RESTORING A FRAGILE PEACE
The 2000 Battle for Central Mindanao
RESTORING A FRAGILE PEACE

THE 2000 BATTLE FOR CENTRAL MINDANAO
RESTORING A FRAGILE PEACE:
The 2000 Battle for Central Mindanao

Copyright 2019 OPERATIONS RESEARCH CENTER, PHILIPPINE ARMY

Published by:
OPERATIONS RESEARCH CENTER, PHILIPPINE ARMY
Fort Andres Bonifacio, Taguig City
Landline: (+632) 845 9555 loc 6695
Mobile Hotline: (+63) 917 317 2006
Website: http://orc.army.ph/
Email: mail@orc.army.ph
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Foreword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Part 1  Roots of the Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Chapter 1  Mindanao: The Land of Unfulfilled Promise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Chapter 2  Between Secession and Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Part 2  The Battle is Joined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Chapter 3  The Theater of Conflict: Central Mindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Chapter 4  The MILF Gears up for War and Secession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Chapter 5  Mobilization, Organization and Deployment of Government Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Chapter 6  The AFP Campaign: From Valiancy to Freeway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>Chapter 7  The Road to Busrah and Abubakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142</td>
<td>Part 3  Lessons From the Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Chapter 8  Campaign Analysis: Leadership and Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>Chapter 9  Campaign Analysis: Lethal Warfighting Functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>Chapter 10  Campaign Analysis: Non-lethal Warfighting Functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194</td>
<td>Chapter 11  After Abubakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204</td>
<td>Military Glossary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>Commanders of the Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This publication looks back at one of the biggest military campaigns in the history of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): the “All-out War” vs. the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) from late March to July 2000. This involved preliminary skirmishes at the start of 2000, following a series of MILF ceasefire violations, which came to a head when MILF forces overran Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte in mid-March. The main AFP offensives were targeted at clearing the Narciso Ramos Highway and dismantling a network of enemy camps, mostly in Central Mindanao, culminating in the military takeover of Camp Abubakar al Siddique, the symbol of MILF defiance of Philippine sovereignty.

This “retrospective” study in military strategy, tactics, and operations has been done on the initiative of the Operations Research Center, Philippine Army (ORCPA). This relatively new Army unit is mandated to document significant information on Army operations by conducting research, managing data and producing handbooks for the organization to keep up with changes in the manner of Army operations. Its publications focus on specific warfighting and support functions and highlight the best practices, challenges encountered, lessons learned and recommendations of key authorities within the Philippine Army. These resource materials are designed to help enhance organizational adaptability, soldier survivability, and combat effectiveness that will enable ground forces to neutralize current and emerging threats.

In this context, revisiting the 2000 Central Mindanao campaign with a sharper focus on Army operations carries immense contemporary significance for our organization. A deeper appreciation of the evolution of our war-fighting capability through the analytical lens of a major military campaign can only help the Army assess the effectiveness of subsequent interventions to sharpen operational efficiency.

From a broader perspective, looking back at the 2000 Central Mindanao campaign gives us a better sense of how the political environment in the south has evolved since then. At the time, the MILF positioned itself as the champion of an independent Muslim Mindanao and managed to draw substantial popular support at the grassroots. The passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law,
creating the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), in 2018—coupled with the rise in international Islamist terrorism in the years following the campaign—has changed the complexion of the threat scenario in the Southern Philippines. It remains to be seen whether or not armed “liberation fronts” can hold as much sway as the MILF did over large swaths of Central Mindanao nearly two decades ago. It has been an open question, too, if the Bangsamoro aspiration can be hijacked by a larger Islamist agenda.

The meat of this “retrospective” study dwells on the conduct of the “All-out War” vs. the MILF in 2000, with a sharper focus on Army operations. Nevertheless, military strategists, reading between the lines, have much to infer by way of appreciating nuances in the fluid dynamics between political and military decision-making.

In the end, we go back to the reality that military strategy is but part of a broader political and national strategy. In the case of the campaign to reclaim Central Mindanao in 2000 (and other internal conflicts like it), the value of victory in war tends to diminish if it does not significantly advance the prospects of winning the peace over the long term.

Apart from reinforcing our confidence in the ability of the AFP/PA to thwart formidable threats to the Republic, this book is designed to help us learn vital strategic lessons well.

Lt. Gen. Macairog S. Alberto AFP
Commanding General, Philippine Army
This book looks back on the escalating offensive of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Central Mindanao from January to July 2000. This came after the breakdown of peace talks with the Southern Philippine secessionists and subsequent MILF violations of the ceasefire agreement. Its sheds light on the strategic plans for various aspects of the campaign, with particular emphasis on operations conducted by Philippine Army (PA) units, led by the 6th Infantry Division (6ID) and the 4th Infantry Division (4ID).

Culling analyses and insights from past studies conducted by the AFP and PA, this volume looks at how the strategic and operational plans were orchestrated in the war rooms and in the battlefields. It examines outcomes of, and lessons learned from, actual operations— in some cases, down to battalion and company level.

The study also examines the strong interplay between political and socio-economic factors and military imperatives. Any decision to wage war on the part of the national leadership, particularly against a segment of the Filipino people, is never made with equanimity, as there is always a steep price to pay. In the words of then Gen. Angelo T. Reyes, CSAFP, who directed the campaign from GHQ: “The campaign proceeded from a rather hard and painful decision, considering the tremendous expenditures and expected loss of life and property it would entail.”

Equally hefty was the cost in terms of derailing anew the multi-sector effort to realize the much-cherished dream of a peaceful and progressive Mindanao.

Having previously served as head of the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) before becoming CGPA and CSAFP, Gen. Reyes had in-depth knowledge of the situation in Central Mindanao and the dynamics of dealing with the MILF.

---

1 Foreword by Secretary of National Defense Angelo T. Reyes in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.
As the top military officer, he must have found it quite a challenge to calibrate the response to every MILF provocation in light of the fragile peace process. Clearly, the MILF was taking advantage of its seat at the negotiating table to rule virtually with impunity inside their camps and to stealthily build up military strength. There were even unconfirmed reports at the time that the MILF camps were being used as training facility by foreign Islamic extremists in exchange for support to the Bangsamoro secessionist cause. Despite mounting evidence, including news reports, that the MILF was flouting Philippine sovereignty within their camps, the AFP found its hands tied by political exigencies.

After three months of sporadic MILF provocation and retaliatory AFP action and ultimatums, the situation came to a head when the rebels attacked Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte and held hundreds hostage. This prompted President Joseph Estrada, the AFP Commander in Chief, to declare an “all-out war” against the MILF on March 21, 2000.

According to Gen. Reyes, the objective of the Central Mindanao campaign was “to degrade the MILF’s fighting capability and to…restore government authority over the dozens of camps it had been able to control and fortify.”

He went on to summarize the imperatives of the military offensive: “Because of the growing strength of the MILF, time was of the essence. It was essential to launch a campaign of quick decision, a bold and swift move to deny the MILF any opportunity to gain time for consolidation of control and strengthening of forces.”

