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Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: The Mindanao Experience

Merliza M. Makinano and Alfredo Lubang

Prepared for the
International Security Research and Outreach Programme
International Security Bureau

February 2001



Department of Foreign Affairs
and International Trade

Ministère des Affaires étrangères
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PREFACE

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade or of the Government of Canada.

The International Security Research and Outreach Programme commissioned a study to address the following issues:

- i. What factors have driven the separatist conflict in Mindanao?
- ii. Through what vectors have small arms and light weapons typically flowed into Mindanao?
- iii. What policy instruments has the Philippine government used to stem this flow, and to reintegrate the Muslim separatists on Mindanao? What role did outside agencies/states play in this regard? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the central government's approach to disarmament and demobilization, and to what extent can this be considered responsible for the level of success experienced by this effort? What role did sub-national community and other groups play in this regard?

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade wishes to acknowledge the work performed under contract through the International Security Research and Outreach Programme in the preparation of this report by the authors: Merliza Makinano and Alfredo Lubang.

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Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
February 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an attempt to analyze the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) experience of Mindanao, this study delves into the historical background of the conflict on this island, together with the vectors of firearms imports, government efforts to curb the proliferation of firearms, and the negotiations for peace.

A number of factors have been attributed as the causes of the Mindanao conflict, including religion, Muslim oppression and socio-economic deprivation, the political machinations of various domestic and foreign forces, and the Philippine Government's ineptitude in Mindanao. Calls for Muslim autonomy, secessionism or federation eventually took an armed revolutionary dimension in the 1970s, led by the radical elements of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The proliferation of small arms has exacerbated the conflict in Mindanao. As early as 1969, the MNLF enjoyed foreign support, including the supply of arms and military training. Present-day sources of illegal firearms circulating in Mindanao include those firearms lost during military or police operations, unlicensed manufacturers, foreign shipments, gunrunning, and rebels' manufacture of their own firearms. In 1998, police figures suggested that there were some 329,985 firearms nationwide in the hands of gun enthusiasts, political warlords, criminal syndicates, and even government officials and employees.

In Mindanao, individuals possess firearms for security, power and prestige, as well as for socio-economic reasons. It is also reportedly the "culture" among Muslims to possess firearms, as Muslims from this region often associate the right to possess firearms with their religious heritage. In addition, the easy access and affordability of firearms contributes to their proliferation. Gun smuggling is also prevalent, given to the country's geographic configuration, prospects for huge profits, increased connivance between syndicates and police officers, and involvement on the part of politically influential families. To date, despite government efforts to address the problem, guns still proliferate in Mindanao.

Since 1946, the Philippine Government has also tried to resolve the conflict in Mindanao primarily through assimilation and autonomy, as well as a combination of military, political, economic and social means. However, the fighting between government and secessionist forces continued until the relative peace in 1996, which was achieved with the signing of the peace agreement between the Government and MNLF.

The integration of the MNLF forces into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) is the most tangible elements of success achieved the 1996 peace agreement. By September 1999, a total of 4,850 MNLF members have been integrated into the AFP and PNP respectively. However, this reintegration of the MNLF members to the mainstream society was done without disarmament and demobilization. The Government recognized that the MNLF could not be forced to turn in their firearms and thus chose to emphasize instead the MNLF's

voluntary surrender of their firearms. As of September 1999, some 4,874 firearms have been turned in by MNLF integreees into the government arsenal under the "Balik-Bari" Program.

The study then concludes with a brief look into the possible roles of peace organizations, religious institutions and local educational institutions towards effective DDR efforts in Mindanao.

RÉSUMÉ

Pour tenter d'analyser l'expérience de désarmement, démobilisation et réintégration (DDR) à Mindanao, cette étude aborde le contexte historique du conflit qui sévit dans l'île, ainsi que les vecteurs d'importation des armes à feu, les efforts du gouvernement pour mettre un frein à la prolifération des armes, et les négociations de paix.

Le conflit de Mindanao a été attribué à divers facteurs, dont la religion, l'oppression musulmane et les privations socio-économiques, les machinations politiques de diverses forces nationales et étrangères, et l'ineptie du gouvernement philippin à Mindanao. Les appels à l'autonomie, à la sécession ou à la fédération ont pris une dimension révolutionnaire dans les années 1970, à l'instigation des éléments radicaux du Front moro de libération nationale (MNLF).

La prolifération des armes légères exacerbe le conflit. Dès 1969, le MNLF a été soutenu de l'étranger, notamment sous forme de livraisons d'armes et d'entraînement militaire. Les principales sources actuelles d'armes à feu illégales à Mindanao sont les armes perdues au cours d'opérations militaires ou policières, la fabrication clandestine, les livraisons de l'étranger, la contrebande, et la fabrication par les rebelles eux-mêmes. En 1998, selon les chiffres publiés par la police, quelque 329 985 armes à feu se trouvaient dans le pays, entre les mains d'amateurs d'armes à feu, de chefs de guerre politiques, de bande criminelles, et même de fonctionnaires et d'agents du gouvernement.

À Mindanao, les particuliers possèdent des armes à feu pour leur sécurité, pour le pouvoir et le prestige, ainsi que pour des raisons socio-économiques. On dit aussi qu'il est dans la « culture » des musulmans de posséder des armes à feu, car les musulmans de cette région associent souvent le droit de posséder des armes à feu à leur patrimoine religieux. En outre, l'accès facile aux armes et leur bas prix contribuent à leur prolifération. La contrebande des armes est également répandue, en raison de la configuration géographique du pays, des bénéfices énormes à réaliser, de la connivence de plus en plus courante entre les syndicats criminels et les agents de police, et de la participation de familles politiquement influentes. Encore aujourd'hui, malgré les efforts des gouvernements, les armes à feu prolifèrent à Mindanao.

Depuis 1946, le gouvernement philippin a aussi essayé de résoudre le conflit de Mindanao principalement par l'assimilation et l'autonomie, ainsi que par un assortiment de moyens militaires, politiques, économiques et sociaux. Cependant, les combats entre les forces gouvernementales et sécessionnistes ont continué jusqu'à la relative paix de 1996, instaurée à la signature de l'accord de paix entre le gouvernement et le MNLF.

L'intégration des forces du MNLF dans les forces armées et la police nationale philippines est le résultat positif le plus tangible de l'accord de paix de 1996. En septembre 1999, 4 850 membres du MNLF au total avaient été intégrés dans les deux forces. Cependant, la réintégration des membres du MNLF dans la société s'est faite sans désarmement ni démobilisation.

Le gouvernement a reconnu qu'il ne pouvait pas forcer le MNLF à rendre ses armes et a donc choisi de privilégier leur remise volontaire. En septembre 1999, quelque 4 874 armes à feu avaient été remises par des membres du MNLF et intégrées dans l'arsenal du gouvernement en vertu du programme « Balik-Baril ».

L'étude conclut ensuite par un rapide aperçu des rôles que pourraient jouer les organisations de paix, les institutions religieuses et les établissements d'enseignement locaux en faveur d'un DDR efficace à Mindanao.

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION: THE MINDANAO EXPERIENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

After twenty years of negotiations that spanned three political administrations, the peace agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was finally signed on September 2, 1996.¹

Implemented in two phases, Phase I is a three-year transition period while Phase II intends to build peace and confidence. Phase I has established the implementing mechanisms and institutions to the peace agreement: the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD),² the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), and a Consultative Assembly (CA) through Executive Order 371.³ Likewise, development task forces have been established under the SPCPD. Key MNLF personalities were appointed to development institutions, such as the Amanah Bank, the Southern Philippine Philippines Development Authority, and the President's Education for Peace Program.⁴ Phase 2 involves the Congressional amendment or repeal of Republic Act 6734 or Organic Act of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)⁵, after which a plebiscite (September 2000) will determine the shape of the new autonomous government and its specific areas of jurisdiction.⁶

¹ Signed by Ambassador Manuel T. Yan for the Philippine Government and Professor Nur Misuari for the MNLF and participated by the Indonesian Foreign Minister Mr. Ali Alatas, Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Ministerial Committee of the Six and H.E. Dr. Hamid Al-Gabid, the Secretary General of the OIC.

² The SZOPAD is composed of the provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Palawan and the cities of Cotabato, Dapitan, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Marawi, Pagadian, Zamboanga, and Puerto Princesa.

³ *The Philippines Today: Pole Vaulting into the 21st Century (Citius, Fortius, Altius): A Technical Report on the Five Year Accomplishments of the Ramos Administration*. Prepared by the Presidential Management Staff in coordination with concerned agencies, June 1997, p. 22.

⁴ *A Triumph for Peace and Development: The Implementation of the GRP -MNLF Peace Agreement 1996-1999*. Prepared by the National Security Council, March 1999, p.1.

⁵ The Act covered 13 provinces (now 14) but only Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao voted in a plebiscite. None of the component cities voted for inclusion. In addition to the 4 aforementioned ARMM provinces, the other provinces are: Basilan, Palawan, Lanao del Norte, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, Sarangani, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga del Norte. The component cities are: Dapitan, Cotabato, Dipolog, General Santos, Iligan, Marawi, Pagadian, Puerto Princesa, Zamboanga and the newly created Kidapawan.

⁶ The amendment to Republic Act 6734 will expand the autonomous region to include all 14 provinces and their component cities but only those who will vote "yes" in the September 2000 plebiscite will become part of the expanded ARMM.

The National Security Council considers the GRP-MNLF Agreement a success and has moved on to the second phase of its implementation.⁷ Accordingly, as of February 1998, the funding to foreign-assisted⁸ ongoing projects in the SZOPAD area was valued at P 25.6 billion, half of which was in infrastructure, 32 % in agro-industrial development, and 1 % development allocated towards administration.⁹ Another P 8.9 billion worth of projects have been undertaken within SZOPAD, including P 8 billion worth of projects implemented by government line agencies in infrastructure, energy development, and irrigation systems.¹⁰ Furthermore, specialized Government agencies spent some P 845 million for livelihood credit programs, aquaculture, housing, skills training, education and cooperatives in the MNLF communities.¹¹ Under the SZOPAD Social Fund, another P 18.7 million (funded by World Bank loans and counterpart funds from the Government) were spent for schoolbuildings, health centers and water systems for the same communities. An additional P 14.6 million were contributed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), and the SPCPD for livelihood projects and relief assistance.¹² Finally, from 1996 to 1997, P 198 million were released for the SPCPD's organizational and operating expenses.¹³

Despite these contributions, it is perceived that the high expectations regarding economic development in Mindanao have not been met. For instance, while Manila has allotted some US\$ 600 million from 1990 to 1999 for the autonomous region, it has little to show in terms of major infrastructure projects.¹⁴ It is only of late that President Joseph Estrada has approved about US \$ 25 million from the Department of Budget for the construction of the 162 km. Jolo Circumferential

⁷ *Official Reference on the Strategy of "Total Approach"*. Presentation of National Security Adviser, Secretary Alexander Aguirre before the Diplomatic Corps, Department of Foreign Affairs, 4 January 2000.

