

CASE STUDY

Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines

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October 2010

Prologue

In 2001, Special Operations Command Pacific formed Joint Special Operations Task Force-510 to lead operations in the southern Philippines Islands of Mindanao and Basilan. The broad purpose was to assist the government of the Philippines by increasing the capacity of the Philippine armed forces in the south to deal with an outlaw Islamic terrorist group, Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya, or the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), thereby to increase the stability of an important regional ally, as well as contribute to what became the global war on terrorism.¹ The problem posed was one requiring the conceptual apparatus of design thinking, even though it anticipated formalization of design doctrine (FM 5-0) by a number of years. The experience also illustrates application of the historical principles of counterinsurgency listed in FM 3-24.²

The situation was complex. The U.S. government, which had neglected their former colony and erstwhile ally since the base closings of 1992, was becoming aware of the threat posed by insurgents to this still friendly government, located on the vital western Pacific waterways. The Philippine government remained sensitive to U.S. intervention for a variety of historical reasons, some from the colonial past, some from more recent events. Moreover, at the time, the Philippine government was

¹ Abu Sayyaf means "Bearer of the Sword." Zachary Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, September 2005), p 5.

² Chapter 4, "Designing Counterinsurgency Campaigns and Operations," FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006) and Chapter 3, "Design", of FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* (March 2010). Historical Principles of Counterinsurgency are in FM 3-24, page 1-19 to 1-26.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE OCT 2010	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Booz Allen Hamilton,8283 Greensboro Drive,McLean,VA,22101		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 29	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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passing through a period of instability, which resulted ultimately in impeachment of the sitting President.

The insurgent threat in the islands was not confined to a single opposition body but was multiple and in some ways incoherent, save in a common, negative goal to bring down the ruling system. The host government much preferred to deal with most of its armed opponents on its own terms, to manage the problems the Philippines way, rather to solve them by dramatic action. Their subsequent actions, however, clearly show concern about the aggressive nature of the ASG reign of terror, which threatened to unsettle the fragile situation with various other Muslim factions. They were concerned as well about the evident inability of their forces in the south to deal with the situation.

U.S. Pacific Command, Special Operations Command Pacific, and the U.S. Mission to the Philippines, had to develop a coherent set of responses to deal with this deteriorating situation without producing resistance from the host nation. This task clearly required design processes to identify relevant tensions, portray a more desirable future state, cast light on the actual problems by identifying those tendencies and tensions that had to be overcome or exploited to realize the desired change, and to formulate operational approaches to move toward the desired transformation in ways satisfactory to both the US. and Philippines governments and people: In short, to act **by, with, and through** the instrumentalities of the host nation.

In 2001, ASG conducted a string of large group kidnappings for ransom. Some of these involved American citizens. The coincidence of increasingly aggressive terrorist actions in the southern islands, combined with the events of 9-11 in the U.S., produced the window of opportunity that allowed a more substantial U.S. military effort within both the sensitivities of the Philippine government to foreign intervention in domestic security affairs, and any residual U.S. frustration with the 1992 loss of Philippine naval and air bases. The core of the intervention in the field was 160 Special Forces advisors,

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placed with host nation maneuver units. These were supplemented by a 500 man Navy-Marine Engineering Task Group to do infrastructure development on the ASG home island of Basilan. The Joint Task Force headquarters helped the host nation regional command develop operational intelligence and provide operational command and control. The relatively brief Basilan operation laid the groundwork for a subsequent sustained engagement by a reduced Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, which continues today.

Consciously, or unconsciously, U.S. efforts reflected application of the principles for counterinsurgency listed in counterinsurgency doctrine (FM 3-24). Interventions were designed and conducted with particular attention to increasing the legitimacy of the host government, both by contributing to the ability of host nation armed forces to provide security for the contested population and, at the same time, to increase popular acceptance of the authority of the host government by helping host nation forces to conduct parallel civil affairs actions with immediate benefit to the island people. Special Operations units worked with local authorities, host nation military and non-governmental agencies, to ensure unity of effort. Over time, military engagement was matched by an increasingly active, non-DoD, U.S. civil engagement strategy and investment program, carefully harmonized under the ambassador-led country-team. While there was great concern for the welfare of U.S. hostages, the rule that political factors are primary, disciplined the response of U.S. forces to providing critical intelligence and capacity building, while respecting the Philippine responsibility and authority to lead.

Significant effort was invested in helping host nation units increase their reconnaissance and intelligence gathering skills. In a relatively short time, the local population was made sufficiently comfortable with the host nation and US forces that they began to provide useful information, indeed to turn some of the insurgents back to the government. In part, no doubt, the personal threat posed to

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local communities by the terrorist group, highlighted by friendly psychological operations, probably facilitated the isolation of the insurgents.

The final doctrinal principle is that counterinsurgents should prepare for long term commitment. As the story below indicates, the initial commitment, largely because it was successful, proved to be only a prologue for a sustained advisory effort within the whole-of-government effort focused on the southern islands. These efforts were carried out within the limits of host nation sensitivity that sometimes seemed to make little sense to U.S. commanders, and they have been sustained in spite of periodic surges of violence that might have curtailed less circumspect leaders. In large part, military advisory and support operations continue because of management of information and expectations has been possible, because force size-appropriate to host nation sensitivity and U.S. motivation has been maintained, and because U.S. and local forces have learned and adapted to an ever self-transforming foe. U.S. authorities have resisted the temptation to over control their hosts. The host nation forces, in turn, have gradually bought into the softer approach the U.S. forces have modeled.

Narrative

If the future is going to consist of a era of persistent conflict in which the hallmark prophylactic strategy will involve U.S. armed forces in various foreign internal defense and stability and support operations, the ongoing collaboration with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, now in its ninth year under the title **Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines**, should serve as a model. Because of the complexity of the situation that forms the context for U.S. intervention, the development of the 2002 operations reflects in many ways the approach to problem solving adopted in doctrine under the rubric of design.