Barely a year after the end of hostilities in Central Mindanao, the then CSAFP offered a prescient strategic assessment: “Perhaps in no other AFP operation since the end of World War II had the ground, air and naval forces been more needed to operate jointly, to ensure success and minimize casualties. Never before had the logistical requirements of movement and

---

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
supply been greater and more complex; so were the demands with regard to command, control and communication. These partly explain why this particular military campaign stands out as one of the most significant AFP operations ever launched and completed.4

For precisely this reason, the 2000 Central Mindanao campaign is an excellent case study in military strategy and combat operations. The benefit of hindsight gives us the opportunity to objectively analyze how the units of the Philippine Army and the other AFP branches performed under the circumstances prevailing at the time. It also enables us to assess whether in fact the campaign objectives were met.

The aspect of the mission of the Operations Research Center, Philippine Army (ORCPA) that entails revisiting past offensives of the Philippine Army, conducted by organic troops solely or in collaboration with units from the other branches of the AFP, presents a unique set of challenges.

First, it is imperative for the ORCPA team to develop a keen sense of context. That is to say that we must learn to understand and appreciate the operational environment under which the troops had been fighting at the time of the battle or campaign under study. This involves getting a handle not just on the historical military situation but also on the political and socio-economic forces and conditions at play on both the national and local levels, as these pertain to the troops’ areas of operation. Failing this, we could end up making analyses on the basis of wrong or inaccurate assumptions.

Second, we have to sift through multiple sources of data and analyses, including the AFP and PA archives and, where possible, resource persons with first-hand knowledge and experience of Army battles more than a decade ago.

Third, we need to examine archival information and insight from the prism that the ORCPA employs to distill key operational factors that we are tasked to

4 Ibid
focus on. Specifically, our analytical framework calls for assessing the planning and conduct of operations in terms of key warfighting functions and identifying salient lessons in the areas of: doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy. Insufficient data in some areas may constrain the depth and/or usefulness of certain aspects of our analyses.

Thankfully, in revisiting the decisive and highly instructive 2000 Central Mindanao campaign, we have found a rich trove of material with which to inform and deepen our documentary and analytical work. We hope that, through this book, we have succeeded in casting new light on a pivotal battle that transpired nearly two decades ago—making it relevant and riveting even to modern-day students of military strategy and tactics.

ORC Editorial Board
ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT

PART ONE
CHAPTER 1
MINDANAO: THE LAND OF UNFULFILLED PROMISE

GEOGRAPHY

The second largest island in the Philippines, Mindanao is located in the southernmost part of the country. It is bounded by the Sulu Sea in the west, Celebes Sea in the south and the Philippine Sea in the east. The island is divided into six administrative areas—Regions 9 (Western Mindanao), 10 (Northern Mindanao), 11 (Southeastern Mindanao) and 12 (Central Mindanao), the CARAGA Administrative Region and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)—and 24 provinces.

**Land.** Mindanao has a land area of 105,475.5 square kilometers or 35% of the country’s total land area. Region 11, at 30,447.2 sq. kms., accounts for nearly 29% of the entire Island.² (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region 9</td>
<td>2,459,690</td>
<td>2,794,659</td>
<td>50.84</td>
<td>49.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 10</td>
<td>2,197,554</td>
<td>2,483,272</td>
<td>50.83</td>
<td>49.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 11</td>
<td>4,006,731</td>
<td>4,604,158</td>
<td>51.10</td>
<td>49.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 12</td>
<td>1,817,992</td>
<td>2,359,808</td>
<td>51.02</td>
<td>48.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMM</td>
<td>2,055,896</td>
<td>2,020,903</td>
<td>51.27</td>
<td>48.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARAGA</td>
<td>1,764,297</td>
<td>1,942,687</td>
<td>50.98</td>
<td>49.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,302,160</td>
<td>16,205,487</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1 Sep 1995 Census (NSO)  *Population of Marawi City and Cotabato City are included in Region 12.

Mindanao comprises major mountains, low valleys, swift flowing rivers and smooth lakes, waterfalls and forests. Of the island’s various types of soil the most common is loam, which is ideal for agriculture.

**Climate.** Southern Mindanao and some areas in the ARMM experience relatively even rainfall throughout the year. The other parts of Mindanao
experience a dry season from November to April and a wet season during the rest of the year. (However, recent changes in global climate have disrupted these seasonal patterns to a certain degree.)

**Population.** Popularly known through the years as the “land of promise” because of its rich and expansive uncultivated lands, Mindanao attracted millions of migrants during the 20th century. The island’s population grew from a mere 670,833 in 1903, to 5,384,164 in 1960, 10,905,243 in 1980 and 14,302,160 in 1990. This demographic expansion was largest in the provinces of Davao, Surigao del Sur and South Cotabato.³

With these waves of migration, the landscape that used to be populated mostly by Muslims and indigenous tribes (Lumad) came to be dominated by Roman Catholics and other Christian groups.

As of 1995, Mindanao had a total population of 16,205,487, of which more than 28% resided in Region 11. Population density was highest in Region 10 (Table 1). Females used to be far outnumbered on the island due to heavy demand for male settlers to develop Mindanao’s vast agricultural lands (Table 2). Over time, however, gender distribution has evened out.⁴

**Table 2: Population, Land Area and Population Density Per Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Land Area (sq km)</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region 9</td>
<td>2,794,659</td>
<td>15,997.3</td>
<td>174.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 10</td>
<td>2,483,272</td>
<td>14,032.9</td>
<td>177.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 11</td>
<td>4,604,158</td>
<td>30,447.2</td>
<td>151.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 12</td>
<td>2,359,808</td>
<td>14,542.8</td>
<td>162.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMM</td>
<td>2,020,903</td>
<td>11,608.3</td>
<td>174.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARAGA</td>
<td>1,942,687</td>
<td>18,847.0</td>
<td>103.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Statistics Office, 1 September 1995

The same figures reflected a very young Mindanao population, with over 50% below the age of 20. (Table 3)
Ethnolinguistic and Religious Groups. There are three major Filipino ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao: the Christians, the Muslims and the Lumad or the indigenous tribes who are neither Muslim nor Christian. There are at least 11 Muslim and 18 Lumad groups in Mindanao. (Table 4).

Table 4: Ethnolinguistic Groups in Mindanao

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnolinguistic Groups &amp; Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tausug (Sulu); Iranun (Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur); Jama Mapun (Cagayan de Sulu); Kalagan (Davao Oriental); Kolibugan (Zambuanga); Maguindanao (Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat); Maranao (Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Zamboanga del Norte); Samal (Tawi-Tawi); Sangil (South Cotabato, Davao del Sur) Tausug (Zamboanga, Sulu) and Yakan (Basilan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata (Davao Oriental); Bagobo (Davao del Sur); Banwaon; B’ilaan (Sarangani); Bukidnon (Agusan del Norte); Dibabawon; Higaonon; Mamanwa (Surigao del Norte); Mandaya; Manguwangan (Davao); Manobo (Sarangani, Bukidnon, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat); Mansaka, Subanon (Zamboanga); Tagakaolo; Tasaday; T’boli (Sarangani); Tiduray/Tiruray; and Ubo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, Feb 1988

Based on 1990 figures, Roman Catholics comprised more than 65% of the Mindanao population. Muslims, who used to constitute the majority on the island, accounted for less than 20% by that time. (Table 5).