⁸ The international donor program is under the auspices of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the SPCPD and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and involves the implementation of livelihood projects, skills training, capability building and emergency assistance to the MNLF. Donors include the UNDP, World Bank Social Fund, USA Emergency Livelihood Assistance, Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA), Japanese International Cooperation Assistance (JICA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), ADB Adult Literacy Program, and the Belgian, Australian, German humanitarian assistance programs.

⁹ *Six-Year Accomplishment Report: 15 September 1993 to 15 May 1998*, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, p. 14.

¹⁰ A Triumph for Peace and Development, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Antonio Lopez, "Mindanao's Chance" in *Asiaweek* at <<http://pathfinder.com/asiaweek/current/issue/nat4-2.html>>

Road project that has become the flagship project of Misuari.¹⁵ Estrada also approved the construction of P 4.3 billion worth of 163 steel bridges (total span of 7,476 meters) in the basis of loans from the British government in collaboration the Department of Public Works and Highways. The 1999 budget of US \$ 111 million mostly covered the salary of the region's 19,000 employees.¹⁶ As Nur Misuari himself has admitted: "his administration in the ARMM had failed to address the people's expectation, especially on the implementation of major infrastructure and development projects due to the laxity of the government to provide necessary support..."¹⁷

Moreover, in the 26th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers Misuari complained on the "flawed and erratic implementation of the Peace Agreement" due to the "unnecessary dilly dallying with the development funds, thereby procrastinating and delaying our development and rehabilitation program to an uncertain date in the future."¹⁸ Hence, he opined that since they embarked on the governance and supervision of the ARMM and the SPCPD "nothing meaningful and visible that can touch the life of the people and society have transpired", including the anti-poverty programs.¹⁹

Indeed, although the MNLF expressed their discontent over what they consider as the Government's unfulfilled promises, the Government has expressed satisfaction over the gains of the peace accord.

At this point, however, what bears watching is the progress of the peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), together with the prospects of the plebiscite, both of which will define the political landscape and the future of Mindanao.

Chairman Misuari had reportedly expressed his opposition to the holding of a plebiscite unless it is certain to "deliver genuine autonomy," and that he would "rather go back to war than have a referendum."²⁰ It is also possible for MNLF to reject the results of the plebiscite.

On the other hand, MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat, while demanding an independent

¹⁵ Speech of Nur Misuari during the 26th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, in *The Seeds of Lasting Peace*. Published by the Office of the Chairman, MNLF Central Committee, n.d. p., 8

¹⁶ Antonio Lopez, "Mindanao's Chance".

¹⁷ "1st cabinet meeting Gov Nur lays down rules; go to people, talk to them, be patient, be humble, be on time," in *The Bulletin* (Cotabato City), Vol. XIII No.2 October 5-11, 1999.

¹⁸ Speech of Nur Misuari, p., 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Patricio Diaz, "The Rough Road to Mindanao Peace," *Inquirer Mindanao*, 12 February 2000.

Islamic state, has reportedly told Misuari that "they'll support and even join", once a "real and genuine autonomy" will be achieved.²¹ The MILF and the international Islamic community's monitoring of the peace agreement bring an added impetus for Misuari to do well. However, at the present, he feels that the MNLF is "on the verge of losing its credibility"²² something which he attributes to the "Philippine procrastination, prevarication and filibuster tactics" in implementing the peace agreement."²³

One can argue that the dissatisfaction over Misuari's performance and of the regional government in general is a consequence of Philippine bureaucratic procedures. In turn, the delays in the implementation of projects are perceived as a product of the Government's insincerity. What is clear at this point is that the Government is sincere in its efforts to gain a lasting peace in Mindanao, given the occasional vague pronouncements and policy statements of President Joseph Estrada. Even with skirmishes between government troops and MILF rebels, Estrada affirmed that "Peace is my dream for Mindanao. If we have peace, development will be accelerated not only in Mindanao but also in the whole country."²⁴

Given the convoluted nature of political and bureaucratic processes in the Philippines, the delayed amendment of the Organic Act for ARMM is understandable. As the Government explains, these were due to the separation of the legislative and executive branches of government, as well as to the delayed inputs [and warring factions] of legislators from Mindanao, mindful of the interests of their respective constituencies.

Amidst such divergent views on the political and economic gains of the Final Agreement, the Government and MNLF leadership agree on the achievement of one tangible success – the integration of the MNLF members to the forces of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP).²⁵

In the agreement's transitional phase, 5,500 and 1,500 MNLF members shall be integrated into AFP and the PNP respectively. Another 250 MNLF members shall be integrated in the special or auxiliary services of the PNP, as well as another 250 items for auxiliary services in the AFP.

²¹ Speech of Nur Misuari, p. 4.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Erap Affirms Gov't Policy for Mindanao", *Manila Bulletin*, 18 November 1999, p. 18.

²⁵ Miriam Coronel Ferrer in her initial findings also points to the direction that the integration of the MNLF forces into the PNP and AFP was done without demobilization and disarmament. Presentation of the research findings on *GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, Phase 1: Pans and Gains*, Faculty Center, University of the Philippines, 10-11 November 1999.

However, before delving into the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts in Mindanao, it is necessary to provide a background of the environment including the factors behind the conflict in Mindanao and the proliferation of firearms in the area.

II. THE MINDANAO CONFLICT IN CONTEXT

Various explanations have been offered as the cause of the Mindanao conflict. The most persistent of these is religion. Other variations include: (1) the challenge of the minority against an oppressive majority; (2) economic and social deprivation; (3) political manipulations by domestic and foreign sources; and (4) government ineptitude.²⁶

While religion is indeed an element in the Mindanao under various national governments, it is certain that religion provides the backdrop, but never the bone of contention for the conflict which has wracked this island.²⁷ Religious wars typically require a Government official policy of one faith and religious discrimination.²⁸ However, this was not the Mindanao experience even during the Spanish period, when Spain aggressively propagated the Christian faith. However, religion did lend a certain intensity to the land disputes that mushroomed in the wake of internal and external migration and which were aggravated by official policies that were disadvantageous to the Muslims and Lumads (natives) in Mindanao.

T.J. S. George explains that religion provides the "incentive for a majority to discriminate against a minority ...[and] sometimes the minority seeks religious solutions to their problems."²⁹ This explanation lends credence to the assertion of Muslims against the majority [of Filipinos] through a religious war.

In a primordialist approach to identity formation, religion is among the culturally distinctive characteristics in distinguishing groups and peoples from one another, in addition to myths of origin, ritual, and genealogical descent.³⁰ Culture on the other hand, is the "primary defining characteristic of an ethnic group" and that "ethnicity" is only important as far as it assists people to determine their

²⁶ T.J.S. George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 8.

²⁷ According to Cesar Majul, a noted Muslim scholar as cited in *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²⁸ T. J. S. George, p. 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁰ Views associated with Edward Shils and Clifford Geerts as cited in Kingsley M. de Silva, "Ethnicity and Nationalism" in Luc Van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, Paul Sciarone (eds.), *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States* (Great Britain: The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs/The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 1996), p. 110.

own distinctiveness from other groups.³¹

Yet, despite the identities of an ethnic group (*i.e.*, language, culture, religion) that may prove quite durable, ethnicity is a complex social phenomenon acceptable to changes through the centuries. Such changes can occur through the following factors:

1. emigration or changes in political boundaries;
2. subjugation by conquest;
3. assimilation (whether voluntary or involuntary).³²

Ethnic "identity" is a product of the adaptation of social morals and values of these forces.

Thomas McKeena argues that Muslim activities in an *inged* (Muslim locality) are not all distinctly "Muslim" or "Islamic".³³ The Bangsamoro people (Muslims in Mindanao) accommodate other cultures. Their self-recognition as an inclusive Moro people joined by Islam is no less than their other social identities – that of being a Maguindanaoan, Tausog, or Maranao. However, such complex identity became a target of intense politicization. Hence, Muslim separatist leaders attempted to draw a distinctive picture of a Philippine Muslim identity to purge themselves of the complexities which this history engendered. These nationalist ideas were then emphasized, altering customs that are seen as un-Islamic while promoting thoughts of a transcendent Muslim identity.

Kingsley de Silva in his recent exposition on ethnicity and nationalism explains that an awareness of a common identity can best be understood in these elements:

First is the vital importance of the past, wherein ethnic identities often bring along "memories of historical enmities that has very deep roots."³⁴ Hence, tensions and hostilities inevitably result in the attempts to redress the historical grievances.

Second, is the "politicization of the ethnicity", a process wherein ethnic groups emphasize their singularity but "facilitates their modernization by transforming them into a political conflict group for the modern political arena."³⁵

³¹ According to the anthropologist Charles Keyes as quoted in *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³³ Thomas McKeena, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Third, is the flexibility of the term ethnicity, which can include "community", "culture", language group, corporation, association or population, wherein their cultural traits distinguish them from the other groups.³⁶

According to US political scientist Paul Brass, "community" refers to "ethnic groups whose members have developed an awareness of a common identity and have attempted to define the boundaries of the group."³⁷ A critical aspect in this regard is the "transformation or transition of a community into a nationality or a nation" when the community "mobilizes for political action and becomes politically significant... makes political demands and achieves a significant measure of success by its own efforts."³⁸

In this regard, there are two options for the potential independence movement: national liberation in colonial settings and separatism in post-imperial and post-colonial situations.

De Silva adds that ethnicity is often used to serve political ends in a separatist movement. The danger lies in a situation wherein an ethnic group determined to secede becomes the majority, while a new ethnic minority also seeks to become a new majority. Thus, self-determination based on ethnic identities is a limited right in a political sense. In general, self-determination that is "limited to regional or local autonomy based on cultural distinctions, freedom of religion, language and association gains greater acceptance", albeit reluctantly and only after violent encounters.³⁹

Although the above discussion does describe significant aspects of the Mindanao secessionist phenomenon, it is best to consider the historical and contemporary aspects of the Muslim struggle in order to gain a better perspective of this political issue.

Comprising approximately 15 % of the national population and about 25 % of the Mindanao population in the 1980s,⁴⁰ the Muslims or Moros in the Philippines strive for autonomy or independence. Presently, the approximately 3 million Muslims make up about 5 % of the national population. However, Misuari claims that there are 15 million indigenous Bangsamoro people in

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ In a 1980 national census, the non-Christians in Mindanao are composed of the Muslims numbered 2,504,232 out of the Mindanao population of 10,905,243 or about 23 % and the *Lumadnons* 1,269,660 or 12 %. Cited in Samuel K. Tan, "The Socio-economic Dimension of the Moro Secessionism", *Mindanao Studies Reports 1995/No. 1*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Integrative and Development Studies and UP Press, 1995, p. 1.

Mindanao.⁴¹

Islam was first introduced in Mindanao in 1460 and became the basis for the development of principalities and sultanates in the area. These sultanates traded with Southeast Asia, India, Japan and China, and established diplomatic relations with Spain, France, the Netherlands and Britain.