Design, as outlined in Army doctrine, is intended to help understand ill-structured problems, anticipate change, create opportunities, and recognize and manage transitions. Design consists of three

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broad activities: 1) describing the context in which the design will be applied; 2) identifying the problem the design is intended to solve, and 3), constructing a broad general approach to solving the problem.³

The first step in design is understanding the situation in which you wish to engage. From the standpoint of the Commander, United States Pacific Command, the Philippine situation was an unusually complex problem because of the limitations imposed by the legacy of U.S. colonialism, the nature of the Philippine government and the tension between U.S. long-term regional goals and short-term desires to challenge a local terrorist threat that had harmed U.S. citizens. Internal political tensions in the islands, and concerns on the U.S. side about force protection and the need to limit the size of the military commitment in light of other ongoing and anticipated operations, offered additional challenges. Balancing all these tensions required a creative approach based on deep understanding of the Philippine situation and, as it turned out, a flexible and adaptive approach to a rapidly changing situation defined by the fluid relationships and transactions of a host of Philippine actors pursuing a plethora of individual goals.

Every locale for capacity building operations is unique. The strategic importance of the Philippine Islands, marking one boundary on the South China Sea, has only been enhanced by the rise of the Peoples' Republic of China and China's evident intention to become a regional naval as well as land power. While the U.S. naval and air installations have been gone from Subic Bay and Clark Field since 1992, a sustainable and independent Philippine Republic remains important to U.S. interests to ensure access to the markets and trade routes of the South China Sea and, indeed, for continuing viability of the U.S. role as a balancing power in the political constellation of the region.

The Republic of the Philippines constitutes a highly complex setting for U.S. military operations. The Philippine government and military are known for their endemic corruption. The nation has

³ FM 5-0, paragraphs 3-7 and 3-36, pages 3-2 and 3-7.

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suffered from volatile crony politics, suspension of the constitution, political murder, attempted military coups, impeachments, and unrest brought about by long economic decline and resulting deprivation. The historical U.S. colonial relationship with the Philippines continues to make U.S. military operations on the ground problematic while, at the same time, the memory of U.S. liberation of the islands from Japanese occupation can still provide a reservoir of good will. One additional legacy, the wide presence of English, eases communication with the educated classes, though not necessarily in the villages. Indeed, absence of skills in local dialects proved to be a problem for Special Forces advisors in the post 9/11 period.⁴

Memory of the colonial legacy generally requires sensitivity, particularly with the governing classes and the vociferous and nationalistic Philippine press. While it is correct to argue that the basis for U.S. – Philippine military collaboration is legally satisfied within the Philippines' Constitution by existing mutual defense treaties, experience shows that Philippine government leaders feel themselves constrained by their estimates of what is politically advisable.⁵ No doubt this accounts in part for the imposition of force caps, stringent rules of engagement on advisory personnel, and other restrictions on the activities of U.S. military personnel during advisory efforts. It may also account for the acceptability of U.S. presence in the southern islands of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, but not in the island of Luzon where the greatest insurgent threat, the communist New Peoples' Army operates.

Following the U.S. withdrawal in 1992, the U.S. and Philippine governments continued their 1952 Mutual Defense Treaty. In 1998, they negotiated a Visiting Forces Agreement permitting increased military cooperation and allowing resumption of combined military exercises. In November 2001, the

⁴ Dr. C. H. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," *Special Warfare The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (September 2004), 21.

⁵ Colonel David S. Maxwell, "Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines: What Would Sun-Tzu Say?" *Military Review* (May-June 2004), 22.

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Presidents of the United States and the Philippines declared common cause in the War on Terror. In October 2003, as a result of their support for the War on Terror, the United States designated the Philippines a Major Non-NATO Ally. Today, the U.S. International Military and Education and Training (IMET) program for the Philippines is the largest in the Pacific and the third-largest in the world. A Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) was signed in November 2002. In 2009, the U.S. provided \$138,000 in grant funds to support economic development, over half, targeted for chronically impoverished Mindanao, the center of Islamic insurgency.⁶ U.S. military operations occur in the Philippines within a dynamic whole-of-government effort run out of the Embassy by the Ambassador and his country team.⁷ As a matter of policy, the Philippines government also subscribes to a coordinated whole-of-government approach to internal security.⁸

Another unique feature of the political environment of the Republic of the Philippines (and the U.S. response to it) is the fact that armed insurgency is a more or less normal, even legitimate part of Philippine politics. This situation has its roots in the historical, geographical and political configuration of the republic, extending more or less north and south over more than 7,000 islands of all sizes. The government administration is centered on the large northern island of Luzon. The further south you go, the more underdeveloped and, even feudal, the governmental structures become.⁹ In the words of a

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Background Notes: Philippines, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. April 19, 2010. Available on line from the Department of State.

⁷ See comments by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone (Ambassador 2002-2005) in Transcript, Dan Rather Reports, Episode Number 404; Episode Title: Target: Philippines, 28 February 2009. On line at http://www.simmons.edu/undergraduateadmission/blog/docs/Dan_Rather_Reports_404.pdf. Colonel David S. Maxwell, Memorandum, SUBJECT: Commander's Summary of the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTF-P) 2006-2007.

⁸ Government of the Philippines, "Executive Order No. 21, Creating A Coordinative and Integrative System of Internal Security," Official Gazette, (September 10, 2001), 5449-5491. The date of the order is 19 June.

⁹ See Eliza Griswold, "Waging Peace in the Philippines: With innovative tactics, U.S. Forces make headway in the 'war on terror'," *Smithsonian* magazine (December 2006). On line at

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graduate thesis from the Naval Postgraduate School, “the colonizers ultimately left the Philippines in the hands of an elite group cultivated by them, so that post-colonial Philippines much resembled colonial Philippines only without foreign rule.”¹⁰

The population of the Philippines reflects extremes of wealth and poverty, with primitive subsistence agricultural villages, lack of modern infrastructure that would favor development, large coastal urban concentrations and difficult interiors. The vast majority of Philippine citizens are Roman Catholic but a sizable and concentrated Muslim minority occupies significant territory on the southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, which extends south and west, merging with the Muslim islands of Malaysia and Indonesia. The Muslims have resisted what they see as foreign domination since the Spanish arrived to impose it. They were the most irreconcilable opponents of the U.S. colonial administration and have been the source of armed regional opposition to the government on Luzon through the final quarter of the twentieth century. They remain so today.