Of over a hundred dialects spoken by more than sixteen million people, Cebuano is the dominant tongue in most of the regions.\(^5\)
Psycho-Social Peculiarities

Historical Roots. The convergence in Mindanao of two major religions of the world – Islam and Christianity – has greatly influenced the shaping of the region’s cultural, social and political milieu. Historically, the relationship between these two great religions is tainted with centuries of bloody but fruitless conflict. This dates back to the Middle Ages when the champions of the Christian cross fought to ward off the Muslim warriors who invaded western Europe and Spain by way of North Africa.

The conflict was transplanted in the Philippines centuries ago when the Spanish colonial government waged the so-called “Moro Wars” in an attempt to subjugate the Filipino Muslims in the south. The Muslims mounted a successful resistance, enabling them to preserve their Islamic identity.

The Bangsamoros. The terms “Muslim” and “Moro” have been used interchangeably in the Philippines to refer to various Islamic groups found in Mindanao. There was a time, however, when the term “Moro” was used derisively to refer to Filipinos of Mindanao and Sulu who converted to Islam, apparently as an expression of Spanish hatred for the Moors who invaded and ruled much of Spain in the 8th century. “Moro” evolved into an insulting, derogatory word that suggested savagery, barbarism, piracy and the like.

Filipino Muslim self-assertion came to fore with the organization of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the early 1970s. Since then, the term Moro has gained complimentary, if not edifying, connotations particularly among the Muslim youth. It expresses their distinctiveness as a people who had resisted foreign domination. It refers to a people whose ancestors were never subjects of Felipe (Prince Philip II), who later became King of Spain. Used together with the Malay word Bangsa (nation) as in Bangsamoro, it indicates a nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>9,342,828</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aglipay</td>
<td>364,713</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2,690,456</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iglesia ni Cristo</td>
<td>261,943</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Church of Christ in the Phil</td>
<td>314,206</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah</td>
<td>80,039</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
<td>188,969</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1,026,58</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

distinct from Filipino – which, to some Muslims, refers to one subjugated by the soldiers of the Spanish monarch.

Both the MNLF and its breakaway faction, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), apply the term Bangsamoro to all native inhabitants of Mindanao and Sulu, regardless of religious or ethnic origin, who accept the distinctiveness of the Moro as a separate nationality.6

To better understand the problem of Muslim secessionism, the psychological and sociological peculiarities of Mindanao, among others, need to be examined.

Introduction of Islam.
Pieces of evidence show that Islam was introduced in the Philippines through the southern tip of the archipelago, now represented by Tawi-Tawi and Sulu, as early as the period of the Sung Dynasty (960-1280 A.D.) in China. Arab trade was then active with South China via Sulu. It appears that because of trade, Islamic Chinese who survived the 878 A.D. massacre of Muslims in China and who subsequently found their way to the Malay peninsula introduced Islam to the Philippines. Islamized Filipinos were therefore like the Islamized Malays before the arrival of Spanish colonizers in the Philippines in the latter half of the 16th century. By that time, the Islamized portions of Mindanao already achieved the most developed and cohesive political organizations, compared to other groups inhabiting the archipelago, as shown by the existence of the Sultanate of Sulu.7

On the other hand, Christianity was brought to the central and northern parts of the Philippine archipelago in the mid-16th century by Spain. With a sword on one hand and a cross on the other, Spain ruled much of the archipelago for almost 400 years. After converting the lowlanders in Luzon and the Visayas to Christianity, the conquistadors became obsessed with subjugating the Muslims in Mindanao, using soldiers from the northern islands. This spawned a Filipino Christian-Muslim feud that would persist well into the 21st century.
The feud effectively increased the Filipino Moros' awareness of their Islamic faith and further alienated them from their Christian brothers. Islam would bind them to common values, attitudes, life ways and actions—indeed, it became their ideology. It would enable them to identify with the greater world of Islam extending from as far west as Morocco to as far east as China. It would put them under a political structure and a set of laws that would govern their political, social, economic and cultural life. They also had a system of writing and language through which they could appreciate the richness of their Islamic heritage.

**Evolution of Muslim Society in Mindanao.** The early Muslim society of Mindanao was organized, socially and politically, in sultanates that had evolved as individual states whose territories increased or decreased depending on the overall leadership abilities of their sultan. These sultanates, with the characteristic feature of lineage and kinship made much for communal production and defense. Their wealth was furthered by the maritime trade they had with China and the Middle East.

The history of the Muslim sultanates in Mindanao has been one of war. The confrontation between the Spaniards and the Muslims in the Philippines in effect constituted the so-called Moro Wars – a series of bloody wars of attrition that spanned more than three centuries. The wars took place primarily due to the Spanish colonizers’ desire to effect conquest, colonization and Christianization of the Muslims. In times of relative peace with the Spaniards, however, the Muslims fought against one another for the control of territory or for the right to levy tribute.

But against the Spaniards, the Muslims would fight together, casting aside their feuds in the meantime. If necessary, sultanates would come to the military aid of each other. In campaigns against the Muslim Filipinos, Spanish authorities deployed Christianized Filipinos forcibly recruited from Luzon and Visayas. This colonial policy of utilizing Filipinos to fight Filipinos, a policy of divide and rule, sowed the seeds of mutual mistrust and hatred that would linger to the modern era.
The sultans made it a point to always remind their followers how easily the people of the Visayas and Luzon had fallen under Spanish rule and how eventually their former datu ended up paying tribute to their conquerors.

The Muslim struggle against domination continued until the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution in 1896 that gave birth to the First Philippine Republic, which was short-lived due to the entry of the United States.

During the ensuing Philippine-American War, the Philippine government sought an alliance with the Moro sultanates, which refused because of the lingering distrust. The Americans exploited the situation, made peace with some of the more important sultans by bribing them with monthly salaries or emoluments, and gave the Muslim leaders the role of brokers between the American colonial government and the Muslim community while the government was concentrating on its pacification drive in Luzon and the Visayas.

The US colonial government encouraged the development of Mindanao by attracting people from Luzon and the Visayas to transfer and settle in the area. Establishment of private holdings was also encouraged in Mindanao. In line with this policy, the colonial government passed several land laws, which became the legal prop for dispossession of Muslims and indigenous groups all over the Philippines. These laws provided for registration of land ownership through land titles. Unregistered land automatically became open for exploration, settlement, utilization, occupation and purchase by the citizens of the Philippines and the United States.

