consequence, people were barely consulted.
- Still, based on the simple information that SSF was supporting small infrastructure projects, there was a deluge of proposals from different parts of ARMM. These were of uneven quality, both in type and proponent organization, however. Organizations thus had a hard time complying with requirements; some projects did not benefit the community, but only a few who were close to the project proponents or managers.
- On project implementation: Due to the lack of people's participation in project design and construction, there was very little ownership of projects and most respondents were unclear about their participation, say, in the maintenance of the subprojects. This is especially true for the madrasah buildings whose ownership was sometimes unclear and maintenance was thus not guaranteed. Facilities such as solar dryers and warehouses were sometimes found idle and/or limited in use to the project proponents and managers.
- Lack of women's participation in the design and decision-making of the projects was evident in all areas visited.

As a result of that study, the second phase of the SZOPAD Fund contracted the services of NGOs to help undertake capacity-building interventions for six months for communities which had received projects. The timing of these interventions was rather late, however, as it came on the heels of an implemented project.

The third phase of the UN Multi-Donor Programme seems to have discovered a workable formula for ensuring people's participation. *Peace and Development Communities* (PDCs) are the focal point of the Programme's intervention and appear to be the most important innovation in mobilizing all stakeholders.

2.2 How much of ODA funds really reach communities? The visibility of expatriates sent in as consultants and technical experts for ODA-assisted programs raises the question of how much ODA funds reach communities and how much are ploughed back to donor countries. The Institute of Philippine Culture research entitled "Reforming Technical Cooperation: the Philippine Experience" devotes a section describing the consultancy mechanisms in the technical assistance projects funded through ODAs.

The study identified the role of Filipino professionals as consultants, either as members or partners in local consulting firms; individuals directly hired by government (Philippine or foreign, national or local), business firms, or multilateral or bilateral aid agencies; or professionals hired by a local or foreign consulting company that has won the bid for a project.

It is a common practice, though, for bilateral organizations to tap their nationals (individuals or firms) as principal consultants who may then partner with a local consultant or consulting firm. However, the rates for Filipino consultants are lower than those of the expatriates, and when local consultants are subcontracted by foreign or international consulting firms, task assignments include field or leg work and downstream activities. Local consultants thus complain about being overworked and doing bulk of the work.

Whether or not ODA funds are used judiciously, one can compare the rates of consultants and technical experts and the cost of a barangay power project. It cost the Iranun Farmers' Association of Brgy. Bayanga Norte in Matanog, Maguindanao, about P40,000 to install a barangay electrification cooperative in its village within the defense perimeter of Camp Abubakar. This is equivalent to approximately half of the monthly salary of a field program manager and a quarter of the monthly rate of a regional manager. Over two years, therefore, the opportunity cost of consultant fees in terms of POs that would have been able to install their own power systems is staggering. In Brgy. Mataya, Buldon of the same province, the same amount was used to build a multipurpose center which now serves as the nucleus of the ongoing peace dialogues and conflict mediation processes.

NGOs who work with some US-based donors also experienced having to agree, as part of the terms of reference, to purchase US-made or US-branded equipment. Again, the question: whose economy are these projects boosting?

Another approach and tool is the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), advocated by the Local Government Support Program (LGSP)[6] and The Asia Foundation (TAF)[7]. Peace zone communities in Maguindanao and Lanao Sur are learning that development does not always bring peace and, in many instances, even exacerbated the causes of conflict. In one instance, a community project for animal raising was scrapped because the need to select only a few beneficiaries was potentially very divisive among residents. In its place, a water system, envisioned to be more unifying and beneficial to majority of the people, was selected.

As most institutions have found, an integrated perspective and approach is an imperative to finding just and lasting solutions to the situation in Mindanao. The question is: how many of the ODA-assisted projects are ready to find precious time to undertake development work at the pace of peace?

Taken from *Putting the Money Where the Mouth Is: ODA in Mindanao, A View from the Communities* by Marides Gardiola. Background paper for the PHDR 2005

on strategic minerals. They view the new, expanded ARMM (with Basilan and Marawi City added) as too weak to address even basic human development needs. All told, there is a general sense in the MNLF of its being marginalized from participation in the peace process, including some leaders who feel they are being cut off or undercut by the GRP. These frustrations were at the backdrop of the outbreak of hostilities between Misuari and GRP forces in Sulu and Zamboanga in November 2001 and again in Sulu in February 2005.