The modern Muslim insurgencies, with which recent U.S. military activities have been most concerned, have their roots in traditional alienation of the Muslim minority and their general neglect by the Philippines’ government. These frictions came to a head in the general uncertainty of the Ferdinand Marcos administration. In 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front, or MNLF, was founded on Mindanao with the goal of gaining secular Muslim political autonomy from the north and regaining land transferred to Christian settlers. From 1973 to 1978, the MNLF waged a guerrilla war with the Armed

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Waging+Peace+in+the+Philippines+%7C+People+%26+Places+%7C+Smithsonian+Magazine&expire=&urlID=24395059&fb=Y&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.smithsonianmag.com%2Fpeople-places%2Fphilippines.html&partnerID=253162&cid=10023156>. Accessed 7 August 2010.

¹⁰ Ricardo Morales, *Perpetual Wars: The Philippines Insurgencies*. Masters Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, Monterey, CA, December 2003. Quoted in Roy Devesa, LTC Philippine Army, *An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology*, Master of Military Art and Sciences Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2005, 2.

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Forces of the Philippines.¹¹ In 1978, the MNLF entered negotiations with the central government. Negotiations carried on with varied success for almost a decade, until 1987, when the MNLF signed a peace agreement with the government and was subsequently granted political authority over Muslim areas of the south, designated the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).¹²

When the MNLF undertook negotiations, a splinter group, made up in part of returning veterans from jihad in Afghanistan, formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and continued the struggle with the government and Christian communities with the revised goal of creating a separate Islamic State organized, they said, on Muslim principles. Another, more extreme, group, the Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya (ASG) was founded in 1991, the year the U.S. retention of Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base was rejected by the Philippines Senate. The goals of ASG, like MILF, were separatist, in their case to create a state based on *Salafi Wahhabism*.¹³ The ASG was related to Al Qaeda early on, through Osama Bin Ladin's brother-in-law, Mohammad Jamal Khallifa, an early financial sponsor, and plotting with Ramzi Yousef (World Trade Center Bomber) and Khalid Sheikh Mohammad (9/11 planner). The ASG has also developed ties to the Indonesian terrorist group Jameah Islamiya (JI) (Bali Bombings). In the 1990s, it was responsible for a wave of terror against Christian communities and Church leaders.¹⁴ The U.S. declared the ASG a terrorist group in October 1997.

Perhaps because of the violence of its behavior, the Philippines government has always looked at the ASG as a criminal gang. However, the government has continued to recognize the MNLF and MILF

¹¹ See Dr. C. H. Briscoe and Lieutenant Colonel Dennis Downey, "Multiple Insurgent Groups Complicate Philippine Security," *Special Warfare The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (September 2004), 12-14.

¹² Russell W. Glenn, *Counterinsurgency and Capacity Building: Lessons from Solomon Islands and the Southern Philippines*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, February 2008), 13.

¹³ Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 2-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

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as potential political interlocutors, with whom they could eventually arrive at a political Modus Vivendi. The Philippine government has granted the two groups qualified protections during periods of negotiation. Because of the evident links between the ASG and MILF, in particular,¹⁵ this has proved to be a source of friction between the U.S. and host government. When the U.S. has raised the possibility of declaring the MILF a terrorist group because of its network of relationship with ASG, the Philippines government has objected strenuously and continues to place limits on military counteraction that might interfere with ultimate political resolution with the MILF.¹⁶

In practice, the U.S. government has followed this pattern, focusing its efforts on the ASG as a terrorist group, while keeping hands off the MNLF and MILF. The U.S. Ambassador has met with leaders of the MILF (2008) and the head of the MILF has written to the U.S. President.¹⁷ Because all of these groups are active in the same general geographic areas, and are interrelated by culture and family connection, this policy has introduced a significant degree of complexity into operations against the ASG.¹⁸ The immediate effect has been to provide sanctuaries to the ASG leaders and gangs when they are pressed in other areas.¹⁹

¹⁵ Abuza, Balik-Terrorism, 14-18. Abuza writes: "Based on the available evidence, the two groups have maintained a long-standing, yet ad hoc relationship that has depended on mission, time, personal/family connections, training, experience, available personnel and funds."

¹⁶ Ibid, 14-16. Maxwell, "What Would Sun-Tzu Say" 22.

¹⁷ Ambassador Ricciardone, Dan Rather Reports, 12-14.

¹⁸ Abuza, Balik-Terrorism, 15. "Based on the available evidence, the two groups [MILF and ASG] have maintained a long-standing, yet ad hoc relationship that has depended on mission, time, personal/family connections, training experience, available personnel and funds." Abuza goes on to relate that "During the 2002 Balikitan exercises, a trilateral agreement was reached, assuring the MILF that joint U.S. Philippine patrols in Basilan would not enter MILF-held zones."

¹⁹ Maxwell, "What would Sun Tzu Say?" 22.

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In truth, the Philippine approach against MNLF and MILF has shown some success. In June 2003 the MILF formally renounced terrorism. In August 2008 the MILF and government came to an agreement in principle on a territorial settlement, subsequently struck down by the Philippines Supreme Court. Peace talks resumed in December 2009. In 2010, the new Philippines President, Benigno Aquino expressed willingness to consider a Constitutional amendment to facilitate the peace process. Four days later, a field commander of the MILF, linked with attacks on Christian groups in Mindanao in 2008, surrendered to the government.²⁰

All that said, Muslims are not the most dangerous insurgent group In the Philippines. They do not constitute a majority of the population, even in the south, nor do they constitute a single coherent threat. MNLF, MILF and the ASG are only the most prominent of a number of Muslim resistance movements. There seems to be agreement that the most dangerous insurgent group is the Communist Party's New People's Army (listed as a terrorist group by the U.S. government), the descendants of the Hukbalahap Rebellion of the late nineteen forties and early fifties.

The communists are located principally in central Luzon.²¹ They have been waging a guerrilla war with the central government since 1967, with the objective of overthrowing the existing system and replacing it with a communist state. The communists achieved their greatest following in opposition to the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos, when they were the most effective opposition group. The government of Corazon Aquino, which followed in 1986, restored popular faith in the government. Under the Aquino regime, and that of her successor, Fidel Ramos, the strength of the communist appeal declined.

²⁰ Reports from Philippine Newspapers posted by Peace Negotiations Watch, Vol. IX, Number 31, Friday, August 27, 2010. (On line mailing.)