Since few Muslims were sufficiently literate in English to understand the bureaucratic intricacies of land registration, many refused or did not bother to register the lands they had been cultivating. Notably, this policy continued to be implemented even after the Philippines gained its independence from the United States. Because of utter helplessness or ignorance of the colonial processes, non-Christian groups generally responded by withdrawing to
inaccessible areas of their homelands. Vast tracts of arable land became vacant and open for sale or lease to settlers and plantation companies. Many migrants from Luzon and Visayas made homesteads out of these tracts of land. These included former Huk communist insurgents who were enticed to abandon their armed struggle for agrarian reform in the 1950s through the government’s offer of land and homesteads in Mindanao.

A number of Muslim leaders—ascendants of today’s Muslim landed elite—were also able to take advantage of the new law to register large territories in their own names. In some cases, agricultural lands purchased, cleared and cultivated by non-Muslim settlers were claimed by indigenous Muslims as part of their ancestral lands. Such disputes often ended in violent confrontation.

Beyond the Mindanao perspective, it appears that the creation of a nation-state dominated by Christian Filipinos simply reinforced most Muslims’ self-perception as a marginalized minority.

Toward the end of the 20th century, militant Mindanao Muslims began looking at themselves as a people distinct from the inhabitants of Luzon and the Visayas. Islam gives them their distinctiveness and the anchor for their defiance of any form of domination—including integration into the mainstream of the Philippine body politic.

**DEMOGRAPHY**

Of the indigenous ethnolinguistic groups that have adopted Islam, three are politically dominant due to their size: the Maguindanao, the Maranao and the Tausug. Some 92% of all Muslim Filipinos belong to one of these three groups. Non-Muslim indigenous groups are called *Lumad*.

**The Maguindanao.** The Maguindanao—“people of the flood plain”—are the largest, numbering approximately 885,000 or about 1.7% of the population in the 1990s. They live in the provinces of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato and South Cotabato.

The Maguindanao inhabit the vast river basin of the Rio Grande de Mindanao, an expanse of marshlands interlaced with winding waterways. The two largest settlements in the past were near present-day Cotabato City and what is now Dulawan, or Datu Piang. They occupy the very heartland of Central Mindanao.

Maguindanao also refers to a common language, belonging to the Malayo-Polynesian family, which has been used by the group for several centuries.
In the 16th century, the Maguindanao tried to expand their territory. They were able to control most of the trade between the seacoast and the interior of Mindanao, and at various times they dominated most of the southern part of the island from the Zamboanga peninsula on the west to the coast of Davao on the east. The powerful Muslim lowlanders were able to exact tribute and taxes from the pagan hill tribes and succeeded in taking slaves from among them too.

A distinctive characteristic of Maguindanao social organization is the system of social rank known as *maratabat*. The most direct descendants of Sarip Kabungsuwan, (a Muslim prince of Johore in the Malay peninsula who claimed to have direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad and who arrived in Mindanao sometime in 1500), have the greatest *maratabat* and are accorded with the highest rank, *datu*. The sultan was traditionally chosen from among the *datu*. Those with the next highest rank are the *dumatu*, or lesser nobles. Below them are the *sakop*, who are followers, or freemen. Lowest in rank are the *ulipan*, freemen indentured for debts or crimes. Not included in the system of social rank but providing an important base for Maguindanao society in traditional times, were the *banyaga*, or chattel slaves.

The Maguindanao practice a distinctly folk Islam, which also involves strong beliefs in environmental spirits and the efficacy of certain magical rituals and healing ceremonies. Culturally, polygyny (practice of having more than one wife), as well as divorce, is observed.

The Maguindanao suffered greatly from the incursions of outside forces, mainly the colonial invaders and non-Muslim settlers. They have become a minority even in their home region of Cotabato, which had been divided by the national government into several provinces. This helps explain the Maguindanao’s dominance of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has sought independence for Mindanao.

**The Maranao.** The Maranao—“people of the lake”—live predominantly around Lake Lanao in the northwest portion of the island of Mindanao. About 90% of the Maranao live in the province of Lanao del Sur, while the remaining 10% inhabit Lanao del Norte and parts of Cotabato, Zamboanga del Sur and Bukidnon. The population of the Maranao in 1983 was estimated at 840,000, making them numerically the second largest Muslim group after the Maguindanao.

Closely associated with the Maranao is an ethnic subgroup variously called Iranon, Iranun, Illanun and Ilanon. The Iranon sometimes refer specifically to people living in and around Balabagan, which is southwest of Lake Lanao on the coast of Illana Bay.
Language-wise, Maranao is closely related to the major Filipino dialects, since it too belongs to the central Philippine group, although the other Mindanao groups, with the exception of the Maguindanao, generally do not understand it.

The Maranao are primarily agriculturists and fishermen. Their other economic activities include such cottage industries as cloth and mat-weaving, woodcarving, and metal work in brass, silver and gold. Maranao are also known to be good merchants who travel throughout the Philippines selling straw mats, yard goods, blankets and metal work.

Like the Maguindanao, the cultural value system of the Maranao revolves around such principles as hospitality, maratabat (involving notions of pride, honor, self-esteem and rank) and the centrality of kinship.

With Lake Lanao situated some 2,300 feet above sea level, the Maranao are predominantly a land-oriented group. The mountainous terrain between the coast and Lake Lanao has made it difficult for outsiders to influence the Maranao.

The Maranao, among the major Muslim ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines, were the last to be Islamized. They also served as the major center of fierce resistance against the Spaniards, Americans, Japanese and even the Philippine government, with some elements preferring to secede from the Republic and be independent. Others advocate a federal system of government, which would allow for more local autonomy. Loyalty to descent groups causes many Maranao to tolerate, shelter or support Muslim rebels.

**The Tausug.** The Tausug—“people of the sea current”—are politically, economically and numerically the dominant Muslim group in the Sulu archipelago. The majority resides on Jolo Island. They are also found on the
Sulu islands of Pata, Marunggas, Tapul, Lugus and Siasi, as well as in the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur and Cotabato and coastal parts of Basilan Island. In the 1990s, they numbered around 600,000.

Most Tausug were already Muslims when the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines. Theoretically, all the people of Sulu were united under the sultanate, although actual control over some groups was nominal. The Tausug traded extensively with China until the middle of the 19th century and adopted some Chinese foods, weights and measures and items of clothing.

The Tausug are divided into two sub-groups—the Parianon (people of the landing) who live on or near the sea, and the Guimbahanon (hill people) who live in the interior of the islands of Sulu and are primarily farmers. The Parianon are well-known navigators. Their native cargo craft travel beyond Philippine territorial waters to Borneo, Indonesia and other neighboring Southeast Asian states for commercial reasons. Compared to the Maranao, nucleated settlements among Tausug families are rare mainly because the sense of community among them is weak.

The Tausug recognize three categories of law, first of which is the Qurana law, which provides that God punishes violators after death; second, interpreted religious law, codified by the sultan and other Tausug officials, deals primarily with such crimes as murder of relatives, slander and adultery; and third, customary law, mediates conflicts involving traditional mores and offenses of honor.