In the 16th century, Spain attempted to colonize the Muslims through the sword and the cross. Spain had earlier developed deep anti-Muslim sentiments due to their struggle for independence from the Moorish rules of the Iberian peninsula. The Muslims fought the Spanish attempts to colonize them for over three centuries. Yet, despite Spain's failure to colonize Mindanao, it included Mindanao in the territories ceded to the United States under the 1898 Treaty of Paris. The American pacification campaign succeeded in dividing the Moros and neutralizing their resistance.

After 1946, the Philippine Government, under Filipino leadership, continued these colonial policies and programs. While the Moros claimed Mindanao as their historic homeland, Christian settlers from Visayas and Luzon viewed Mindanao as a "land of promise."⁴² By 1970, after decades of internal and external migration, the Christian population outnumbered the non-Christian population by approximately 75 %.⁴³

These colonialism and their concomitant demographic consequences also resulted in the inequitable distribution of resources. The gross socio-economic imbalance between Muslims and Christians was most evident in the distribution of land, where the state policies and modern laws enacted by the colonial rule favoured the Christian settlers.

Further prejudices and misperceptions have added to the complexity to the fundamental issues involved in the Mindanao conflict. In particular, these include the lands taken by Christian settlers from the Muslims, "the marginalization of the Moro masses, and the increasing pauperization of the Christianized inhabitants."⁴⁴ The sporadic armed clashes between Christians and Muslims in the 70s were aggravated by various myths which claimed that the Moros are the "cause of the Christian woes by their refusal to abandon their old ways", and conversely, that the Christians were the "culprits in the suffering of the Moro masses."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Speech of Misuari, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Eliseo Mercado, "Culture, Economics and Revolt in Mindanao: The origins of the MNLF and the Politics of Moro Separatism", in Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S. (eds.), *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1984), p. 162.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

The Philippine Government's decades-long neglect of Mindanao, coupled by the rising expectations borne out of modernization led to a variety of subsequent calls for autonomy, secessionism or federation.⁴⁶

There have earlier attempts of the part of Mindanao leaders to distinguish the island from the government in Manila. In 1935, Muslim leaders in Dansalan (now Marawi City) forwarded a strongly worded manifesto to the United States Congress objecting to the inclusion of Mindanao and Sulu in the Philippine territory.⁴⁷ In 1949, the Muslim Association of the Philippines (MAP) was organized to promote the welfare of the Filipino Muslims. Consequently, in 1959, then MAP President expressed their desire to establish a separate government with Pakistan as a model.

Initially, the demand for Bangsamoro independence followed a peaceful path, including the 1968 Muslim Independent Movement [later known as the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM)]. Led by Cotabato Governor Udtog Matalam, it invoked an ideal Islamic state.⁴⁸ From 1968-1969, at the height of the Philippine-Malaysian dispute over Sabah and the 1968 "Jabidah massacre"⁴⁹, some members of the MIM underwent guerrilla training in Sabah. These men

⁴⁶ Samuel K. Tan " Islam and Christianity in the Philippines," *Mindanao Studies Reports 1995/No.3* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Integrative and Development Studies and UP Press, 1995, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Abdurasad Asani, *Moros: Not Filipinos* (Manila: MNLF Secretariat, n.d.), p. 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ A secret project code-named "Operation Merdeka" with unspecified links to the armed forces recruited young Muslims for a private army. In December 1967, some 180 trainees were transferred to Corregidor (the last stand of Gen. Douglas MacArthur against the Japanese during World War II) and were trained in techniques of infiltration, sabotage and jungle survival. Administered by the Civil Affairs Office, it was so secret that most top brass of the armed forces were unaware of its existence. It dominated the headlines when reports spoke of a mutiny in the camp, during which 14 trainees were shot dead and 17 were missing. A survivor, Jibin Arula said the trainees protested about the non-payment of the P 50 monthly allowance and wanted to resign. Told they could resign but not leave the island, they were later shot while being escorted to the airstrip below the camp. Four separate Congressional and military inquiries failed to unearth the real story. Official witnesses said "Operation Merdeka" was a pre-emptive manoeuvre to prevent an international incident and possibly war in Sulu. Senate investigators received a document from an unknown source saying Merdeka was conceived as a plan to take Sabah by a contingent of civilian volunteers but under armed forces control. Another version in a newspaper said that it was a counter-insurgency move against Chinese-backed guerrillas in Sabah led by a master spy trained in Nanning. The Muslims had their own explanation, conjuring images of wily politicians in Manila trying to split the Islamic ranks and provoke a war between Sulu and Sabah. According to this theory, the recruits realized the nature of their mission and refused to fight fellow Muslims across the Sulu Sea, and thus precipitated the mutiny and the subsequent shooting.

The Jabidah massacre was damaging to the psyche of the Muslims; the secular, religious, modern and backward sectors all began to reconsidered their future with the Philippines government. Jose Crisol, 'then President Marcos' highly regarded technocrat said that, the Civil Affairs Office bungled its job so badly that the Muslims practically lost its faith in the government, as well as inflicted deepest wounds in Tawi-Tawi and Sulu. Then Senator Benigno Aquino in a fact-finding mission found scores of families weeping inconsolably for their dead or missing folk. All over Sulu communities considered this event an intensely personal tragedy. Nur Misuari was among those who participated in the demonstrations in Manila before Congress and Malacanang. Quoted from T. J. S. George, pp. 122-8.

reportedly formed the nucleus of the MNLF. Shortly after the declaration of the Martial Law in 1972, the Muslim movement took an armed revolutionary approach to the struggle.

The MNLF was identified as a response to the "Coregidor (*sic*) massacre, land grabbing and the disappointment of the masses with the government's failure to solve social, political and most of all, economic problems."⁵⁰ Accordingly, the rise of separatist movements involving Muslim minorities was a response to the dominance of the non-Muslim majority who had become a hindrance to the changing of the "distorted social order".⁵¹ The maintenance of an Islamic social order [at all times] must be observed by every Muslim, and defended when necessary.

Islam was the common factor that bound the then MNLF membership, but its members were from a mixed background: "disgruntled politicians; ambitious people who used the movement to launch their careers; displaced farmers; the victims of arms and police abuses; religious leaders who would like to construct an Islamic theocratic state; idealistic intellectuals/students moved by a social duty; adventurous young students who would like to test their fighting process; and others who joined because of friends and relatives in the movement."⁵²

The three groups that constituted the then MNLF (*i.e.*, Nur Misuari's Tausog/Samal group; Bangsa Moro Liberation Front (BMLF) representative Rashid Lucman who is a Maranao and Hashim Salamat's Maguindanao group) also had varying interpretations of autonomy. In the 1970s, the MNLF initially stressed the primary goal of "secession under the supervision of Libya and the Islamic countries" but later opted for autonomy in Southern Philippines.⁵³ This discrepancy was attributed to the MNLF members' ethnic differences, personal idiosyncracies, and quests for power and leadership.

The MNLF's initial demand for an independent Bangsa Moro Republic was composed of

⁵⁰ Nagasura Madale, "The future of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as a separatist movement in Southern Mindanao) p. 177 citing Alfredo Tiamson and Rosalinda Caneda (eds.) *The Southern Philippine Issue: Readings with the Mindanao Problem*. Proceedings of the 18th Annual Seminar on Mindanao - Sulu Cultures, 16-18 November 1979 (Marawi City: Mindanao State University).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 178 citing Jalahuddin delos Santos, "Liberation and Separatist Movements and their Impact on Political Interpretation and National Development," *Philippine Political Service Journal* 1 (7) (1978): 6-14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Mindanao, the Sulu archipelago and Palawan.⁵⁴ Under the Tripoli Agreement of 1976,⁵⁵ it was reduced to regional autonomy comprising of 13 provinces and 9 cities. However, differences in the interpretation of the implementation of the accord became a stumbling block and the fighting continued.

On 3 January 1987, the Philippine Government and the MNLF signed a Joint Statement (known as the Jeddah Accord) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In this statement, "both parties agreed to continue discussion of the proposal for the grant of full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan subject to the democratic processes."⁵⁶ The document also stated that the Philippine panel would convey to then President Corazon C. Aquino, the MNLF's request for the suspension of provisions on autonomy as contained in the draft 1987 Constitution. By 15 January 1987, Aquino turned down the request citing the opinion of the Constitutional Commission that the Constitution should be submitted as a whole for approval in the 2 February 1987 plebiscite. In Mindanao, some 70 % voted for the Constitution while Sulu garnered the highest votes at 95 %.⁵⁷

One of the contentious issues within the MNLF demands was that of autonomy for the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Palawan and Tawi-Tawi, as allegedly agreed during the Jeddah Accord. Such agreement would have expanded the area of autonomy from 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement to 23 provinces. The MNLF later announced its decision to settle for the 13 provinces including all cities and villages in these provinces. In 1994, the 13 provinces under the Tripoli Agreement were composed of approximately 19.79 % Muslims and 80.21 % non-Muslims, while the entire Mindanao population was 13.09 % Muslim and 86.91 % non-Muslim.⁵⁸

The Republic Act 6734 or the Organic Act for the Creation of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was approved by then President Aquino on 1 August 1989. However, only 4 out of the 13 provinces voted to join the ARMM during the 19 November 1989 plebiscite in a similar exercise on 17 April 1977, only 5 out of the 13 provinces voted favorably, namely Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Misuari thus refused to recognize the ARMM

⁵⁴ Ismael Z. Villareal, "Conflict Resolution in Mindanao", *OSS Forum*, Nr. 2, s-96, p. 1.

⁵⁵ The Tripoli Agreement was a compromise agreement based on autonomy within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines. This was signed by then Deputy Minister for National Defence Carmelo Barbero for the Philippines, Chairman Nur Misuari for the MNLF, Dr. Ali Abdsalam Treki of Libya, and Dr. Amadou Karim Gaye, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). This became the common denominator for all Moro factional demands until the Aquino administration adopted the stand to use the 1987 Constitution as a basis for negotiations and settlement, with the Tripoli Agreement as a secondary frame of reference.

⁵⁶ Signed by Philippine Panel Chairman Senator Aquilino Pimente, MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari and OIC Secretary General Shariffudin Pirzada (as witness) as cited in Fidel V. Ramos, *Break Not the Peace* (Manila: Friends of Steady Eddie, November 1996), p. 127.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *AFP Briefing Paper on the Secessionist Movement in Southern Philippines*, unpublished, August 1994.

and insisted on an autonomy based on the Tripoli Agreement, and the fighting once again broke out.

Although the Tripoli Agreement brought most Muslims' demand for regional autonomy, it however, created factionalism in the Muslim struggle. Consequently, the reassertion for a separatist ideal established the: Muslim Reformist line under Dimasangkay Pundato of Lanao; the Muslim Islamic Liberation Front, led by Udtadz Hashim Salamat of Cotabato (later on Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, led by Nuruladji Misuari of Sulu.⁵⁹

The Philippine Government has long been trying to resolve the conflict in Mindanao as early as 1946, primarily through assimilation and autonomy as well as a combination of others military, political, economic and social means. The decades-long struggle, however, continues as the MILF wages an on-again/off-again fight for independence amidst the Government's peace efforts.