²¹ Abuza, Balik-Terrorism, 1, 41

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The communists entered peace negotiations with the Ramos government in 1996. Ramos transferred responsibility for the remaining communist threat from the Army to the National Police. The communists then began to rebound as conditions failed to live up to expectations. The revitalized communist threat, combined with deteriorating conditions in the South, led the national government to adopt a comprehensive security and defense plan, the National Internal Security Plan (NISP), in 2001, based upon what the government calls a Strategy of Holistic Approach and an operational scheme of “Clear-Hold-Develop” (C-H-D).²² As late as 2005, a Philippine Army Officer attending the U.S. Command and General Staff College, could argue that the strategy, while adequate on the face of it, lacked the coordinated planning and execution necessary to succeed with a true whole-of-government approach. The Armed Forces, he wrote, over emphasized the use of Special Operations Teams (SOT) (combining psychological operations, intelligence, security, and stay-behind personnel) to clear hostile villages. They had no program to secure them against long-term guerrilla returns. The result, he argued, has been a marked inability on the part of the central government to take decisive action against the communist insurgents.²³ A 2010 article from the *Manila Bulletin*, however, repeats Army claims of continued progress against the communists from 2005 to the present.²⁴

²² Government of the Philippines, “Executive Order No. 21.

²³ Devesa, Assessment, 6. According to Devesa, the C-H-D technique is the idea of Brigadier General Victor N. Corpus of the Philippine Army. Corpus had defected to the Communists from the Constabulary in 1970. He surrendered six years later, was imprisoned for ten years and allowed to reenter the Army after Marcos was ousted from power.

²⁴ Manila Bulletin, “AFP cites gains in internal security plan,” on line at <http://www.mb.com/articles/267733/afp-cites-gains-internal-security-plan>. No date. Copyright 2010.

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The Basilan Model

The second and third goals of the design methodology are to identify the problem(s) the design is intended to solve and develop an approach to overcome opposition and exploit opportunities within the existing context. In the case of most complex problems, there is more than one goal. In the case of the Philippines, there were both immediate short-term goals and longer-term ambitions. The first was to help the host government and its armed forces achieve greater capability to deal with terrorist forces, a goal given greater immediacy with the kidnapping of two American missionaries, the Burnhams. Then there was the long-term goal of developing sustainable means of support to strengthen the government's control over its territory, while influencing the government to respect the human rights and legitimate needs of the traditionally disadvantaged minority, which provided the manpower behind the Islamic insurgents.

Much of the total effort was, and continues to be accomplished through the U.S. country team. SOCPAC, in the form of Joint Special Operations Task Force 510, designed a broad general approach focused on improving the capabilities of Philippine forces in the southern islands by providing training, encouragement, material, information and intelligence resources. This succeeded in reversing the adverse trends and laying a foundation for an advisory effort that continues to this day. The "design" has become known as the Basilan Model, because initial operations were focused on Basilan Island, the home of the ASG terrorist group.

The U.S. support of operations against the ASG can be traced to the death of the ASG founder, Abdurajak Janjalani, who was killed by Philippine police in December, 1998, the year the U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement was signed with the Philippines. The focus of the ASG has seemed to be remarkably

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sensitive to the characteristics of the leader of the moment.²⁵ Janjalani's successors led the group away from their political aims and into a period of largely apolitical criminal activity, punctuated by large group kidnappings for ransom. In 2000, they conducted something like a reign of terror. In March, the ASG kidnapped 55 people, mainly school children, teachers and a priest. In April, they conducted a long amphibious raid on a resort located on the Malaysian island of Sipidan, kidnapping 20 foreigners and a Filipino. Between July and August, ASG kidnapped 30 more westerners, including an American, Jeffrey Schilling, who later escaped or was released.

In September, President Estrada ordered over 1,500 Philippine troops onto the island of Jolo to operate against the ASG elements who had conducted the Malaysian raid.²⁶ The Commander, U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), Admiral Dennis Blair, accompanied by a Special Operations Command Pacific briefing team, flew to the Philippines to offer a military training team to help the Army of the Philippines create a company-sized counter-terrorism unit. Philippines President Joseph Estrada declined the offer but, when he was forced from office the following January (2001), on grounds of corruption, his successor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, invited PACOM, to send the team.²⁷ They arrived in March 2001 and remained until July, training the first of three Light Reaction Companies, or LRCs.²⁸

In May, 2001, ASG kidnapped 30 more tourists from the Dos Palmas resort on Palawan Island. Among these were two American missionaries, the Burnhams, Martin and Gracia, and a third American

²⁵ Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 13..

²⁶ Larry Niksch, *Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation*, CRS Report to Congress, Updated January 24, 2007, CRS-8.

²⁷ Brisco, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines", 16.

²⁸ Colonel David S. Maxwell, *Commander's Summary of Operation OEF-P, 5 May 02*. (In possession of Colonel Maxwell.)

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citizen, Guillermo Sobero. Sobero was later beheaded.²⁹ President Arroyo ordered 4,500 troops to Basilan to root out the ASG.³⁰ In June, the Government of the Philippines promulgated Executive Order Number 21.

Following the Burnham/Sobero kidnappings, the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group began providing intelligence support and light reaction company expertise to the PACOM Commander's Pacific Situational Awareness Team (later the Counterterrorism Cell) located forward in the U.S. Embassy in Manila.³¹ When its training was complete, the Light Reaction Company was sent south to the forces on Basilan Island, just south of Mindanao, which served as the ASG's staging base. Meanwhile PACOM, SOCPAC and 1st Special Forces Group, conducted planning for follow-on work to increase Philippine counter-terrorism capacity. An initial visit to Armed Forces of the Philippines headquarters on Zamboanga, on Mindanao, was planned for 12 September, 2001, and rescheduled for the 19th following 9/11.

9/11 offered an opportunity to expand the tentative steps to U.S.—Philippines military rapprochement. President Arroyo immediately offered support to U.S. counterterrorism efforts overseas and the PACOM commander dispatched his SOCPAC commander, Brigadier General (USAF) Donald Wurster and Colonel (USA) David Fridovich, commander 1st Special Forces Group, to conduct what they called a "Terrorist Coordination and Assistance Visit," or TCAV, under cover of the preparations for a periodic joint exercise called Balikatan (Forward Together) 02-1. The purpose of the team was to identify the deficiencies of the Armed Forces of Philippines with regard to their ability to conduct effective combat operations against terrorists.