The Tausug social stratification has been described as status-conscious egalitarianism since all men are regarded as equal, although some have greater wealth or power. An individual’s power is determined by such factors as the size of his following, wealth, titles, personal courage and the number of guns owned. People of the highest status are those with titles either inherited through relationship with a sultan or bestowed by him. The second level includes most Tausug who lack such titles. The lowest level comprises the slaves (including debt slaves), who have become rare among the Tausug.
Slavery was widespread in the first half of the 19th century. An immense number of slaves, including captives of Muslim pirates who raided coastal villages in the Visayas and Luzon, were integrated into Tausug society. Many of them eventually prospered, and their offspring, at least the second generation, were invariably assimilated into Tausug society.

For nearly three centuries during the Spanish era, the colonizers and the Tausug were in continual conflict. It was the policy of Catholic Spain to contain Islam in Southern Philippines, to stop the looting and slave raids of the Tausug and their allies and to gain control of the Moluccas, south of the Philippines, from the Portuguese. However, the Spanish failed to subjugate the Tausug.

During the American colonization of the Philippines, stiff Muslim resistance delayed US control of Jolo until 1913. Under Pax Americana, illegally owned guns were collected, and slavery was quickly abolished. In 1915, under the Carpenter Agreement, the Sultan of Sulu, Salip Jamal ul-Kiram, relinquished his claim to secular powers but retained his religious authority.

The Tausug have never been at ease with the central government in Manila. For a long time, they sought to establish a separate state either through revolt or petition. The MNLF had its origins among Muslim students (led by Jolo native, Nur Misuari) in Manila, many from Sulu.11

The Lumad.12 A Cebuano-Visayan term meaning native or indigenous, Lumad refers to the groups native to Mindanao who are neither Muslim nor Christian.

At the start of the 20th century, the Lumad controlled an area, which in the 1990s covered 17 of Mindanao’s 24 provinces. By 1980, the census showed that they constituted less than 6% of the population of Mindanao and Sulu.

The Lumad’s traditional concept of land ownership is based on what their communities consider their ancestral territories. To them, a territory occupied by their people is communal private property, and community members have the right to the fruits of any piece of unoccupied land within the communal territory. Ancestral lands include those under cultivation and the hunting grounds, rivers, forests, uncultivated land and the mineral resources below the land.

Unlike the Muslims, the Lumad never formed a revolutionary group that would unite them in armed struggle against the Philippine government. When the migrants came, many Lumad groups retreated into the mountains and forests. For the Lumad, securing their rights to ancestral domain is as important as the Muslims’ quest for self-determination. Unfortunately, much of their
land has already been appropriated or otherwise registered in the name of multinational corporations, logging companies and wealthy Filipinos, many of whom are new settlers in Mindanao.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE**

Mindanao, one of the richest areas in Southeast Asia and long known as the Philippines’ land of promise, had remained relatively underdeveloped late into the 20th century.

With its very fertile soil and typhoon-free climate*, Mindanao had been a vital source of agricultural produce. The country’s leading supplier of corn, coconut, pineapples, rubber, coffee and cassava, the island also contributed substantially to the country’s rice output. Close to half the national production in coconut and fish also came from there. With expansive pasture lands, especially in Cotabato and Bukidnon, Mindanao had become the leading producer of cattle, pigs and chickens.

The vast valleys of Cotabato and Davao had turned into lucrative food production zones. The rich river basins of the Cotabato provinces led the country in corn, rice, peanut, vegetable and fruit yields.

During that time, despite rampant illegal logging, productive forests still covered much of the island and constituted a substantial source of wood products. Timber in North Cotabato and Maguindanao included the prized Philippine hardwood used for plywood and veneer production.

The Sulu Sea is regarded as the richest fishing ground in the Philippines. It also holds a treasure chest of pearls, shells and black coral.

Mindanao is endowed with extensive deposits of metallic and non-metallic minerals, as well as potentially high oil reserves. At the time, the island accounted for 48.4% of the national gold reserves and 63% of the country’s nickel stocks. Its rivers have been harnessed as an inexpensive source of electricity through hydro-based power plants.

More than just a traditional food and raw material supplier for the entire country, Mindanao had been the country’s gateway to the Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA).

* This was before global climatic shifts steered typhoon paths to include Mindanao, starting with Typhoons Sendong (2011) and Pablo (2012).
**Socio-Economic Development Thrusts.** To fully address the root causes of the Mindanao conflict, the government had been adopting long- and short-term socio-economic development programs. These included a number of infrastructure projects, designed to develop the region for the benefit of both its Muslim and non-Muslim populace.

With the formal installation of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari as the elected ARMM governor, a Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) comprising 14 provinces in Central and Western Mindanao had been created under the administrative supervision of the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD).13

**Poor Living Conditions.** In general, living conditions in the ARMM at the time left much room for improvement. The SPCPD’s accomplishments had been limited to investment promotion initiatives and improvement in the peace and order situation. Apparently, it lacked the necessary resources to implement its own economic programs.

At the time of the impending outburst of violence in Northern and Central Mindanao, the five provinces where the Muslim population is concentrated—Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Basilan—depicted images of poverty, unemployment and grossly inadequate social services. The 1991 Family Income and Expenditure Survey showed that the average household incomes in these provinces were generally low except for Tawi-Tawi’s, which was almost the same as the Philippine average. Compared to daily cost of living estimates during the survey year, at least 83% of families in the five provinces lived below the poverty line. (Table 6)

**Table 6: Average Household Incomes and Major Sources 1991**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Annual Family Income</th>
<th>Sulu</th>
<th>Tawi-Tawi</th>
<th>Lanao del Sur</th>
<th>Maguindanao</th>
<th>Basilan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(₱)</td>
<td>33,601</td>
<td>63,643</td>
<td>45,732</td>
<td>41,396</td>
<td>34,509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Families by Major Source of Income (in %)</th>
<th>Wages and Salaries</th>
<th>Agricultural</th>
<th>Non-Agricultural</th>
<th>Entrepreneurial Activities</th>
<th>Agricultural</th>
<th>Crop Farming</th>
<th>Fishing</th>
<th>Non-Agricultural</th>
<th>Wholesale and Retail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1991 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, National Statistics Office*
Notably, only about half of the potential labor force was being harnessed and 70% of them were in agriculture while less than 5% were in the industry sector.

Legislated minimum wages in the area were not adequate to provide for half of the daily cost of living requirements. This was aggravated by the fact that most employers did not comply with the law on wages, especially in the agricultural sector. Department of Labor and Employment figures from January to September of 1994 showed that the labor standard violation rate was 38.1% in Western Mindanao and 89.5% in Central Mindanao.

**Education.** More than one-fourth of the population over 14 years of age had not completed elementary schooling. Primary education was the highest educational attainment for about two-fifths of the population. For every 20 elementary graduates, only eight finished high school, and only one went on to earn a college degree.