The MNLF is now split into four factions, the two main factions being the Misuari group and the anti-Misuari "Council of 15." An MNLF unity process is, however, under way with support from Libya. Because of the MNLF split and leadership crisis, there has arisen in the OIC the question of representation of the MNLF as observer there. Parallel to this, the GRP has made a bid to replace the MNLF as observer on the basis mainly of the elected ARMM government representing the Muslims in Mindanao. The sense in the OIC seems to be to close the chapter in due time on the GRP-MNLF peace agreement implementation.

The MNLF has also, perhaps fatally, neglected to maintain or recreate itself as an organization, whether as a politico-military liberation organization or as "a political party and/or civil society movement and/or cooperative movement and/or business group, and preferably all of the above." The pacification scenario for the MNLF seems to have come to pass: concessions, cooptation, divide-and-rule, demobilization and, worse, political defeat or marginalization through its own mismanagement of the ARMM. It may almost be said that they won the war (by stalemating the AFP) but lost the peace.

The February 2005 hostilities in Sulu involving the MNLF Misuari group are, however, a wake-up call for this group which is now, by the number of its forces, more clearly, the real MNLF mainstream. Since in their perception the GRP is "destroying" the Peace Agreement, they now "are back to being MNLF." The Sulu hostilities should also be a wake-up call for the GRP. Contrary to its notions of the Sulu situation "normalizing," there is still a state of war there. For the GRP to treat what it calls the "Misuari Breakaway Group" as "lawless elements" to be destroyed like the Abu Sayyaf is to miss the point, at its own peril, about the real MNLF mainstream which may finally reject the moderate track of the Peace Agreement in favor of a more radical independence track now bannered by the MILF.

A Filipino Muslim scholar has astutely described the complementarity of the two Moro liberation fronts this way: "The MNLF and the MILF are separated ideologically, they are like security guards with shifting schedules. When one takes a nap, the other takes over." For the most part since 1996, while the MNLF has napped (though it has recently awakened), the MILF has taken over.

GRP-MILF peace negotiations (1997-present)

This might be referred to simply as the ***"MILF Track."*** With the unraveling of Misuari, the MNLF, the implementation of the peace agreement and the ARMM, the MILF has emerged as the main standard bearer of Moro aspirations. Its maximum long-term aspiration is an independent Islamic state, with Islam as a way of life and governance in predominantly Muslim areas. This is seen as the ultimate solution to the Bangsamoro problem of Philippine colonialism. The MILF ***tendency is to exit or separate/secede from the Philippine system rather than to access or share power in it.***

This brings the MILF into frontal conflict with the GRP. Besides the constitutional challenge it represents, the MILF is also a formidable military challenge. Though considered only second to the communist-led NPA as a threat to national security, the MILF has an estimated force of more than 12,000 concentrated in Central Mindanao (compared to just under 12,000 for the NPA dispersed nationwide), a force kept intact despite being subjected to two major AFP offensives in

three years, the "all-out war" of 2000 and the "Buliok offensive" of 2003. Before the "all-out war," the MILF had 13 major fixed camps and 33 secondary ones—on which basis it was oriented to semi-conventional warfare, including positional warfare with the AFP. The MILF has since shifted to a more mobile guerrilla mode with base commands still using field camps more remote or hidden than before.

While holding on to the armed struggle option, however, the MILF has made a ***strategic*** (not just tactical like the NDF) ***decision to give the peace negotiations a chance***, even a maximum chance, to achieve a negotiated political settlement or solution to the Bangsamoro problem. It has stayed with the peace negotiations track despite the two "treacherous" AFP offensives while peace negotiations were ongoing. It also agreed to the general mode of a cease-fire accompanying the peace talks (in contrast to the NDF's position of no cease-fire during peace talks until and unless there is a negotiated political settlement.) And the MILF equally treats armed struggle and peace negotiations—"war by other means"—as forms of struggle (unlike the NDF which adheres to the primacy of the former.)

Since 1997, the GRP-MILF peace negotiations have been held in two stages: a "domestic stage" from January 1997 to June 2000 and a "diplomatic stage" with Malaysian mediation from March 2001 to February 2003. The two suspensions, first from June 2000 to March 2001, and second from February 2003 to the present, were the direct results of the "all-out war" and "Buliok offensive." Although the pattern of recurrent hostilities has continued, this appears to have been broken since the mutual cease-fire agreed on in July 2003 (but marred by two firefights in January 2005) and will probably be consolidated with the support of international and civil society mechanisms to monitor the cease-fire.