²⁹ Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism*, 7-8.

³⁰ Nicksch, *Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation*, CRS-8.

³¹ Maxwell, *Commander's Summary*, 5 May 02.

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The survey was conducted in October and plans were drafted during November and December to develop a relevant training package to increase Philippine military capabilities. The survey covered the ground from the national level in Manila to the Philippines Armed Forces' Southern Command headquarters in Zamboanga, to (Philippine) JTF Comet and tactical units on Basilan. It addressed both combat and operational sustainment capabilities, which had deteriorated badly during the period of U.S. neglect, following the 1992 withdrawal.

In November, President Arroyo traveled to the United States to meet with President Bush. The two leaders declared their intent to develop a "vigorous, integrated plan for strengthening the AFP's capability to combat terror and protect Philippines sovereignty."³² President Bush promised \$100 million in military assistance and \$4.6 billion in economic aid. President Arroyo agreed to allow the U.S. military to deploy to the Philippines *to advise and assist* the Philippines Armed Forces.³³

In December, SOCPAC deployed an intelligence fusion cell to SOUTHCOM HQ in Zamboanga.³⁴ According to a report produced by the Congressional Research Service, the initial terms of reference (TOR) governing advisory personnel were difficult to hammer out, again because of Philippine sensitivity to foreign intervention, as well as U.S. concern for force protection.³⁵

Although military equipment to upgrade Philippines capabilities began to arrive in December, the host nation resisted any idea of a direct combat role for their American partners. The intervention was to be cloaked in an exercise and American advisors were to be limited to a non-combat role. Involvement in operations was limited to actions against Abu Sayyaf, and there was a geographical

³² Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," 17-18.

³³ Ibid, 18.

³⁴ Maxwell, Commander's Summary 5 May 02.

³⁵ Nicksch, Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation, CRS-10-11.

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limitation to Basilan and the Zamboanga peninsula. For their part, U.S. political figures were reluctant to place U.S. military forces under Philippine command. According to Colonel Dave Maxwell, the commander of the Special Forces troops on Basilan in 2002, the Secretary of Defense and PACOM commander imposed unfortunate force protection standards.³⁶ It took until June to negotiate permission for Special Forces advisors to accompany company level units on operations. Further, an initial force cap, apparently originating at PACOM, combined with subsequent deployment of a large headquarters element for the Joint Task Force, delayed arrival of supporting Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs elements for Basilan units until April.³⁷

The Basilan Model for counterinsurgency, which apparently has its origin with Dr. Gordon McCormick of the Department of Defense Analysis, Naval Post Graduate School, is portrayed either as a triangle, representing the interaction of security, economic development and sustainment;³⁸ or a square, consisting of two triangles joined at a common base. In the second, combined model, one triangle illustrates the internal environment (security; insurgent infrastructure; insurgents) and the other the external environment (diplomacy; financing; insurgents), assuming the interaction of People, Insurgents, International Actors and Government (shown at the corners).³⁹ In 2009, General Fridovich described the governing vision to Dan Rather more simply, as having three cornerstones,

³⁶ Maxwell, "What Would Sun Tzu Say?" 21.

³⁷ Dr. C. H. Briscoe, "Reflections and Observations on ARSOF Operations During Balikatan 02-1", *Special Warfare The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (September 2004), 56. On Force Cap see Dr. Cheryl A. Walley, "Impact of the Semipermissive Environment on Force-Protection in Philippine Engagements," in *ibid*, 37.

³⁸ Glenn, *Counterinsurgency and Capacity Building*, 11.

³⁹ Colonel Gregory Wilson, U.S. Army, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and The Indirect Approach," *Military Review* (November-December 2006), 4. Jason A. Densley, Major (USAF), Air Command and Staff College, Air University, *The Basilan Model: A Case Study in Counterinsurgency Operations*, A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements (AL: Maxwell Air Force Base, April 2008), 8. Wilson attributes the model to McCormick's "Pocket Guide to Internal War".

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- 1.) Assisting in counter-terror operations;
- 2.) Training in light infantry skills and self-assessment; and
- 3.) Civil military operations, humanitarian assistance.

The emphasis, he said, was on 'sweat equity'. Commitment by the supported units to make the process self-sustaining, "building a relationship between the population, the government and the forces."⁴⁰

Perhaps more pertinent for Joint Special Operations Task Force 510, which was deployed to Mindanao in February, was the selection of three lines of effort:

- Building AFP capacity to enhance security;
- Conducting focused civil-military operations to separate the population from the guerrillas; and
- Information Operations to enhance both – all conducted "by, with and through" host nation forces.⁴¹

Notably there is no specific reference to the Burnhams, though the general tenor of the ARSOF historian's account seems to suggest their rescue was a major focus (and justification) for the large JSOTF headquarters on Mindanao.⁴²

However broad the mission, the principal operational element of JSOTF 510 was the 160 Special Operations Soldiers of FOB 11 on Basilan. The mission statement for FOB 11 was:

On order FOB 11 conducts Unconventional Warfare Operations in the Southern Philippines through, by and with the Armed Forces of the Philippines to assist the Government of the Philippines in the destruction of terrorist organizations and the separation of the population from the terrorist organizations.⁴³

The A and B Teams began deploying to Mindanao on February 16th. On arrival at Zamboanga, they attended "cultural sensitivity training," required by the host nation as part of the exercise Terms of Reference. Colonel Maxwell observes wryly that, "initial seminars were heavily observed by the press"

⁴⁰ Lt. General David Fridovich, U.S. SOCOM TO Dan Rather in Dan Rather Reports, Episode Number 404; 5-6.

⁴¹ Glenn, *Counterinsurgency and Capacity Building*, 12.

⁴² Dr. C. H. Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnhams: The Unspoken SOCPAC Mission", *Special Warfare The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (September 2004), 48.