From 1971-1976, the damage due to the separatist war was considerable: "towns and villages were razed to the ground; thousands of families were displaced; properties and harvests were destroyed; on a conservative estimate, 60,000 lives were lost; and about 300,000 refugees moved to neighbouring Sabah."⁶⁰

Others point to a higher estimate of 120,000 people who have been killed and some \$3 billion worth of damage over the Mindanao conflict.⁶¹ At present, the Philippine Government still maintains some 35,000 troops, 25,000 policemen, and a 25,000 strong para-military unit on the island.⁶²

In a protracted intra-state conflict, such as the case of Mindanao, the proliferation of small arms has been recognized as a factor that aggravates the situation. The direction and intensity of the conflict is influenced by the massive availability of arms.⁶³ Thus, it is important to look into the proliferation of small arms in Mindanao.

III. Vectors of Small Arms in Mindanao An Overview

In 1998, the Philippines had about 330, 000 loose firearms in the possession of gun

⁵⁹ Samuel K. Tan " Islam and Christianity in the Philippines", p. 8.

⁶⁰ Eliseo R. Mercado, "The Moro People's Struggle for Self-Determination" in Mark Turner, R. J. May, Lulu Respall (eds.), *Mindanao: Land of Unfulfilled Promise* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992), p. 160-1.

⁶¹ Antonio Lopez, "Mindanao's Chance".

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Luc Van de Goor, Kumar Rupesinghe, Paul Sciarone, *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States*, Palgrave, 1996, p. 26.

enthusiasts, political warlords, criminal syndicates and even government officials and employees.⁶⁴ From 1993 to the 1st quarter of 1999, 3,423 or 93% of the 3,670 firearms involved in criminal cases were unlicensed.⁶⁵

The Partisan Armed Groups (PAGs)⁶⁶ [previously known as Private Armed Groups] also contribute to the proliferation of unlicensed firearms in the country. As of September 1998, the PNP has identified 93 Partisan Armed Groups, with 2,129 members and 1,072 firearms.⁶⁷

There are some 45 firearms manufacturers, 522 authorized dealers, and 133 gun repair shops in the Philippines as of April 1998, according to the PNP Firearms and Explosives Division (FED). Gun smuggling is also prevalent, given that smuggled firearms cost cheaper and no documentation is required to market or possess them.

The main sources of uncontrolled firearms (loose firearms) in the Philippines are the unregistered local gun manufacturers, mostly concentrated in Danao and Mandaue cities in the Visayas. Firearms are then shipped to Manila and other provinces in Visayas and Mindanao aboard passenger and fishing vessels. Filipinos returning from abroad also reportedly smuggle firearms, either for business or private use.

Firearms are also smuggled in the country through the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) and the maritime ports in Luzon and Mindanao. In Manila, gunrunning activities are prevalent in Cavite, Ilocos Norte, La Union, Batangas and Palawan.⁶⁸ Gunrunning is heavily concentrated in the Visayas, where firearms smuggled out of the country (i.e., Japan) are manufactured.⁶⁹

From 1991 to March 1997, the National Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee

⁶⁴ *Country Paper on Illicit Trafficking and Manufacturing of Firearms: Philippine Context*, Philippine Center on Transnational Crime (PCTC), 1999, p. 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ According to the PNP's Intelligence Directorate, a Partisan Armed Group is an organized group of more than 3 persons with legally issued or illegally possessed firearms, utilized in the conduct of criminal and/or oppressive acts primarily for the advancement and protection of the vested political and economic interests of a public official or private individual. This definition excludes groups that are purely criminal in nature.

⁶⁷ PNP Report on Partisan Armed Groups, 1999.

⁶⁸ "Firearms Smuggling" in a *Concept Paper on the Philippine Experience on Transnational Crime*, PNP, 1997, p. 55

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

(NLECC) has intercepted 334 assorted firearms.⁷⁰ In 1992, a big shipment of 5.56 mm US made rifles (originating from Vietnam) were unloaded in Mindanao and reportedly purchased by local officials.⁷¹ From 1992 to March 1998, the Philippine Navy conducted 142 anti-gunrunning operations that resulted into the apprehension of 55 vessels, 52 persons and the seizure of P 5.7 million worth of firearms.⁷²

The Mindanao Situation

Why Arms Proliferate?

Various reasons contribute to the accumulation of firearms in Mindanao. The armed groups attributes this accumulation to their long history of fighting [please see the foregoing discussion on the 'secessionist factor'].

On an individual level, possession of firearms offers security, power and prestige. A belief common with many communities is that the more arms one possesses, the braver he becomes.⁷³

The prestige lent to firearms possession is considerable, such that it is used as a political tool should a person runs for political office. A "show of force" affords one candidate a high chance to be elected in public office.⁷⁴

It is also suggested that the "culture" among Muslims necessitate the possession of firearms. The acquisition of a firearm is likened to someone living in a city and the need to buy a car [as a luxury item] - attributing such acquisition of a firearm is associated with the prestige and power that goes with it.⁷⁵ The possession of a newer or better version of a firearm or firearms allegedly increases the chances of a suitor trying to win a girl's hand as such would lend him more prestige and a "macho" image. The acquisition of a new firearm[s] is even made known in the entire neighbourhood in order to increase one's "respectability" in his community.

⁷⁰ PNP Firearms and Explosives Division as cited in Jose Olaivar, "Proliferation of Firearms and its Impact on Regional Security: A Perspective from the Philippines," Paper presented at the *Third CSCAP Meeting on Transnational Crime*, Pasig City, 23-24 May 1998, p. 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷³ Interview with Supt. Abdelgardan Indanan Alih, Battalion Commander, Special Mobile Group, Camp SK Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, Provincial Regional Office, ARMM, 27 October 1999.

⁷⁴ Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalitod, Mindanao State University, Marawi City, 29 October 1999.

⁷⁵ Interview with an MNLF Integree, Camp SK Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, 27 October 1999.

For socio-economic and security reasons, a person also needs arms to protect his livelihood, farm and farm animals, particularly the carabao.

Ironically, in the interviews and informal discussions conducted in Mindanao, no one cited the need for self-defense, unlike in Metro Manila, where gun owners possess guns for self-defense due to the "present peace and order situation which is not one of the best."⁷⁶ Some view this ownership of gun as a Filipino trait, especially those in Cavite and Mindanao who are known for "their fascination for guns."⁷⁷

The proliferation of firearms in Mindanao can further be attributed to the relatively easy access and affordability of "paltik" [locally made firearms]. Firearms also change hands, something which is reflected in their relative cost, which increases as it is handed from one seller to a buyer to another buyer.⁷⁸ Prices vary according to the origins and urgency of the disposal: a 9 mm would cost around P25,000, a cal. 45 around P24,000, and an M 16 at P26,000.⁷⁹ Firearms acquired by Christians are not sold to Muslims and vice versa, given the reported feelings of mistrust between Muslims and Christians.

The prevalence of gunrunning/smuggling of firearms has been attributed to the country's geographic configuration; the prospects for huge profits; the increased connivance between gunrunning syndicates and corrupt law enforcers; and the persistent involvement of political and influential families in these activities in order to beef up their private armies.⁸⁰

One more factor that propels the arms trade is the existence of family/clan disputes among the "rich" sectors in Mindanao. These disputes are typically violent in nature; hence, families continually purchase arms to update their arsenal. In this light, gun smuggling operations whether for profit or personal use also increases.

Finally, another important factor is the socio-religious dimension for Muslims who had "equated the right to carry arms with their religious heritage".⁸¹ A Qu'ranic verse encourage the use of weapons as a preparation against oppression, and have been used to justify the possession of

⁷⁶ Poch de Castro, President, Peaceful, Responsible Owners of Guns (PROGUN) as cited in "Pinoys say no to gun" *Philippine Star*, 22 March 1999.

⁷⁷ Francisco Calado, Official of the Philippine Practical Shooting Association (PPSA) in *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Interview with an MNLF Integree to the PNP, Police Officer 1, Special Mobile Group, Camp SK Pendatun, Parang, Maguindanao, 27 October 1999.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ PCTC paper, p. 15.

⁸¹ T. J. S. George, p. 191.

firearms.⁸² To this end, Muslims are reportedly "enjoined, obliged, commanded to arm themselves to prepare against oppression/injustices."⁸³ and the secessionist movement is premised, in part, on the grounds that "the Muslims have the duty and the obligation to wage *jihad* (holy war) physically and spiritually to change the Moro homeland to *Daral-Islam* (House of Islam)."⁸⁴ This view is expressed by MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat, who has stated that: "the achievement of a just peace is an objective which every individual or group with sound mind must pursue by all means even by means of war because a just war is better than an unjust peace."⁸⁵ In the same light, Christians are arming themselves for security reasons.

Hence, it is typical to see weapons in public places. For instance, in the Mindanao State University in Marawi City, security guards are heavily armed with among other weapons M14 and M16 firearms. The Office of the Regional Governor in Cotabato City is similarly secured with heavily armed men. For people in Mindanao, the general perception is that possession of weapons is an ordinary fact of life; they are used to it, and others have grown old with it. For them, not much has changed over the years.

The Secessionist Factor

As of June 1999, military intelligence statistics suggested that there were 11,777 firearms in the possession of the Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups alone (*i.e.*, MILF, Abu Sayyaf, and NICC/MILO), up from 4,300 in 1976 (prior to 1996 figures include the MNLF). Its peak number of 17,800 firearms in 1995, dropped to 7,230 in 1996 but is steadily rising since then. These statistics, however, do not include the firearms in the possession of communist insurgents, criminal syndicates, political clans or individuals.

To reiterate, the illegal arrival of arms became prevalent in Mindanao in the aftermath of World War II as politics turned violent and gunrunners took advantage of the island's geography. The influx of these weapons became even more prevalent with the rise of pro-independence movements for a Muslim Mindanao. With the common exception being that the greatest level of armament in the past of Muslim took place during the period of Martial Law⁸⁶ The experience of the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina is commonly taken as an example of Muslims being killed because there were no "mujahideen"; hence, the logic maintains, they [the Muslims] have to prepare so it will

⁸² Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalidtod.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Mercado, "The Moro People's Struggle for Self-Determination".

⁸⁵ Malik Mantawil "First Ulama Summit: Bangsamoro Homeland" *Homeland*, March-April 1998, Cotabato City, 5(2), p. 4.