**Social Services.** The Muslim-dominated provinces did not have enough doctors and medical facilities. Malnutrition was widespread and the child mortality rate—98 (compared to a national average of 55) of every 1,000 children under five years of age—was the country’s highest, based on a study released by the National Statistical Coordination Board in 1999.

Patient-doctor ratio in Mindanao at the time was 5,000 patients for every doctor—way below the ideal ratio of 500:1. Likewise the number of hospital beds was sorely inadequate.

The depressed situation in the five Muslim-dominated provinces can be gleaned from other indicators. As of 1990, for instance, only 9.4% of the households in Sulu had electricity; the rest depended on kerosene for lighting. In Tawi-Tawi, only 13.5% of the households had access to potable water and a mere 8.7% had sanitary toilet facilities. (Table 7)

**Table 7: Selected Statistics From 1990 Housing Census (% of total)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sulu</th>
<th>Tawi-Tawi</th>
<th>Lanao del Sur</th>
<th>Maguindanao</th>
<th>Basilan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion Urban</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Households with:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potable</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitary Toilet Facility</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Roof Materials</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Outer Wall Mtls.</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing
**Business Environment.** Given all these socio-economic handicaps, it comes as no surprise that Muslims did not control major business enterprises in Mindanao. A survey made in 1988 showed that foreign-owned and -affiliated corporations dominated the business landscape in Muslim provinces.

While there was much economic activity in food and beverage manufacturing, coffee processing, coconut oil manufacturing, rubber/tire production, logging, fishing and canning, these industries were dominated by big corporations, mostly with foreign tie-ups.

Only the barter trade saw active involvement of Muslims, mostly of Chinese descent. Development had been limited in predominantly Muslim areas, where agriculture remained the chief source of livelihood. Militant Muslims attributed this to government neglect while others blame it on the traditionalism of the Muslims, including what others view as an archaic social and political system, which continued to favor the few of higher rank. Nevertheless, the political power of the datu had declined, due in part to the influence of other cultures upon their society and in part to the changing population of these provinces, brought about by migration of non-Muslims from other parts of the Philippines. For a time, quite a number of Filipino Muslims were able to attain elective positions in the national and local governments, but the increase had not grown appreciably with the continued arrival of new settlers from Luzon and the Visayas.

One major factor that could bring about the economic uplift of Muslims in Mindanao is their direct participation in the long-term policy decisions regarding the development of Mindanao. This in turn depends primarily on the economic growth of the provinces where they are concentrated, and on the distribution of the fruits of progress among Muslims and non-Muslims. Development programs had been in place, but their success remained contingent on the stabilization of peace and order in the region.

**ENDNOTES**

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.
4 Ibid.
8 See Samuel Tan, The Socioeconomic Dimension of Moro Secessionism (Mindanao Studies Reports No 1) (Quezon City: Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1995).
9 See Muslim and Guiam, “Mindanao: Land of Promise”.
10 Most of the entries regarding the characteristics of the Maguindanao, Maranao and Tausug were taken from Richard Weekes, ed. Muslim Peoples: A World Ethnographic Survey, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984).

12 The information on the Lumad were mostly taken from the paper entitled “Mindanao: Land of Promise” written by Macapado Muslim and Rufa Guiam published as part of the article “A First Step to Peace: Mindanao in Transition” by Accord’s *International Review of Peace Initiatives*.


14 “An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs,” (Study in depth on Muslim affairs in the Philippines conducted under the auspices of Filipinas Foundation, Inc., February 1971).
CHAPTER 2

BETWEEN SECESSION AND AUTONOMY

THE LURE OF SEPARATISM

Deeply-rooted struggle. The Mindanao conflict stems from a long-standing perception on the part of Muslims on the island that they have been victims of discrimination, neglect, distrust, prejudice and plunder by Christian Filipinos over the years. As a consequence of Spanish and American colonialism, the Christians and the Muslims have lived virtually in two separate worlds.

The Philippine Revolution of 1896 presented the opportunity for the indios to unite as Filipinos through a common struggle for national liberation. But because Christians and Muslims were alienated from each other, they effectively waged separate campaigns against the Spaniards and, subsequently, the Americans.

Following the waves of Christian migration to Mindanao, the Muslims soon found themselves a minority in what they perceived to be their native land. As a result, the Muslims found cause to resist efforts to assimilate them into the mainstream of Philippine society for fear of losing their land, religion and culture. This had been exacerbated by the American regime’s efforts at underscoring the differences between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos by its colonial policies.2

Even after the Philippine Republic was restored in 1946, the government carried on with colonial laws, particularly on land acquisition and utilization, which weighed heavily against the Muslims. Furthermore, with meager resources particularly after the Second World War, the government sustained the colonial policy of “virtual neglect” toward development needs of the Southern Philippines. For many years, the Manila government paid little attention to Mindanao, except for concerns that it was a backdoor for smugglers to sneak in contraband goods and for pirates to ply their trade. Worse, in the 1950s, the government started a migration program, encouraging people from Luzon (including surrendering Huk insurgents) and the Visayas to go South where land was abundant. This would inevitably lead to social friction.
as some Christian settlers, familiar with the land titling system, were able to occupy lands which the Muslim natives claimed as theirs.³

The 1935 Constitution, upon which the post-War Republic was based, had Filipinism as an underlying theme. For instance, it limited the right to exploit, utilize, own, and develop natural resources to Filipino citizens. However, the Muslims felt all this would amount to Christianization, particularly because the Constitution did not provide due recognition of the varied aspects of Islamic culture and life ways, including their political and social practices and traditions.

Given their fear of being swept into the mainstream of a secular and predominantly Christian nationhood, it is understandable how grudgingly the Filipino Muslims allowed themselves to be part of the Philippine Republic. This discomfort would grow in intensity through the years and eventually take the shape of an armed separatist movement.

Filipino Muslim resentment has several dimensions.

First, Muslims—including their traditionally powerful nobility—found no place in the Republic’s democratic system of government. Indeed, Muslims have not had fairly reasonable representation in the Congress of the Philippines, the Cabinet, and the administrative bureaucracy. Second, the government encouraged migration to Mindanao among homestead seekers and among former Huk rebels who fought for social justice in Central Luzon during the 1950s. Many of these migrants settled in the Kapatagan area of Lanao, the Cotabato towns of Buldon and Parang, and other places where the Muslims abound. Third, persistent misunderstanding, mistrust and animosity painted a stereotype of Muslims as social misfits, trouble-makers, a treacherous lot. Fourth, Mindanao’s share of the national budget had been grossly disproportionate to its substantial contribution to the national income.

**Emergence of the Secessionist Movement.** The separatist tendency of the Filipino Muslims, which later evolved into the secessionist movement in
the southern Philippines, clearly has historical antecedents. Aside from their traditional tendency to defy any attempt to assimilate them into the Philippine body politic, the Filipino Muslims have repeatedly voiced their desire to have autonomy or to secede from the Philippine Republic and form an independent Islamic state.