⁴³ Maxwell, *Commander's Summary*, 5 May 02

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and notes that while the sessions offered some new information, the operational units were already well prepared to deal with the culture on Basilan.⁴⁴

During the first week, the A and B teams had to familiarize themselves with their host units and equip themselves for long term basing. This provided an opportunity to begin putting money into the local economy and required no small degree of ingenuity and adaptation. The second week, Colonel Fridovich came to Basilan to brief his teams. He told them that their next task was to conduct a survey, a detailed assessment of the needs of the local villagers. This served the dual purpose of getting the teams into the villages and understanding the environment *as the locals saw it*. The surveys were targeted on both Christian and Muslim villages and confirmed the relative neglect of the latter by the government.

There were 263 Baranguays or villages on Basilan and 30 were to be sampled by the end of March. 28 surveys were completed with the results serving as the basis for Phase II Civic Action plans. The final two assessments were not completed because the Armed Forces of the Philippines began Operation LIBERTY in March and April. The military operations were intended to produce human intelligence on ASG and they allowed the U.S. advisors to observe battalion level operations and suggest to their host unit training regimes to improve their performance, particularly in use of reconnaissance, employment of control measures, lateral coordination and communications, and rehearsal for tactical actions: in short, to do the bread and butter of advisory work.⁴⁵

Operational restrictions on movement of the advisory personnel proved to be a persistent problem. Initially, it was necessary to seek permission from Joint Task Force level to participate in operations. Eventually a kind of blanket permission was received for advisors to deploy with battalion

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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headquarters. Deployment at company level, where most fighting was actually done, was approved only as the initial six month mission came to an end.⁴⁶

While Operation Liberty was going on, there was an unsuccessful attempt to capture an ASG leader, believed to be hiding in the house of a local mayor. The raid did not capture the fugitive largely, military officials believed, because it was compromised when the armed forces applied for a warrant through civil justice channels. Colonel Maxwell observes, however, “the raid was characterized by good tactical planning and most importantly, rehearsals, which was a result of the ODA advisors.” The US medics on the scene treated wounded participants, one friendly and one enemy.⁴⁷ There was a hasty amphibious raid on a neighboring island (Dassilon) and an operation conducted against an MILF battalion commander, Amir Mingkong. U.S. advisors took no part in the latter because of the limitations of the governing terms of reference forbidding participation in actions against the MILF. A final intervention involved U.S. advisors agreeing to exfiltrate surrendering ASG members to authorities in Manila. 19 ASG members agreed to surrender but only to the U.S. forces, and subsequently authorities in Manila, because they feared retribution from the local political authorities.

As a result of observations during Operation Liberty, particular attention was paid to training in reconnaissance capabilities, including small unit patrolling, aggressive medical training both for unit medics and buddy-aid capabilities, tactical decision making procedures and intelligence preparation of the battlefield. Teams conducted marksmanship training and instruction in weapons maintenance. A process was put in train to replace many unserviceable weapons. A highlight of the training was a full-mission profile simulation for the light reconnaissance company, observed electronically in the Joint Operations Center.

⁴⁶ Briscoe, “Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines,” 22.

⁴⁷ Maxwell, Commander’s Summary, 5 May.

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The advisory teams in the field also looked for opportunities for small scale civic action projects, both to connect with the local population, separating them from the ASG, and to model the behavior to the host units. The teams assigned at Philippine brigade level, worked with the largest non-governmental organization on the island, the Christian Children's Fund, and all detachments medics held daily sick calls for AFP members and their dependents. As local people began showing up for medical care, the advisors and the Armed Forces of the Philippines medical staff began a program of scheduled medical care around the island. These proved very successful establishing ties to the local people, Christian and Muslim, and initiating a flow of information enhancing force protection and local operations. Care was paid to insuring civil affairs actions were led by Philippine authorities.

In March, a U.S. Naval Construction Task Group arrived to conduct an initial survey and confirmed much of what the dispersed advisory teams had reported concerning infrastructure shortfalls. The engineers developed an action plan, briefed it to US and Philippine authorities, and returned with a 340 man engineering task group and heavy equipment to do the work. The Engineer effort was a follow-on to the initial Special Operations advisory mission, that was limited to six months. The construction unit focused on road building, enhancing the primitive island airstrip and port facilities, as well as establishing pure water sources for villages without them. The Army Special Operations Civil Affairs personnel provided the interface with local government and the community. The infusion of armed U.S. forces, and the connections made by Civil Affairs programs (always under Philippine lead), as well as Psychological Operations programs, began to infringe on both the local support and freedom of movement of ASG forces.⁴⁸ By the end of the initial six month engagement, measurable progress could be observed both in the capabilities of the Philippines Military forces, who were the major security

⁴⁸ Given as a major reason for ASG's movement of their leadership and U.S. hostages to Mindanao. Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnhams", 48.

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provider. Progress was observable as well as in the civilian environment, marked by the beginning of returns of displaced persons to regions from which they had been driven by ASG activities.⁴⁹

While Basilan operations had been improving the tactical skills of the forces on that Island, the Philippines Army 1st Division Command and the headquarters of Joint Task Force 510 (SOCPAC) had expended their efforts gathering intelligence and planning for operations to find and hopefully free the Burnhams.⁵⁰ In May, intelligence reports came in, indicating that the ASG had moved the Burnhams to Zamboanga del Norte on Mindanao. Much of the Armed Forces of the Philippines action on Basilan was curtailed to pursue the ASG leader, Abu Sabaya, who was holding the Burnhams. The rescue operation, Operation DAY BREAK, involved Philippines Army, Navy and Marine forces, with key American staff conducting detailed intelligence preparation of the battlefield to focus combat operations and operational assistance in exercise of command and control.⁵¹ On June 6th, a Philippines Scout Ranger patrol found the ASG group holding the hostages and attacked under cover of the rain. Martin Burnham was killed in the initial moments of the attack. Gracia Burnham was wounded but rescued. Three ASG members were killed and the remainder, including Abu Sabaya fled. In the words of the Command Historian for U.S. Army Special Operations Command:

The individual and collective training of the army and marine infantry battalions by the SF teams, and JTF 510's emphasis on JTF Comet [AFP 1st Infantry Division]] to plan operations against the ASG, made the rescue possible. Operations Liberty I and II not only coordinated army and marine field operations but increased the pressure on the ASG in Basilan, while the Psychological Operations wanted-poster campaign and the humanitarian projects of Civil Affairs reduced Muslim popular support of the terrorists. Despite the constraints imposed by the Philippine government, the ARSOF elements managed to accomplish their assigned, "advise, assist and training" mission and significantly altered ASG power on Basilan.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Briscoe, "Rescuing the Burnham, 47.