This security aspect is complemented by rehabilitation and development, in which projects are supposed to be determined and managed by the MILF through its NGO, the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA). The novel idea here is to have a truce not only for negotiations but also for development; and for rehabilitation and development and negotiations to go hand in hand. This approach is supposed to create the right conditions on the ground for when contentious political issues are discussed.

There is some concern, however, about the peace talks falling into the same protracted pattern as experienced with the MNLF (and NDF). Although the MILF agenda "to solve the Bangsamoro problem" was presented early on, there still have been no negotiations on the substantive agenda, starting with ancestral domain. Itself already a complex, difficult, and contentious issue (even only in the context of indigenous peoples rights), ancestral domain is made more so by its possible linkage to territorial (e.g., homeland) and governance (e.g., self-rule) aspects of the Bangsamoro problem. The ancestral domain aspect is not necessarily the last substantive agenda item for the peace talks but it could be, if discussed comprehensively to fast-track a final peace agreement, as the GRP is inclined to do.

Enhancing the nominally MNLF-led ARMM is the GRP's preferred framework for a final peace agreement with the MILF based on power-sharing between the MNLF and MILF, their unity efforts being actually a parallel negotiation. The question is whether this framework will satisfy the MILF. If a "political and lasting solution to this Bangsamoro problem" can be found with "respect for the identity, culture and aspirations of all peoples of Mindanao," then the GRP-MILF peace negotiations can go beyond completing the solution to the Bangsamoro problem; it can also serve as a catalyst for the broader Mindanao peace process and even for the fight against terrorism on the Moro front. One of the bright spots of this process is the growing civil society-led movement for peace in Mindanao, sections of which have consciously adopted the human security framework. Hopefully, the emerging multiple international involvements—Malaysia, Libya, OIC, the US, the UN and other international organizations, some with a human security framework—will facilitate,

rather than complicate, the crucial GRP-MILF peace process.

The alternative, as again highlighted recently by the "all-out war" and the "Buliok offensive," are enormous costs, not only in human security and human development terms but also in economic and business terms.

Post-9/11 terrorism and counterterrorism on the Moro front (2001-present)

Terrorism in the Philippines predated "9/11" by at least one decade through the Abu Sayyaf which prefers to be referred to as *Harakatul al-Islamiya* (Islamic Movement). In a sense, it represents a certain track, that of ***local terrorism in relation to 9/11-type international terrorism.*** After Janjalani's death in 1998, the Abu Sayyaf degenerated from being a movement of young Moro rebels to banditry, with a confluence of Moro, outlaw and Islamic identities. It achieved international notoriety with the Sipadan hostage-taking in April 2000 and the Dos Palmas hostage-taking in May 2001. Both involved the bold kidnappings for ransom of Westerners including Americans, beheadings of civilian hostages and a cross-border foray into Malaysia in the case of Sipadan.

The Abu Sayyaf has been on the US list of "foreign terrorist organizations" for several years now, and was the target of joint US-Philippine "Balikatan 02-1" military exercises in Basilan in February 2002.

There are now several factions of the group though the most recognized leader is Janjalani's younger brother Khaddafy. After the bombing of a SuperFerry passenger ship in February 2004, regional intelligence officials and terrorism experts observed "the group is returning to its Islamic roots and is using the familiar weapons of terror—bombing and assassination—in an attempt to achieve an independent Muslim republic in the southern Philippines…" National Security Adviser [Norberto] Gonzales describes Abu Sayyaf as "by far the most dangerous group in the country today." It claimed responsibility for the Valentine's Day 2005 bombings in three big cities and for the following month's jailbreak in Bicutan which ended with a police siege killing 22 prisoners, only a few of whom were leaders of the jailbreak and of the Abu Sayyaf. Both the MNLF and the MILF have rejected and condemned its methods as "un-Islamic."

Memorandum Order No. 37, issued by President Arroyo in October 2001, provided for a 14-pillar anti-terrorism policy, which emphasized military measures. However, after 9/11, the militarization of the response to terrorism (e.g. Abu Sayyaf) has tended to be carried over to the response to rebellion (e.g., the MILF and the NPA). This approach has in turn tended to disregard human rights, thereby aggravating the problem by creating more terrorists and rebels.

The "global war on terror" has also made the armed conflict on the Moro front more intractable by localizing the "clash of civilizations" through the "terrorist" profiling of Muslims in general and Moros in particular. The negative impact on the Mindanao peace process is, therefore, not only vertical (on the peace negotiations at the top) but also horizontal (on the Christian-Muslim relations at the community level.) There has been a discernible increase in discrimination against Muslims in Mindanao and in other parts of the Philippines.