Among the early attempts to openly express their desire to form their own separate sovereign state was made shortly before the birth of the Philippine Commonwealth. On 18 March 1935, Muslim leaders convened in Dansalan, now known as Marawi City, to draft a declaration against the inclusion of Mindanao and Sulu to the territory, which the Republic of the Philippines was to cover. In this document forwarded to the US Congress through the American President, they claimed that the Constitution was designed mainly for the welfare of the Christian Filipinos to the exclusion of the Muslims. They rejected Filipinism and the idea of a politically, economically and socially integrated nation.

Separatist agitation was felt anew with the emergence of the Muslim Association of the Philippines (MAP) in 1949. Primarily intended to unify and promote the welfare of Filipino Muslims, MAP eventually became a tool for local and international political purposes when it succeeded in forging strong links with such Islamic states as Egypt, Iraq and Indonesia. During its second National Muslim Conference in 1956, then incumbent MAP president Domocao Alonto reiterated the Muslim desire to establish a separate government patterned after Pakistan's, which was established through unified pressure led by the Muslim League's Mohammad Ali Jinah.

The formation of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM) in 1968 concretized the Muslim separatist statements. In its first manifesto issued in May 1968, the MIM succinctly spelled out the Muslims' “desire to secede from the Republic of the Philippines in order to establish an Islamic state that shall embody their ideals and aspirations, conserve and develop their patrimony, their Islamic heritage, under the blessings of Islamic brotherhood and the regime of the law, justice and democracy and the recognized principles of the law of nations.”

Following the MIM were a number of Muslim secessionist organizations, one of which, the Green Guards, was said to have been formed with the assistance of Malaysian agents. The other secessionist organizations were the Ansar El Islam, the Kalimatu Sahadat, the Lam Alip, the Manvarul Islam, and the Mindanao-Sulu-Borneo Association.
The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), organized by young Muslims who would bolt the MIM for lack of faith in its traditional leaders, was then virtually unknown.

In 1968-69, at the height of Philippine-Malaysian dispute over the Philippine claim to Sabah, the escalation of land conflicts in Mindanao and the occurrence of the so-called Jabidah Massacre*, youthful members of the MIM were projected to undergo a three-month guerrilla warfare training at Pulao Pangkor Island, West Malaysia. Ninety trainees were sent in five batches, the third of which was led by Nur Misuari. Aside from guerrilla warfare, the training included a political orientation and intensive security briefings. These trainees eventually formed the nucleus of the MNLF under Misuari, which was formally organized on the suggestion of their Malaysian instructors.6

---

* In one account, several young Muslim recruits to the Philippine Army, who were being trained as part of a commando group called Jabidah, were killed by their Christian superiors on the island of Corregidor in March 1968. Other accounts say the government was training these recruits to infiltrate Sabah as a prelude to a military invasion which prompted the recruits to rebel upon learning of the mission. Government officials denied the invasion plan, stressing that the recruits were to be used in counterinsurgency and that they rebelled because of inadequate pay.
The original objective of the MNLF was the creation of an independent Bangsa Moro state comprising the Mindanao mainland, the Sulu archipelago and Palawan. However, the demand for independence was later downscaled to autonomy upon the prodding of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the MNLF’s chief foreign patron.

After President Ferdinand Marcos declared nationwide martial law on September 21, 1972, the MNLF’s young ideologues exploited the firearms ban to harness popular support for the secessionist movement by claiming that the ban was part of the government plan to “Christianize” the Muslims by force.

A Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) was organized on paper to unite and oversee the operations of all the secessionist groups with its armed elements called the Muslim Revolutionary Forces (MRF). Nur Misuari was believed instrumental in the formation of the SRC, directly under which were the MIM, Ansar El Islam, and the MNLF. Eventually, the traditional Muslim leaders were relegated to the background, thrusting the MNLF into the forefront of the secessionist movement.

The initial unity forged by the Muslims of Sulu, Lanao, Cotabato, and Basilan showed how Islam had finally emerged as the only unifying element for the disparate Muslim groups. The Islamic mantle was strengthened by support from countries that saw in the Filipino Muslims’ struggle for liberation the greater world of Islam coming to terms with history in the Philippines.

On 21 October 1972, the MNLF came out into the open and claimed leadership of the Muslim secessionist movement. The group marked this coming out with a violent uprising in Marawi City. Soon, the conflict in Mindanao approached full-scale civil war, with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and its paramilitary units conducting military campaigns against rebel Muslims, who were likewise being aided by their own paramilitary groups.

The armed conflict reached its climax in February 1974 when the AFP unleashed its full force on the rebels who had taken control of Jolo. When the smoke of battle lifted, the town of Jolo was razed to the ground.

Realizing that he was confronted by a stubborn and strong rebel front, backed by a formidable group of oil-producing Arab countries, President Marcos decided to negotiate and bring in the OIC to mediate. He sent a team to hold talks with Misuari in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1975. He also dispatched his wife, Imelda Marcos, to Libya in November 1976 ostensibly to sign a trade and cultural agreement but, in reality, to ask Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi to convince the MNLF to sign a peace accord with the Philippine government. While negotiations were in full swing, President Marcos intensified his
diplomatic initiatives, sending delegations to and opening embassies in Muslim countries and wooing key MNLF leaders in the field with amnesty, livelihood projects and business opportunities as well as political positions.

**The Tripoli Agreement.** Mrs. Marcos’ meeting with Qaddafi led to the final stage of the negotiations, which culminated on 23 December 1976 with the signing of the Tripoli Agreement by Misuari and Defense Undersecretary Carmelo Barbero.

The agreement called for the establishment of an autonomous government covering 13 provinces in southern Philippines: 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, Palawan, and “all the cities and villages situated in the above-mentioned areas,” subject to the country’s constitutional processes. The autonomous regional government would have its own executive, legislative and judicial branches, and a regional security force independent of the AFP.

The implementation of the agreement, however, bogged down due to conflicting interpretations. The MNLF argued that the setting up of an autonomous government comprising the 13 provinces (referred to as Paragraph 15) is the true intent and spirit of the agreement. President Marcos, on the other hand, insisted on subjecting the territorial coverage of autonomy to constitutional procedures such as a plebiscite (Paragraph 16) because majority
of the people in the 13 provinces are not Muslims. Despite objections from the MNLF, President Marcos proceeded to implement his own version of the agreement. He declared autonomy in the 13 provinces on 25 March 1977, called for a plebiscite about a month later on 17 April, and divided the 10 provinces, which voted for autonomy into two autonomous regions—Regions 9 (Western Mindanao) and 12 (Central Mindanao). He used these two structures to provide official positions and patronage to the Muslims in exchange for relative peace.

Misuari then reverted to his former goal of secession and resumed hostilities against the government. By this time, however, the MNLF started to break up, triggered by disenchantment over Misuari's inability to have the Tripoli Agreement implemented according to the MNLF interpretation. Breakaway factions emerged: the MNLF-Reformist Group under Dimasangkay Pundato and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) under Hashim Salamat. The former eventually reached a settlement with the succeeding government of President Corazon Aquino, and its leaders received posts in the government's Office of Muslim Affairs. The MILF, on the other hand, rose to become a separate secessionist group, which the government would have to contend with some years later.