⁸⁶ Interview with Prof. Zainal Kalidtod.

not happen to them again.⁸⁷

As early as 1969, the emerging MNLF had garnered foreign support to include arms and military training. At first, arms were reportedly from communist sources, particularly China.⁸⁸ Later on, at the height of the MNLF offensive, Libya, Indonesia and Malaysia were identified as possible sources of firearms.⁸⁹ Libya's Qaddafi publicly declared that he had given arms and funds to Muslim dissidents in the Philippines.⁹⁰ No evidence linked Indonesia as a source of arms and Kuala Lumpur denied interference in Philippine affairs.⁹¹ Yet, the first 90 mujahideen, including Misuari and the MNLF's first Central Committee, were given military training in Pulau Pangkor Island, Perak, Malaysia, arriving through Sabah in 1969,⁹² under British tutelage according to one interviewed trainee.⁹³ Then Sabah's Chief Minister Tun Datu Mustapha Harun allowed Sabah to be used as a training camp, supply depot, communications center and sanctuary for the MNLF from 1972 to 1976.⁹⁴

Libya and Sabah/Malaysia were the main but not the only sources of MNLF's foreign support during its early critical years. In particular, small boats equipped with powerful outboard motors ferried arms from Sabah's port of Sandakan to Mindanao. These included Belgian rifles, anti-personnel mines, grenades, plastic explosives, Browning carbines, and tens of thousands rounds of ammunition.⁹⁵ Such hardware reportedly came from "Persian Gulf sheikdoms" using the Sabah government's private jets, and, on occasion, a chartered flight from Pakistan.⁹⁶ According to various

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ T. J. S. George, p. 231.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁹⁰ Nehemia Levtzion, *International Islamic Solidarity and its Limitations* (1979), 28 citing *The Times* (London) (17 August 1972), and *Conflict Studies*, 41 (December 1973).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁹² Sali Wali, "On the Birth of the MNLF," (7 September 1980). He was a member of the MNLF's First Central Committee and wrote this account after he joined the government.

⁹³ Madale, p. 182.

⁹⁴ Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of the Southern Thailand* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990) p. 139, citing Lela Garner Noble, "Roots of the Bangsa Moro Revolution 4(97) (1983) *Solidarity*, pp. 41, 43.

⁹⁵ T. J. S. George, p. 235.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

accounts, substantial financial support also came from Saudi Arabia⁹⁷ and Iran⁹⁸, these same accounts suggest that the MNLF was given access to military camps operated by Syria, Egypt, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).⁹⁹

Sources of Firearms in Mindanao

In contemporary times, the following are attributed as sources of firearms in Mindanao:

1. military and police (firearms legitimately lost or declared lost during armed encounters between government and separatist forces or stolen from military and police arsenals);¹⁰⁰
2. unlicensed manufacturers of caliber .38 and .45 pistols in Western Mindanao and Zamboanga;
3. unreturned firearms during the coup attempts in the 1980s, where a number were declared lost but which instead likely reportedly sold to the secessionist forces;
4. foreign shipments, reportedly from Afghanistan;
5. gunrunners based in Southern Mindanao (particularly in Agusan, Surigao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga) who sell firearms to ideological groups or local bandits;
6. rebels' manufacture of their own weapons, including assault rifles and rifle-propelled grenades.

In general, only a few smuggling activities have been monitored. Of these, law enforcers has successfully interdicted only a few smuggling operations. It is even possible that gun smuggling in certain areas are flourishing under the connivance corrupt law enforcers and smugglers. In such instances, gun smugglers usually use commercial vessels and conceal the firearms stored within, or use middlemen to unload undeclared firearms. These weapons are smuggled in as:

- undeclared or misdeclared items that are included with other goods and consigned to fictitious names and addresses;

⁹⁷ Che Man, p. 141.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁹⁹ RJ May, "The Moro Movement in Southern Philippines" in Christine Jennett and Randal D. Steward (eds), *Politics of the Future: The Role of Social Movements* (1989) p. 326.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with military officers. Also interview with an informant, former New People's Army member in Central Mindanao Region, now sympathetic to the MILF, Cotabato City, 25 October 1999.

- dismantled pieces included among other metal items, typically machinery parts that are exported and imported legally; and
- cargoes that are dropped sometimes from the vessels at pre-arranged areas some distance from the shore and later picked up by small boats for transportation to safe areas.¹⁰¹

In Mindanao, smuggling usually occurs in the "Southern backdoor", the extensive sealanes and isolated coastal areas in the provinces of Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Zamboanga. This area is also used by secessionist groups as the delivery point of assorted firearms from contacts in Sabah, Malaysia.¹⁰² Other gunrunning areas are in the provinces of Agusan, Misamis, Surigao, Maguindanao and Zamboanga. Most commonly smuggled-in firearms are: pistols (.357 and 9 mm), rifle (5.56 mm and 7.62 mm), Garand rifles (.30), sub-machine guns (.50) and shotguns (12 gauge).¹⁰³

Except for individual shipments (*i.e.*, total number of firearms in each monitored or apprehended shipment), government sources have no aggregate data on the total number of smuggled armaments from various sources. For instance, data gathered only covers the occasional apprehension of arm shipments, but the total number of arms shipments in Mindanao are largely unmonitored. Government data compilation efforts typically focus more on the total number of firearms in the possession of secessionist or private armed groups.

The funding for the arms supply in Mindanao varies according to the end-user and the sponsors of the organization. For instance, the MILF reportedly procured arms through various sources. In one report, the MILF expected a shipment of some 3,000 assorted high-powered firearms and tens of thousands of assorted ammunition (Kalashnikov firearms to anti-tank rockets and landmines) from Afghanistan through funds from Osama bin Laden.¹⁰⁴ Military intelligence reports also cited that assault rifles and rocket launchers were delivered to the MILF [forthcoming the MILF denied, saying it manufactured its own firearms].¹⁰⁵ In addition, military reports have monitored the landing of 15 M14 and 1,485 M16 rifles plus 30 wooden crates of assorted ammunition from Lebanon in May 1994 which were intended for the MILF.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Merliza M. Makinano. *Transnational Crimes: New Risks to Philippine Security* (Quezon City: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, June 1999), p. 15.

¹⁰² "Firearms Smuggling" in a *Concept Paper on the Philippine Experience on Transnational Crime*, PNP, (1997), p. 54.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Tempo* Online (22 February 1999) and "3000 guns for rebels arriving? *Manila Bulletin* (22 February 1999).

¹⁰⁵ *Tempo* Online (March 20, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ AFP Briefing Paper on the Secessionist Movement, unpublished.

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) also has been monitored by the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) for its shipments of smuggled weapons and ammunitions from foreign sources.¹⁰⁷

There are also reports that financial funding for socio-cultural activities or money raised from Muslim communities may have been diverted to buy arms.

Government Efforts

It is the mission of the PNP's Firearms and Explosives Division (FED) to administer, enforce and implement rules and regulations related to firearms and explosives.¹⁰⁸

Presidential Decree 1866, as amended by Republic Act 8294, punishes "the unlawful manufacture, acquisition, disposition or possession of firearm, part of firearm or ammunition and the machinery tool or instrument used or intended to be used in the manufacture of any firearm or ammunition"¹⁰⁹

Terms of imprisonment are from 2 months to 6 years, together with a fine of P 15,000 (cal. 38 or 32), and 6 to 8 years of imprisonment and a fine of P 30,000 if the firearm is high-powered (cal. 40, .41, .45, .357 and Magnum .22). Even if licensed¹¹⁰ to carry firearms, their firearms should be kept in their residences unless issued with a permit to carry by the PNP Chief.

Such laws and regulations are difficult to implement in the Mindanao given the high importance and priority that individuals' attach to the possession of firearms. It is reportedly the Muslim's "culture" to take a weapon back by all means (once seized by law enforcers). Thus, for security reasons, it is allegedly better not to be identified when seizing unlicensed firearms for security reasons.

In fact, in ARMM "where guns are treated as a status symbol" there are only 792 holders of the Permits to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence (PTCFOR) out of the total number of 30,870

¹⁰⁷ Manny Mogato, "In Search of a New Enemy", *Politik* (May 1995), p. 38.

¹⁰⁸ Unpublished FED Briefing as cited in PCTC paper, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Atty. Jose C. Sison, Pornography and Violence in Media (6th part). A Law Each Day (Keeps Trouble Away) in *Philippine Star* (3 November 1999), p. 14.

¹¹⁰ To own a licensed gun, an applicant must be a Philippine citizen, at least 21 years old, and have no pending criminal case. To be issued a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence (PTCFOR), the gun owner must pass a firearms proficiency test and a neuropsychiatric evaluation. Lately, a drug test has also been required.

as of September 1998.¹¹¹ A police official in Mindanao interviewed recently explained that since the firearms are often kept inside residences, they cannot be sequestered.

In the 1970s, for instance, the Government experience in disarming the populace proved to be something of a failure. Under national policy, all civilians were required to surrender their firearms during the Martial Law years. However, many Muslim communities resisted this imperator. While the Army initially launched "house to house searches for hidden arms" three months later they were forced to abandon the offer of amnesty for the rebels and instead focussed their efforts on the secessionist groups. [In this effort, the government failed to take into account the socio-religious importance of such weapons for Muslims, something which made the concept of surrounding such weapons outrageous to them."¹¹²]

Further, in a society like Mindanao, characterized as a "weak state and a strong environment", it is very hard to implement state policies for a variety of social reasons.¹¹³ A significant factor is the presence of corruption in the government such that even the police often cannot enforce the law. Under such conditions, the people are typically apathetic to any government program.¹¹⁴

Thus, while it is widely known that most individuals in Mindanao possess unlicensed firearms, the general consensus among those studying the Mindanao conflict is that it would take decades or even a century to change the culture that makes possession of firearms a necessity.

Despite these difficult conditions, the Government still strives to address the problem through the following measures:

1. The issuance of licenses to former illegal firearms manufacturers, such as the Danao Arms Manufacturing Corporation (DAMANCOR) and the Workers' League of Danao (WORLD);
2. The creation of the National Law Enforcement Coordinating Council (NALECC) Sub-Committee on Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives for the coordination of the efforts of all law enforcement and intelligence agencies as well as the intensification of information gathering and search activities;
3. Stricter implementation of firearms laws and regulations by conducting random inspections of stores, requirements for detailed inventories, site visits and stricter pass or transport

¹¹¹ According to FED as cited in *The Philippine Star* (22 March 1999).

¹¹² T. J. S. George, p. 191.

¹¹³ Interview with Prof. Kalidtod.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

control measures; and

4. The monitoring and physical inventory of government arsenals through counter-intelligence operations are conducted to address pilferage of military/police supply depots.¹¹⁵

In addition, Firearms and Explosives Offices (FEO) have been established at the NAIA and the Central Post Office. Other government units such as the Bureau of Customs (BOC), the AFP, the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), and the Department of Finance monitor the port areas,. Provincial PNP units monitor the port areas in Mindanao.

The relinquishing of heavy and light weapons on the part of the military rebels during the height of their rebellion ended in November 1996.¹¹⁶ The firearms still in their possession are now considered "illegally possessed" and thus subject to law-enforcement. Allegedly, some ten thousand firearms are still in the military rebels' hands. There are also reports that some of these firearms have been sold to armed groups. However, since no extra effort is exerted to recover these firearms and military officers (retired or active) or individuals for that matter cannot be searched without due process, these firearms will be added to the statistics on loose firearms, if at all.

There is also the concern of a resurgence of illegal gun making activities in Danao as its 3,000 skilled gunsmiths struggle to earn a living while DAMANCOR and WORLD reportedly go out of business.

Despite the government efforts to curb the illegal possession of firearms and gun running, the proliferation of loose firearms still persist.