Many reports, intelligence as well as journalistic, and some evidence indicate Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah operations in the Philippines, highlighted by the rash of urban terrorist bombings in 2000, and linkages with the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf going several years back. The difference is that these linkages have been renounced by the MILF post-9/11 but not by the Abu Sayyaf. More recently, the MILF has also joined the fight against terrorism.

Military solutions "will only treat the symptom, not the disease…military solutions in counterterrorism should be carefully targeted and efficiently, and democratically monitored: the use of counterterrorism as a legitimation for human-rights violations could make the medicine more deadly than the disease." Counterterrorism should not be misused

by the GRP to target political opposition, including Moro "unarmed struggle." Governments must ensure that counterterrorism measures respect the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL)—key principles upheld in some peace agreements—and create or reinforce mechanisms that monitor and hold the state accountable to human rights and constitutional standards.

Conclusion

Addressing the root causes of rebellion in Mindanao would also address the root causes of terrorism there. The armed conflict on the Moro front had better evolve in this direction, for the sake of human security and human development in Mindanao and the rest of the Philippines. Of the three tracks constituting the current form of evolution of this conflict, the ***MILF track seems to be a linchpin of the broader Mindanao peace process and the legitimate fight in defense against terrorism.*** This is because this track is still evolving. In the MNLF track, the final peace agreement has encountered problems in implementation, some of which may be due to the inadequacy of the agreement itself. The third track, the nature of the terrorist problem with the Abu Sayyaf, does not partake of peace negotiations.

The MILF track is the key link that merits priority. The two other tracks deserve proper attention. A good indication of this is the policy statement from the MILF's highest level rejecting terrorism and terrorist links, its entering into joint action arrangements with the GRP for the interdiction of criminal elements, and its actual cooperation with the AFP in striking against such elements as the Pentagon gang, which is on the US list of "foreign terrorist organizations." The MILF also has ongoing unity processes and links with both main MNLF factions, namely, the Misuari group and the "Council of 15." It in fact offered to mediate between the MNLF Misuari group and the GRP regarding the recent Sulu hostilities.

***Giving priority to the MILF Track is the bold step that must be taken for peace in our* time,** rather than the path of least resistance of just keeping to Track One. The MNLF can be expected not to begrudge additional gains for Bangsamoro aspirations (such as those not adequately addressed by the 1996 Peace Agreement), which the MILF might achieve in its negotiations with the GRP. At the same time, the GRP should realize that the MILF did not split from the MNLF in 1977 and continue to wage its own struggle, only to end up with a mere enhancement of the ARMM. It has to be qualitatively and substantially better than that.

Neither should the MILF just sweep aside the gains from the MNLF track. In fact, at one point it may seem necessary for the negotiations to bring in the MNLF. One proposal is for a three-cornered peace process leading to "a new peace agreement involving the GRP, MNLF and MILF." Since the GRP-MNLF peace negotiations have been concluded, anything new will have to come from the pending GRP-MILF peace negotiations which are only about to enter the substantive phase. Then things could eventually settle anywhere between the existing ARMM and Bangsamoro independence. A more recent proposal is to establish a GRP-MNLF-MILF Commission on Bangsamoro self-determination with an MNLF-MILF working group within it to review the existing ARMM and determine what key changes may be necessary.

Thus, the MILF-MNLF unity process should be sustained, as with the MNLF unity process. "It is difficult to imagine an experiment in Islamic self-determination succeeding against a backdrop of Moro disunity. While such disunity may have been instigated by Manila's imperial governments in the past, no amount of constitutional accommodation by the center can solve this now for Muslim Mindanao. Self-determination now requires that the Bangsamoro people imagine themselves as one nation."

MILF-MNLF unity or interface should be seen in the context of *finally completing the solution* to the Bangsamoro problem. If at least the most important aspirations of the Bangsamoro people are addressed, then there should be no more social basis for another,

new Moro rebellion. This would leave, if ever, only fringe extremist groups like the Abu Sayyaf, who would be better dealt with by the Moro people and mainstream groups themselves. For example, in Sulu, the common main area of operation of the MNLF Misuari group and the Abu Sayyaf, the MNLF State chairman says that if things between the MNLF and the GRP are resolved, then solving the Abu Sayyaf problem is next in line for them.

This is also why it is important for the GRP to properly and immediately handle the current state of war in Sulu with the MNLF Misuari group. How the GRP handles the situation will have a bearing on the GRP-MILF peace negotiations which has much promise as it resumes. What is really at stake here is whether this whole conflict can be ended in this generation, or whether it will be passed on to the next one and evolve into a new form.