⁵¹ Ibid, 48-49.

⁵² Ibid, 50-51.

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In June, Al Sabaya was spotted moving by boat between islands and was killed by the Philippines Armed Forces. Following the end of the Burnham hostage crisis, the Philippine forces and their advisors used what remained of the time on station to complete their training programs.

How Sustainable is the Basilan Model?

The success of the effort on Basilan provided a basis for continued training activities with the Philippines Armed Forces. JSOTF-510 was reduced to a much smaller, perhaps more traditional, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), operating under the general oversight of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group in the Embassy. When Colonel Dave Maxwell returned to the Philippines as commander JSOTF-P in 2006, his mission statement read:

*JSOTF-P, in coordination with the country team, builds capacity and strengthens the Republic of the Philippines' security forces to defeat selected terrorist organizations in order to protect US and Filipino citizens and interests from terrorist attack while preserving Philippine sovereignty.*⁵³

The size of the force was generally about 500 personnel (the headquarters down to 66). Focus now was clearly on supporting the Philippines regional commanders on Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. The commitment of forces to the advisory effort in the field remained constant at about 160-180 Special Forces Soldiers. The primary responsibilities of the JSOTF involved:

1. Capacity building of Philippines Security Forces
2. Targeted Civil Military Operations
3. Intelligence Operations, and
4. Information Operations.

In his memorandum on his tour of command, Colonel Maxwell observed especially the synchronization of JSOTF operations with the U.S. Country Team, the close working relationship with USAID, and he checked off numerous other-governmental programs being run within the Joint Operational Area. He reported improvements in military capacity since he first arrived in 2002: in night

⁵³ Colonel David S. Maxwell, Memorandum, SUBJECT: Commander's Summary of the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTF-P) 2006-2007. Emphasis in original. Note also the word "selected"

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vision goggle flying, joint sustainment operations, and integrated air, land and maritime operations. He also observed that the Philippines Armed Forces, actively engaged on Sulu, were conducting an integrated Civil-Military operation to gain access and influence with the population. He referred to the recent payment by the U.S. Embassy of \$10 million in “Rewards for Justice” money to a number of host nation civilians for information that had led to the deaths of the two primary, post-Burnham ASG leaders, Kaddafy Janjalani and Abu Solieman. He concluded, writing:

The most important aspect of this mission is that US forces are not doing the fighting. They are providing assistance to the Philippines security forces to allow them to fight and win against these terrorist organizations. Thus, US forces are able to contribute to the accomplishment of mutually beneficial US and Philippine strategic objectives in the war on terrorism “through, by and with” Philippine forces.⁵⁴

Maxwell observed that the methods used successfully in the Philippines probably would not be effective elsewhere. “The conditions in the Philippines are much different, as are the political considerations and ROE for US forces.”⁵⁵ Most important, he said, was existence of a host nation security force, able to benefit from U.S. assistance but more capable than any like force available in Iraq and Afghanistan that year.

In 2002, the Philippines Army pursued the ASG south from Basilan to Jolo Island. Eventually, pressure from increased deployment of forces forced the ASG leadership to seek shelter with the MILF on Mindanao. In 2004, an article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* addressed the U.S. intervention on Basilan and declared it have been a failure, observing that the Muslim insurgency had not been ended.⁵⁶

The real issue was not the success or failure of the particular intervention, of course, though the author did consider the outcome on Basilan ambiguous. The author was making a point that the Muslim

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. ROE is Rules of Engagement.

⁵⁶ Steven Rogers, “Beyond the Abu Sayef,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, Iss. 1 (Jan/Feb 2004). 15.

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insurgency was much broader than ASG and the Philippines political problems much deeper. In the end, he was in raging agreement with the U.S. Military Leaders that only the Philippines Government can finally bring peace to the islands. With regard to the continuing Philippine sensitivity to U.S. military operations on their ground, he reported that, in February 2003, a combined U.S.—Philippines exercise on Jolo had to be cancelled when it appeared to Philippine opinion makers that U.S. forces would be employed in a combat role. The author also pointed to a bombing campaign undertaken by ASG on Mindanao and, more critically, the sinking of *Superferry 14* in Manila Bay on the 27th of February 2004, killing 116. This was followed by a coordinated series of bombings in Manila, General Santos and Davo, on 14 February 2005. These attacks were particularly troubling because they indicated collaboration by distinct terrorist groups across the islands.

Eventually, under military and political pressure from the Philippines government, the MILF forced the ASG leaders to depart from their protection. In 2006, the Philippines Armed Forces carried out a major combined arms offensive, Operation ULTIMATUM on Jolo. In August they killed Abubakar Khadaffy Janjalani, the brother of the group's founder and leader of the bombing campaign.⁵⁷ In December, Eliza Griswold reported in *Smithsonian*, that U.S. forces were making headway "in the war on terror".⁵⁸ In January, 2007, the Philippines Marines were forced to deploy forces back on Basilan in response to revived ASG activity. The ASG attacked the Marines, killing 14, 10 of whom they beheaded. In September, 2007, Peter Brookes reported on progress in the Philippines in the *Armed Forces Journal*, under a headline:

"Flashpoint: No bungle in the Jungle."⁵⁹ In December an ASG attack killed 5 soldiers and injured

⁵⁷ Zachary Abuza, "On the Defensive: Rebel's lose ground in southern Philippines," *Janes Intelligence Review*, April 2007.

⁵⁸ Griswold, "Waging Peace in the Philippines."

⁵⁹ Peter Brookes, Flashpoint: "No bungle in the jungle," *Armed Forces Journal* (September 2007). Accessed on line at <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2007/09/2926516>.

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24 in Basilan. In December 2008, Jonathan Adams reported that, “In Basilan, Philippines, a US counterterrorism model frays”⁶⁰.