The PNP attributes this prevalence of gun smuggling activities to:

1. The prospects of huge profits;
2. The increased connivance among gun running syndicates something encouraged by corrupt law enforcement efforts;
3. The persistent involvement of political families and other influential personalities either to beef up their private armies or as instruments in the conduct of their nefarious activities; and
4. the Filipinos' yearning for guns which provides a ready market for smuggled firearms.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ PCTC Paper, pp. 19-21.

¹¹⁶ "Six-Year Accomplishment Report", p. 16.

¹¹⁷ PCTC Paper, p. 59.

This apparent failure of the government to combat gun smuggling is further exacerbated by combination of societal and institutional factors.

Law-enforcement operations are hampered by the lack of equipment, a lack of personnel to monitor exit and entry points, a lack of informants, insufficient coordination efforts of government agencies, a lack of political will and a general attitude of apathy on the part of the community.¹¹⁸ In fact, members of the "Gunless Society" had attributed the worsening peace and order situation to the "proliferation of guns in the streets and an apparently lax gun control law."¹¹⁹

The lack of sufficient personnel to monitor and conduct an inventory legitimate gun dealers and manufacturers has already been cited; this exacerbate the clandestine market for weapons.¹²⁰

Concerning monitoring operations and collection of data, shipments of firearms are treated on an individual basis, and more often the larger picture behind the operations is not considered; hence seizure are treated as individual occurrences. Futhermore, when the "task force" or intensified operations is conducted the smugglers simply "keep a low profile" and resume operations once the anti-smuggling campaign is over.

The uncoordinated efforts of the part of the many agencies¹²¹ handling law-enforcement efforts against gun smugglers undermine such operations. This is important to note that in addition to local police units, specialized units, and intelligence units of both the military and the AFP, other specialized agencies were also involved in such efforts. These include the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF), the PNP's Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), and probably soon the Philippine Center on Transnational Crime (PCTC). The CIDG has seized 150 loose firearms, ammunition, and gun parts¹²² while PAOCTF has reported the confiscation of 403 firearms and the arrest of 221 suspects from a total of 84 operations.¹²³ This attitude of "competition" among agencies, as well as general security concerns in the conduct of the operations contribute to this lack of cooperation and coordination among agencies.

This confusion is exacerbated when organized crime groups join forces or otherwise

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *The Philippine Star* (22 March 1999).

¹²⁰ PCTC paper, 17.

¹²¹ In addition to the units of the AFP and the PNP, other government agencies include the National Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Customs, and the Economic Intelligence and Investigation Bureau of the Department of Finance.

¹²² "Arsenals for home-made guns, ammo raided," *Today* (17 January 2000).

¹²³ "1999 Year-end Accomplishment Report", Philippine Anti-Organized Crime Task Force.

cooperate in their operations (for example, when arms smugglers ask the support of carnappers or even other armed groups for transport, or simply when they criss-cross the "areas of responsibilities" of police and military units).

The nature of firearms shipments methods intended for secessionist groups is also another matter complicated law enforcement efforts. Given the long coastline of Mindanao and the stretched resources of the police (and the military in particular), monitored "drops" or shipments of arms cannot be wholly interdicted. This is all the more so given lack of navigational and night-vision devices and often and even other simple logistical or transportation requirements.

The apathy and complacency of society towards gun smuggling stems from the common perception that law enforcers are either in connivance with the smugglers or simply helpless in addressing the problem, especially against powerful clans or political families. Since the practice of illegally possessing firearms is common, people have become tolerant of and "desensitized" to the problem; the usual response is to acquire arms to be on an equal footing with an enemy or a rival, or simply for personal purposes. In the past, a Congressman has been forced to resign when he was convicted of smuggling Uzi machine guns into the country: it was allegedly that he was taking orders from his colleagues. Some Philippine police peacekeepers who participated in the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) even brought back assorted firearms as "souvenirs" from their tour of duty.

At present, the strong point of the government is perhaps the strong leadership of Director General Panfilo Lacson. While his appointment drew mixed reactions within the ranks, it is clear though that PNP Chief Panfilo Lacson means business in the government's drive against loose firearms. He had recently imposed stricter guidelines in the licensing of firearms and controls the approval of all gun applications. Gun agencies are only responsible for conducting psychological tests and other prerequisites for the issuance of gun licenses. Due to the intensifying situation in Mindanao, all efforts of the AFP and PNP and other law enforcement agencies are focused on this island.

The Government efforts in Mindanao at this point consist largely of a counterinsurgency effort directed against the Muslims, especially in the context of MILF-GRP sporadic clashes. During the Martial Law years, the Muslims perceived the confiscation of guns as specifically directed against them. Since this effort does not address the real motivations and reasons behind the acquisition of firearms, gunrunning and the illegal possession of firearms will continue.

III. REINTEGRATION WITHOUT DISARMAMENT AND DEMOBILIZATION

Before elaborating on the reintegration, it is important to give a backgrounder on the peace negotiations between the MNLF and the Philippine government.

The Negotiations for Peace

In February 1992, even before former President Fidel V. Ramos's election to office, he already made overtures for peace when he traveled to Tripoli, Libya to discuss the possibilities of a renewed peace settlement in Mindanao with Libyan Leader Col. Muammar Khaddafi.

On 28 July 1992, the President issued Proclamation 10-A, creating the National Unification Commission. It was an ad-hoc advisory body which subsequently formulated and recommended a viable amnesty program and peace process.

Executive Order 19 empowered the NUC to provide the framework for negotiations with all rebel groups. The NUC formulated the "Six Paths to Peace", which Executive Order 125 (subsequently dated 15 September 1993) adopted.

At the end of its term in 1993, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) was created to continue the work started by the NUC.

The MNLF and the Government held their first exploratory talks in Tripoli, Libya on 2-3 October 1992. A second round of exploratory talks was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 14-16 April 1993. Both parties had agreed to hold formal peace negotiations on an agenda focussing on the establishment of autonomy for the Muslims in Mindanao, within the realm of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippine republic, and in accordance with the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) also participated in the formal talks as an observer.

After 47 months of negotiations, the Final Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front was finally signed on 2 September 1996 in the Ceremonial Hall of Malacanang Palace.

The Implementation of the Agreement

Administrative Order No. 295, dated 7 October 1996, provided for the implementation of Section 20 of the Final Agreement. This order describes the integration of 5,750 regulars in the AFP, 250 of whom shall be absorbed in the auxiliary services. Thereafter, Department of National Defense Order No. 139 and AFP Letter of Instruction (LOI) 41/96 "Pagsasanib" were issued outlining the manner in which the integration of the MNLF forces into the AFP was to occur.

To further ensure the smooth and coordinated implementation of the integration of the MNLF members into the AFP, a Joint AFP-MNLF Secretariat Office (JAMSO) was created. In implementing Section 20 of the Final Peace Agreement, JAMSO acts as a monitoring, liaising, coordinating and supervising office for the integration process, particularly in processing, individual

training, on-the-job training and consequently deployment of MNLF forces.

Further, in accordance with the provisions of Executive Order No. 371, dated 2 October 1996, MNLF Chief of Staff Yusop Jikiri was appointed Presidential Assistant for Separate Units with the rank of Director 1 and designated Deputy Commander of the AFP Southern Command (COMSOUTHCOM) for Separate Units (ODCSSU). An AFP Staff Memorandum also created the Office of the Deputy COMSOUTHCOM for Separate Units at the AFP Southern Command Headquarters in Calarian, Zamboanga City.

The Reintegration Process

The reintegration of the MNLF forces into the mainstream society was done without the disarmament and demobilization of these forces.¹²⁴ The peace agreement did not include explicit provisions for disarmament or demobilization.¹²⁵ The Government recognized that the MNLF cannot be forced to turn-in their firearms and thus worked on "convincing" them to voluntary turn-in their firearms. This is why the scheme on the turning-in of firearms is not explicit in the peace agreement. Reportedly, General Romeo Zulueta instructed the military planners to take out any terms that are synonymous to "surrender", to include such terms as "disarmament" and "demobilization" in order to avoid the perception of an MNLF "surrender".

Then President Fidel V. Ramos was keenly aware of the "loss of face" in the demobilization of MNLF fighters might generates, and that the "issue touched the sense of dignity of MNLF fighters very deeply..."¹²⁶ Ramos, in citing the lessons learned from the negotiations, expressed the "critical need to keep a strategic view always and to refuse to be muddled or stampeded by tactical pressures."¹²⁷ This he said was one reason why the government during the negotiations "did not force the issue of 'demobilizing' or 'disarming' the MNLF", because to do so would have simply led to an "unreasonable impasse."¹²⁸ Accordingly, the "strategic objective" was to have the agreement signed with its political, economic, social and cultural benefits rather than "belaboring

¹²⁴ Interview with BGEN. Rodolfo Garcia AFP, Commanding General, 6ID, Camp Siongco, Awang, Cotabato City on 22 October 1999 (telephone) and 26 October 1999 (personal).

¹²⁵ Demobilization is defined as the "formal disbanding of military formation, and at the individual level, as the process of releasing combatants from a mobilized state" in Mats R. Berdal, *Disarmament and Demobilization after Civil Wars*, Adelphi Paper 303 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies/Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹²⁶ Fidel V. Ramos, *Break not the Peace: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Negotiations 1992-1996* (Philippines: Friends of Steady Eddie, November 1996), p. 87.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

any issue that struck deeply into the honor and prestige" of the MNLF.¹²⁹

Furthermore, Ramos was conscious of Misuari's expressed concern over "losing his men to other militant armed groups" during the transition period if the Government cannot assist them; hence Misuari's hopes for a larger Special Regional Security Force (SRSF).¹³⁰ Also, during the last hours of backroom negotiations, Misuari and then Executive Secretary Ruben D. Torres allegedly agreed on the auxiliary services [to augment the number of MNLF members integrated into the AFP and PNP], unaware of their respective varying interpretations. Reportedly, for Misuari, this meant the integration of his men into specialized units of the AFP, including the intelligence service; whereas for Torres, this understand would refered to the technical services of the AFP, such as the medical, dental and engineering units and the AFP's Women's Auxiliary Corps.¹³¹ It is not clear at this point where the auxiliary services will serve. However trivial, this could be another cause of temporary snags given that peace accords in earlier administrations had bogged down due to conflicts in the interpretation of salient provisions.

Further complicating these talks was the fact that the security concerns of the MNLF were intertwined with its economic concerns. Ramos was aware of the problems related to the livelihood and basic needs of the MNLF men, as well as other sensitive issues of registration and licensing of firearms, together with the question of the ranks and qualifications of those who would be taken in into the armed forces.

Moreover, Ramos knew that Misuari had to perform the follow balancing act if the talks were to succeed:

1. He had to maintain his leadership in attaining the aspirations of his people under the Tripoli agreement;
2. He had to project an image of a consensual peacemaker before the people of Mindanao; and
3. He had to bring prestige to the OIC and earning the respect of its members in order to negotiate a meaningful peace for his people.¹³²

Hence, in a Memorandum to the Government Panel Negotiating with the MNLF dated 23 August 1993 he instructed that "the conduct of the Formal talks shall be in line with the aim of the

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹³¹ Discussions with military officers supporting the technical requirements of the peace negotiations, December 1999.

¹³² Fidel V. Ramos, p. 66.

National Comprehensive Peace Program to seek a peaceful resolution of armed conflict, with neither blame nor surrender, but with dignity for all."¹³³

The other principle was to conduct the Formal Talks under the mandate of the Constitution and the laws of the land. In addition to these two principles, instructions were also given concerning such others issues as:¹³⁴

- finding a solution to the problem, taking into consideration the existence of the ARMM, other Muslim rebel groups and the sentiments of affected communities and sectors;
- establishing common ground with the OIC; and
- finding common ground between the aspirations of the MNLF and the political, social and economic programs of the Government.

The objectives as outlined by then President Ramos were:¹³⁵

- the return of the MNLF into the national mainstream;
- the attainment of lasting peace and security under the meaningful program of Muslim autonomy; and
- the establishment of a fair and constructive consensus with the Islamic world to attain these objectives.

Such guidelines and directions were evidently derived from the six institutional paths that defined the Government's overall peace program. In brief, these were:

1. the pursuit of social, economic and political reforms;
2. consensus-building and empowerment for peace;
3. peaceful, negotiated settlement with the different rebel groups;
4. programs for reconciliation, reintegration and rehabilitation
5. conflict management and protection of civilians caught in armed conflict; and

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 30-1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*. p. 30.

6. building and nurturing a climate conducive to peace.¹³⁶

Most of the Government Panel's negotiation plans were contained in its manual of negotiation. This include the projected expectations of both sides under ideal circumstances, summary of major points including contentious issues should both sides insist on maximum objectives, vital questions the Government might test its negotiation limits, and a proposed negotiation process. This manual was in response to Ramos' directive to develop with a manual of negotiation that would include specific agenda issues, proposals for maximum, medium and minimum positions of the Government; proposed diplomatic initiatives on the talks; and a public information plan.

Integration of MNLF Forces into the AFP and PNP

The Philippine Government and the MNLF considered the integration of the MNLF forces into the AFP and the PNP as the most successful aspect of the peace agreement. While Misuari claimed that an "absolute peace exist between MNLF "mujahideens" and the Philippine military, occasional issues arise, including Misuari's accusations of non-issuance of arms to MNLF integrees [denied by the military], as well as the involvement of MNLF integrees in Abu Sayyaf kidnapping operations.¹³⁷ The government issued firearms were recovered but this isolated incident raised suspicions of the integrees spying on the AFP.¹³⁸

The integration phase of MNLF members to the AFP takes three phases: processing, individual training, and on-the-job training/deployment, after which the MNLF members are not be treated as a separate units but rather integrated into existing AFP regular units. While its full integration was to have been completed by November 1999, after a period of three years, delays in the processing (*i.e.*, MNLF submission of list of candidates) of MNLF and Chairman Misuari's request for its delay have adjusted the timetable. In turn, this affects the final phase of the integration process -- the individual assignments of MNLF integrees to the different AFP units in the Southern Command and the dissolution of the separate units.

Regarding the PNP, the MNLF members were integrated as soon as they took their oath of service, but their assimilation process is a 5-year program which will culminate in the assignment of MNLF integrees to local police stations on an individual basis.

¹³⁶ "Six-Year Accomplishment Report", p. 2.

¹³⁷ "Ex-MNLF Men in AFP among Sayyaf Fatalities," *Today* (3 February 2000).

¹³⁸ Alvin Tarroza and Roel Pareno, "MNLF Integrees Spying on AFP?: 2 Slain in Abu Sayyaf Clash Found to be Ex-rebels".

With the integration of the MNLF into the AFP and PNP now in its final phase, Misuari has issued "verbal orders to his field commanders in the 14 provinces and cities under the terms of the Peace Agreement ... to prepare for the formation of the so-called Regional Internal Security Forces."¹³⁹ Members of this Force are drawn from those who cannot be integrated into the MNLF and the PNP.

There is also a special socio-economic, cultural and education programs to those that cannot be accommodated in the AFP, PNP or the SRSF, designed to equip with the necessary educational, technical skills and livelihood training for other productive endeavours.

As of September 1996, shortly after the signing of the peace agreement, military records showed some 17,700 MNLF members. The military intelligence statistics place the MNLF strength at 6,900 in 1976, gaining its peak strength of 21,200 individuals by 1977.

Most of the MNLF members should be in their late forties or early fifties, given that the MNLF has fought for their cause since the 1970s. Thus, some integratees to the AFP and PNP are representatives of MNLF members; typically, as sons and nephews of the MNLF "mujahideens". There are also unverified reports that some people are buying the slots in order to be integrated.¹⁴⁰

Consequently, those MNLF members who did not opt for integration turned to farming. Others lost hope in the armed struggle and gave up fighting to lead a civilian life, given that the fight had provided little benefit for them.¹⁴¹ They felt that only those with connections have benefited from the peace agreement.¹⁴² Some others former MNLF members have gone on to form their own groups or join existing associations branded as "lost command groups", kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and terrorist groups.¹⁴³

Many former MNLF members joined the MILF due to what they considered as MNLF's compromise concerning its accedence to terms for autonomy. This exodus was confirmed by Al-Haj Murad, MILF's Vice-Chair for Military Affairs,¹⁴⁴ as well as by military figures which showed a drastic increase in MILF strength from 8,000 in 1996 to 15,420 as of June 1999. Its firearms holding also increased from 10,227 in December 1998 to 11,351 by June 1999.

¹³⁹ Speech of Misuari, p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with BGEN Garcia.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Prof. Kalidtod.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ In an earlier separate interview on Dec. 2, 1998, Camp Abubakar As-Sidique, Maguindanao.

Since the implementation of the integration program in November 1996 until September 1999, a total of 4,850 MNLF members have graduated, out of the 5,066 candidates who reported for training in the AFP. Of this number, 160 have been commissioned in the armed forces and called to active duty as 2nd Lieutenants, while 4,690 have been enlisted in the Philippine Army with the initial rank of Private. Effective February 1998, 998 Privates were promoted to the rank of Private First Class. Some 900 slots for MNLF integrees remain, broken down into 60 slots for officers and 840 for candidate soldiers, including the 250 slots for auxiliaries. At present, the AFP is undertaking the processing of the candidates for the training remaining batches to fill-up the above quota.

The current number of MNLF integrees into the PNP is 4,835, out of the original strength of 4,850. Since their integration, some have left due to absences without leave, death and summary dismissal. At present, the MNLF integrees are organized into 10 Engineering Company and 39 Rifle Company, for a total of 49 Separate Units. Eight other separate units have been organized to stalled by the integrees upon completion of their training.

A total of 496 were integrated as the first batch of MNLF integrees to the PNP, of which 35 were females. Comprising 4 companies, these individuals have been deployed in Sulu, Maguindanao and Cotabato City. The second batch consisted of some 500 integrees who graduated last 15 November, while another 500 integrees are undergoing training.

The additional integrees of the PNP will be inducted into the Non-Uniform Personnel, as a support group comprising 1,500 police integrees.

Profile of Integrees

Most of the integrees in the AFP are beyond the required age limit for commission or enlistment into service. Of the 160 officers, only 49 2nd Lieutenants (or 30 %) have under 31 years of age. Most of these officers are instead within the age range of 32 to 41 years old, while 31 (or 20 %) are within the 42-50 year old age bracket (which is already nearing the retirement age of 56).

73 (or about 45 %) of the 160 officers were from Sulu; 2,185 (or 46 %) of the 4,773 enlisted personnel were also from Sulu. 45 % or 75 of the 160 officers were college graduates. Also, 1,043 of the 4,773 enlisted personnel satisfied the standard educational attainment for enlistment into the AFP.

Issues and Concerns

An initial problem regarding the integration of MNLF members into the AFP has been the slow turn out of applicants. This 8-month delay has also affected the time frame for the processing, training, deployment and integration of these inductees.

During training, MNLF Major General Abou Amri Taddik said the MNLF integrees typically experienced a "cultural shock" in that they found it difficult to adjust to the AFP training rules and

regulations. The AFP is more hierarchical while, the MNLF approach emphasized that the trainer and trainees are treated as equals. In this regard, the MNLF needed time to explain the peace agreement to the MNLF members. Another factor is that the AFP reportedly did not understand the culture of the Muslims, and that the AFP personnel still considered the MNLF integrees as hostile. The non-issuance of firearms even when they were already enlisted personnel was also raised. Finally, mismanagement of financial matters was also mentioned.

Some MNLF men walked out during training. For instance, 487 MNLF integrees walked out of a government camp, complaining of harsh training and delays in the release of their allowances.¹⁴⁵ The military denied this, claiming that "mass leave" was triggered by the integrees' apprehension over plans of retraining in Luzon which would take them away from their homes.¹⁴⁶

Another issue was the influx of ex-military personnel who were members of the MNLF Spider Unit and who appealed for re-instatement in the active military service upon the recommendation of the MNLF leadership. Only 3 officers out of the 300 appellants were considered due to administrative reasons.¹⁴⁷

Finally, out of the 71 slots requested by Misuari to be given senior ranks (from Major to Brigadier General) in the AFP, only 33 can be considered subject to the approval of higher authorities, based on the AFP ratio of 1:25 officer to enlisted personnel.

Internalization Program

An internationalization program was planned for MNLF integrees and AFP personnel in order to "enhance the assimilation process of the integrees [into the AFP] focusing on their psycho-cultural preparation".¹⁴⁸

Information seminars were also conducted to bridge misperceptions and build trust among MNLF integrees and regular members of the AFP. An AFP Speaker's Bureau was also established to conduct seminars and support dialogue in various parts of Mindanao as part of this information drive.

Continuing Education Program

¹⁴⁵ "MNLF Men Back in Army Training Camps", *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (7 November 1999).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ "JAMSO Briefing Manuscript", *Joint Monitoring Committee Meeting*, Sulu Hotel, Quezon City, 10 September 1999, p. 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

In order to respond to the educational needs of MNLF integreees with regards to their professional advancement, and in some instances the requirements for their integration, the AFP, in coordination with Commission on Higher Education and National Peace Unification and Development Council, launched a scholarship program for MNLF integreees. Some 54 integreees have availed themselves of this program, and have pursued courses in agriculture, education, arts, and sciences. 556 enlisted personnel have also involved themselves in the Philippine Education Placement Test, and the Non-formal Education Accreditation and Equivalency Program, as well as secondary education.

Gains from the MNLF Integration

From a military perspective, the reward of the integration of the MNLF has been in terms of its assistance to AFP Civil Military Operations. The MNLF integreees were particularly helpful in the establishment of cooperatives for livelihood programs, as well as in the delivery of basic literacy programs, health and medical care. They have also been of great assistance in improving mosques, as well as in other infrastructure projects (such as building toilets and digging canals).