In January, 2009, Max Boot and Richard Bennet wrote an essay titled “Treading Softly in the Philippines: Why a low-intensity counterinsurgency strategy seems to be working there.”⁶¹

Boot and Bennet summarized the course of seven years’ efforts against ASG, positive and negative. They found most compelling the relatively low cost involved in U.S. manpower, lives and money. By 2009, they could report that they were told by a Philippine general that he had told his subordinates “that all military operations should be intelligence-driven and surgical...through intelligence enhanced by civil-military operations.”⁶²

Boot’s and Bennet’s conclusions echoed Colonel Maxwell’s. They quoted Brigadier General Salvatore Cambia, commander U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Pacific: “This is a model, not the model.” But this “soft and light” approach – a “soft counterinsurgency strategy, a light American footprint”—“is a model that has obvious application to many countries around the world where we cannot or will not send large numbers of troops to stamp out affiliates of the global jihadist network.”⁶³ That seems, at the end of the day, to be the Basilan Model.

Zackery Abuza observed that ASG had morphed again, reverting to kidnapping for ransom to provide much needed financial resources. Also, he reported, troops on Jolo had

⁶⁰ Jonathan Adams, “In Basilan, Philippines, a US counterterrorism model frays,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 11, 2008, posted at <http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/238791>.

⁶¹ Max Boot and Richard Bennet, “Treading Softly in the Philippines: Why a low-intensity counterinsurgency strategy seems to be working there.” *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 14, No. 16 (January 5 – January 12, 2009). Accessed on line at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/Contents/Public/Articles/000/000/015/956zwnwj.asp>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Quoted in *ibid*.

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discovered marijuana plantations, thought to be either controlled or taxed by ASG.⁶⁴ One significant insight from Abuza's writing is certainly the institutional adaptability of the ASG as a terrorist group.

Conclusion

The extended Special Operations campaign in the Philippines, now approaching its ninth anniversary, reflects most if not all of the principles of counterinsurgency outlined by FM 3-24.⁶⁵ Throughout planning and the conduct of operations, the primary objective of operations in the southern Philippines has been "to foster development of effective governance" (Legitimacy) by the host government. From the start, operations involved a combination of capability building within the armed forces and delivery of services to the local population, particularly that group most often neglected in the distribution of resources. The initial survey of local needs on the island of Basilan is most illustrative of this approach.

Achieving unity of effort, recognition that the military contribution was only part of the total U.S. effort and that coordination with other governmental and non-governmental groups on the ground could provide useful synergies, was and remains a key element of the Philippine operations. The value given Philippine authority and exercise of leadership is important, reflecting a sensitivity not to undermine Philippine authorities and to take particular care to remember they are in charge of the final resolution of Philippine problems.

It is probably over emphasizing the obvious, to point at the Basilan survey as evidence of the attention given by the Special Forces to knowing the environment. In fact, the deployment was preceded by study of the culture and political structure and, as Colonel Maxwell observed,

⁶⁴ Zachary Abuza, "Abu Sayyaf holds Philippines to ransom," *Janes Islamic Affairs Analyst* (April 2009). Accessed at http://www.simmons.edu/undergraduate/academics/departments/political.science/docs/abu_Sayyat_still_holds_Philippines_to_ransom.pdf.

⁶⁵ FM 3-24, pages 1-19 to 1-26.

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by the time they arrived in 2002, the in-country orientation had little to tell them they did not already know. Obviously intelligence drives operations and at the higher level technical intelligence was a large part of what the JTF offered the host nation commander. In Basilan this principle was reflected by the attention given to reconnaissance and development of tactical intelligence at battalion and brigade level.

The principle that insurgents must be isolated from their cause and support was central to the approach adopted on Basilan and eventually internalized by the Philippine forces on the southern islands. Again, it is highly likely that the ASG cooperated in their alienation by the harshness of their actions but the civil affairs and psychological operations on Basilan highlighted the difference sufficiently to make many heretofore alienated locals sources of information and even persuasive agents to turn disaffected guerrillas.

The final two principles are “security under rule of law is essential” and “counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment.” In the first case, special operations forces appear to have convinced their hosts of the counterproductive nature of excessive indiscriminate fire. The need for patience is illustrated by the final narrative above.

At any particular point there have been critics and proponents to declare the failure or success of the Philippine model. The fact remains that counterinsurgency is a process not an event. Progress has been steady but sometimes interrupted by enemy countermoves and transformations. In design, this accounts for the requirement for what is called *reframing*, re-conceptualizing when the circumstances on the ground are no longer congruent with expectations. Counterinsurgency is in many ways problem management rather than problem solution.

It is difficult to say either that the investment in the Philippines has not been productive of a better overall strategic situation, or that the problem of extending government control over

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the southern islands has been achieved in terms recognizable in U.S. states and territories. Both are demonstrably untrue. The strategic situation has improved in the south and the active collaboration between the U.S. and Philippine government appears to have solidified their relationship. The country team, including the military elements, seems to have learned and adapted as the situation transformed, not least as the capabilities of the host nation forces improved.

The conclusion of this story is provisional because the story isn't over. Ultimately problems of insurgency, particularly complex insurgencies, are solved only by the home government killing off the incorrigibles and turning the remaining insurgents into part of the peaceful political system of competition—or succumbing itself to a more vital alternative. Complex political situations, in general, are seldom resolved so much as transformed to different, hopefully improved states, which in turn, require further work ad infinitum.

In 2009, asked by Dan Rather the “Single most important thing people should know and understand about the Philippines,” Zachery Abuza replied

Well, I think it's, we just have to understand the importance of space, and governed space, and ungoverned space. What we've seen in the Southern Philippines we've seen in places like the Horn of Africa. How important it is. And so again, I support what the military's done there. I don't think it's panacea. We've got to work on building up governance and political institutions in these countries. And really holding the governments that we working with, with benchmarks. And giving, making sure they have ownership, and ...improve the services and their governance.⁶⁶

Abuza's big concern, he went on, was worry about what would survive if the U.S. soldiers were suddenly withdrawn. Colonel Maxwell shares the same concern. In the meantime, the security and stability of an increasingly important U.S. ally has been reinforced and a sustained, albeit modest continuum of successful military collaboration, reestablished at a very reasonable costs, given the importance of the issues involved.

⁶⁶ Zachary Abuza, quoted in Dan Rather Reports, 28 February 2009.