Crime levels has also been in the decrease. In Jolo for example, the crime index declined from 63 % before deployment of PNP-MNLF integreees to about 49 % after deployment in October 1999.¹⁴⁹ In general, PNP crime statistics in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has also been decreasing since 1995 at an average of 2 % per year.

The "BARIL" [Bring a Rifle Improve your Livelihood] Program

While the MNLF integreees who joined the PNP were not required to turn in their firearms, the AFP applied the "BARIL" [Bring a Rifle Improve your Livelihood] Program to the MNLF integreees. This is a modified version of the government's "Balik-Baril" Project for the communist rebel returnees. Under this program, the MNLF members who joined the AFP would be provided compensation for each firearm that was turned in. These firearms would be accounted for as government property, and would be issued to the trainers during their training and deployment. Those who opted to retain their firearms were required to register such firearms with the local PNP subject to existing regulations concerning firearms registration, licensing and possession. High-caliber weapons and crew-served weapons (mortar, 50 caliber machine gun, 90 recoilless rifles) that did not qualify under the existing firearm laws and regulations were required to be turned in under the terms established by the "Balik-Baril" Project.

As of 10 September 1999, a total of 4,874 assorted firearms have been turned-in by the integreees. Below is classification of these weapons by type and the total amount turned in:

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Supt. Abdelgardan Indanan Alih.

<i>Type of Firearm</i>	<i>Total Number</i>
M16/1R15	884
M14	9
M653	3
M653HM	1
HM	4
FAL G1/FN	97
BAR	9
Carbine	1,563
M79	198
M203	1
AK47	20
AR 18	1
30 CBH	2
Garand	1,760
Cal. 22 HM	3
Cal. 38 Pistol	57
Cal. 380	11
Pis. 380 HM	8
Cal. 45 Pistol	34
30 FM	3
Shotgun	21
Springfield	21
9 mm NGRAM	11
Thomson	97
Thomson/Cal. 45	56

The compensation package for the firearms turned in varies. According to DND Department Circular Nr. 8 (1992) the cost valuation of the firearms are as follows:

- (a) foreign made pistols, revolvers and low-powered rifles (e.g., cal. 45, cal. 38, cal. 357 magnum) range from P 1,500 to P 4,000.00;
- (b) local-made pistols and revolvers from P 1,000 to P 2,000; and
- (c) high-powered rifles from P 9,000 to 15,000 (e.g., light machine guns, mortars, B 40 SAM/RPG Launcher, HMG Cal .50, M16, etc).

In the illegal market, an M16 is valued at a range of P30,000 to P 45,000, and a carbine/cal. 45 pistol at P 25,000.

Despite the turn-over of firearms to the government, it is believed that the number of firearms circulating in Mindanao remains high and may have even increased. Only a fraction of the firearms under the MNLF have been turned over to the government. Other members have sold their firearms,

and others have held on to them.¹⁵⁰

Also, while MNLF members turned over some firearms, these did not significantly disarm them. As maintained by MNLF members and acknowledged by the military officers, an MNLF member typically possesses more than one firearm. In fact, according to an MNLF integree, the other arms in their possession which were not turned in, but were given to comrades were not part of the AFP/PNP integration. One integree, upon completing his training, was reportedly given an M16 by Chairman Misuari as a graduation gift.

Furthermore, some MNLF members who did not opt for integration and are now part of livelihood cooperatives remain armed.¹⁵¹ There are also instances where MNLF members who were granted compensation for their firearms failed to subsequently integrate into AFP.

References have also been made that the modest amount earned from the turnover of firearms has been used to purchase newer and more powerful firearms. Furthermore, some 70% of MNLF integrees to the AFP, as members of the militia, availed themselves of the privilege to acquire loan grants from AFP financial institutions.¹⁵² This practice was reportedly stopped after it was discovered the first batch of MNLF integrees into the AFP had all availed themselves of the gun loan,¹⁵³ particularly since the integrees were left as little as P 2,000 as their "take-home" pay after loan deductions.

The MNLF members who were integrated into the AFP and the PNP were presented with firearms. The MNLF members who were integrated as AFP officers were issued cal. 45 pistols, while the enlisted personnel were issued M 16 rifles except for those who were in garrison duty. MNLF integrees will acquire as part of the arms forces a new firearm unless they are performing garrison duty.

On the other hand, those integrated to the PNP were given "long" arms (i.e., M16) and "short" arms (cal. 45) depending on the crime situation within their assigned areas. The first batch of integrees initially had a problem of inadequate firearms. Only 250 firearms were available, which was not enough for the first batch of 496 graduates. Even the 960 short firearms subsequently issued were reportedly funded from the Countrywide Development Fund of Chairman Nur Misuari.¹⁵⁴ Still,

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Prof. Kalitod.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Lt. Samsodin A. Pulusa, MNLF Integree, 6ID, Camp Awang, Maguindanao, 27 October 1999.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Interview with AFP Officer involved in the MNLF Integration, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City (9 November 1999).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Supt. Abdelgardan Indanan Alih.

the PNP MNL integrees still needed additional 500 or more firearms for the other training graduates. Hence, in the process, MNLF integrees gain firearms after joining the PNP.

IV. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

According to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, peace-building compromises the establishment of new social, political and economic institutions and structures, and fostering reconciliation in removing the underlying causes of armed conflict. This includes "disarming the previously warring parties", monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening government institutions, and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.¹⁵⁵

One element in making the ever-elusive prospects of peace in Mindanao a reality lies in the present disarmament, demobilization and reintegration [in this sense, the integration of the larger Muslim community with the majority of the Filipinos in Mindanao] efforts. Disarming the populace is particularly important given that the massive availability of weapons has a catalytic role in violent intra-state conflicts.

This task is a daunting one, to some, it seems impossible. Even the discussions on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration issues as initiated by the Government and some sectors in society are often viewed with skepticism. Given the in-group bias that exists both Christians and Muslims, the expressed pessimism over a "gunless Mindanao" is understandable.

As the peace agreement with the MNLF inevitably moves on to its second phase and the commitment of the MNLF leadership to the peace agreement still stands, the prospects seem better. An optimistic view of a peace accord between the Government and the MILF will even hasten the process. Once the Government and the armed groups, both committed to uplifting the welfare of the Filipino people albeit in different ways get their act together and resolve the core issues that underpin the Mindanao conflict, peace and progress is not far behind.

A key component in this regard is to instill the willingness of the community, both between the Muslims and Christians to disarm and demobilize themselves, and in the process establish a united but diverse society. Historically, among other factors, the increasing acquisition of arms was borne out of the need for security. It also showed that people are willing to part with their guns once proper incentives are in place. In the martial law years for instance, many Muslim families parted with their weapons to avail of low-interest loans.¹⁵⁶

The successful integration of the MNLF forces into the AFP and the PNP provides the best example that former warring factions can work on building trust and confidence and later on, achieve

¹⁵⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda of Peace* (United Nations: New York, 1992), p. 32.

¹⁵⁶ T.J. George, p. 241.

a common goal.

Sectoral groups can contribute substantially to the DDR efforts. Previously, the use of special education programs using religious instructors and scholars proved successful in making a Muslim "the equal of every man so that he will have no cause or grievance to fight against the government".¹⁵⁷

Towards an effective DDR effort in Mindanao, these groups can be tapped: (1) peace organizations; (2) religious institutions; and (3) local educational institutions. There are 16 peace organizations in Mindanao, nine of which are church-initiated.¹⁵⁸ These groups protect constitutional democracy, promote and propagate a culture of peace, provide assistance (*i.e.*, legal), and educate people on various (*i.e.*, justice, peace).

The religious institutions also play a critical role in the peace process in Mindanao. Groups that provide a key role in this process include the Bishops-Ulama Forum (BUF), Peace Advocates of Zamboanga (PAZ), Silsilah Movement (Inter-Faith Dialogue). These groups spearhead the inter-faith/cultural pluralism in Mindanao.

Ulamas (Muslim religious leaders) are influential in Muslim societies and therefore particularly useful in the mobilization of thousands, as well as in imparting issues to the communities. More than 670 *ulamas* attended the First Ulama Summit¹⁵⁹ spearheaded by the MILF in response to the need of addressing the Moro problem from their own people's perspective. The MILF exhorted the Muslim sectors (groups or individuals) to participate in this endeavour, which is supported by the Qu'ran:

"Verily never Allah change the condition of the people until they change it themselves (with their own souls)" [S. XIII:11]

In this Summit, strong resolutions were formulated to forge unity, solidarity and cooperation among Muslims and non-Muslims to please *Allah*. The *ulamas* had also mobilized thousands in separate rallies before the formal opening of talks between the government and the MILF.

The academe also has a key role in the process of changing perceptions, promoting multiculturalism, democratization and even advocacy and empowerment. The Mindanao State University (MSU), one of the biggest universities in the South with seven campuses in Western Mindanao (Marawi, Iligan City, Maguindanao, General Santos City, Tawi-Tawi, Sulu and Naawan), is an ideal

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Miriam Coronel Ferrer (ed.) *Peace Matters* (Quezon City: Conflict Resolution and Human Rights Program, University of the Philippines, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ Held last 23-24 February 1998 in Da'wah Center, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat.

venue for the discussion or formation of programs on the weapons issue. In addition, the universities can propagate the "culture of peace".¹⁶⁰ The Peace Education Center of the Notre Dame University in Cotabato City offers services and programs to resolve conflict situations and serves as a Secretariat to bodies working on the Mindanao peace process, such as the Independent Fact Finding Committee (IFFC) and the Quick Response Team (QRT).

The role of the international community particularly the OIC is important. OIC has played a crucial role¹⁶¹ in forging the peace agreement between the government and can be tapped in ensuring that effective disarmament and demobilization efforts take place among armed groups in Mindanao.

Such sectors above can contribute in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, either by promoting the culture of peace or through direct involvement in coercing armed groups in Mindanao to give up its arms and disband for the greater interest of their respective communities.

In the end, any attempt at disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in Mindanao will only succeed if these efforts are initiated or at the very least supported by the people themselves. Hence, efforts towards this end should first build on changing the perceptions among Muslims and Christians alike in Mindanao and gradually erasing the communities' collective memory of mistrust, hostility, indifference, militarization and marginalization. The above-mentioned sectors can contribute in creating an atmosphere conducive to disarming or demobilizing groups towards their integration to the larger community of Filipinos in general. Otherwise, Mindanao will likely remain in the vicious cycle of conflict.

¹⁶⁰ UNESCO, "UNESCO and a Culture of Peace: Promoting a Global Movement" in *From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace* (UNESCO Publishing), pp. 251-268.

¹⁶¹ In the 1996 Peace Agreement, the roles of the OIC include: quasi-party, inquiry, good offices, consultation, regional arrangements, sanction even quasi-negotiation (OIC-GRP or OIC-MNLF), hosting, facilitation, cease-fire and post-settlement monitoring and international support generation. See Atty. Soliman Santos Jr, *The Philippines-Muslims Dispute: International Aspects from Origins to Resolution: The Role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Peace Negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)*. Unpublished research paper in International Dispute Resolution, Masters of Laws, Melbourne University, 1999.

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