MNLF military activities began to wane in 1983. By the mid-1980s, the MNLF problem, in the words of a keen Mindanao observer, "was perceived to have been contained. It no longer constituted a threat to the state, but was for
all practical purposes a minor local problem.” Misuari left the country and stayed abroad for quite some time.

But when Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency in 1986, the group was reinvigorated. The new President, promising to grant “genuine autonomy” to Muslim Mindanao, sent her brother-in-law, Agapito “Butz” Aquino and Mindanao political leader, Aquilino Pimentel, to convince Misuari to come home for a final settlement of the problem. To show her sincerity in advancing the cause of peace, President Aquino broke protocol and went to Jolo in September 1986 to meet Misuari. This gave the MNLF renewed hope that the “true spirit and intent” of the Tripoli accord would finally be implemented.

After a plebiscite was held on 19 November 1989, however, only four geographically non-contiguous provinces voted for incorporation in the ARMM: Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Resenting the fact that it had been excluded from the process of drafting the autonomy law and that the plebiscite had reduced ARMM’s territorial coverage from 13 provinces to four, the MNLF deemed the government’s moves unsatisfactory. It refused to recognize the Organic Act (RA 6734) that created the autonomous region, as well as the legitimacy of the four provinces under ARMM.

**The 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement.** More concerted efforts to resolve the MNLF problem emerged during the term of President Fidel Ramos. The new President embarked on a deliberate effort to forge a settlement with the MNLF in line with his administration’s objective of attaining economic development. This, he believed, could only be realized if there is comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the country.

On 15 September 1993, he issued Executive Order No. 125, creating the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). This became the lead government agency charged with the task of managing and supervising the peace process with rebel groups in the country. Different peace panels were created: one to negotiate with military rebels, another to negotiate with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and still another to negotiate with the MNLF.

After four years of negotiations with the MNLF, the Final Peace Agreement was signed on 2 September 1996. Its implementation was to come in two phases.

Phase I covered a three-year transition period after the signing of the peace agreement. Executive Order No. 371, issued on 22 October 1996, established the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD), the Southern Philippine Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), and the Consultative Assembly.
The integration of 5,750 MNLF regulars into the AFP and 1,500 more into the PNP was to start during this phase.

The SZOPAD comprised the areas defined in the Tripoli Agreement (the 13 provinces had become 14, owing to a redrawing of local government boundaries in 1992). It included 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. It also included nine cities: Zamboanga, Dapitan, Dipolog, Pagadian, Iligan, Marawi, Cotabato, General Santos and Puerto Princesa. The zone was intended to be the focus of intensive peace and development efforts upon the establishment of the SPCPD. Public and private investments were to be channeled to spur economic activities and to uplift the living conditions of the people in the area.

Tasked with managing peace and development efforts within SZOPAD, the SPCPD was composed of one Chairman, a Vice Chairman and three deputies, one each representing the Muslims, Christians and Lumad. These officials were appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the MNLF.

The Consultative Assembly, which advises the SPCPD, had 81 members drawn from the provincial governors and city mayors in the SZOPAD, from the MNLF and from representatives of non-government organizations (NGOs).

The SPCPD and the Consultative Assembly had a term of three years, which may be extended by the President upon recommendation of the Council itself.

Phase II of the Peace Agreement involved the passage of a new law amending or repealing the Organic Act (RA 6734, which created the ARMM) through congressional action. This new law would then be submitted to the people of the concerned areas in a plebiscite to determine which areas would join a new autonomous region with greater powers than the present ARMM.

With the signing of the agreement, the MNLF ceased to be a secessionist rebel group and became part of mainstream society. It entered civilian politics and government as a partner of the Ramos administration and the Lakas-NUCD (National Union of Christian Democrats) political party. Misuari himself ran and won as ARMM governor in September 1996.
The Moro Islamic Liberation Front

**Break with the MNLF.** When Misuari failed to work out the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement, his vice-chairman Hashim Salamat attempted to wrest control of the secessionist leadership through his so-called “Instrument of Takeover” on 24 December 1977. In his letter to OIC Secretary General Dr. Ahmadou Karim Gaye, Salamat cited three reasons to justify the takeover:

1. *The MNLF leadership was being manipulated away from Islamic basis, methodologies and objectives and fast evolving towards Marxist-Maoist orientations.*

2. *The Central Committee has evolved into a mysterious, exclusive, secretive and monolithic body whose policies, plans and decisions—political, financial, and/or strategic—became an exclusive preserve of Nur Misuari.*

3. *This mysterious, exclusive and arrogant nature of the MNLF leadership resulted in confusion, suspicion and disappointments among the members.*

Misuari countered by expelling Hashim Salamat and charging him with treason. Salamat moved on to form a “New MNLF”—renaming it in March 1984 the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a separate organization with a religious, as well as nationalist, agenda.

Differences between Misuari and Salamat have deep roots. These did not only involve matters of policy but also ideology, leadership style, personality as well as ethnic backgrounds. Salamat comes from an upper-class Maguindanao family and was schooled in Al-Azhar, a prestigious center of Islamic learning in Cairo, Egypt. Misuari, on the other hand, is a Tausug who had a secular education in the University of the Philippines and had taken part in left-wing student activism. The Maguindanao and the Tausug, along with the Maranao, are fundamentally rivals; they may be one in faith, but they harbor varying nuances and degrees of mutual animosity.
Compared with the MNLF, the MILF put greater emphasis on Islam and most of its leaders are Islamic scholars. It justified the waging of its own secessionist armed campaign by pointing out that the MNLF had miserably failed to advance the cause of the Muslims which could only be attained through the establishment of a separate Islamic state in Mindanao. To pursue this objective, the MILF employed a combination of political and military strategies—entering into negotiations with the government while engaging in semi-conventional warfare.

The MILF at the onset braced itself for a protracted and costly struggle, soliciting material and moral support from Islamic movements and individual sympathizers from around the world, including suspected international terrorist Osama bin Laden. It also exacted compulsory contribution from the local populace and conducted extortion, kidnap-for-ransom, robbery and other nefarious activities to sustain the movement. It had even gone to the extent of disrupting government development projects, such as the Malitubog-Maridagao irrigation project in Carmen, North Cotabato, to project an image of sovereignty.

When peace talks between the government and the MNLF were still going on, the MILF initially chose to keep silent and wait for the results. Immediately after the signing of the peace accord, however, it impressed upon the government that it too deserved attention. Displaying its strength, the MILF
held a huge assembly near Cotabato City on 3-5 December 1996, during which it reaffirmed its commitment to independence. The MILF claimed that the GRP-MNLF peace pact had failed to address the fundamental problem of the Muslims. It subsequently declared itself the only legitimate group that upholds the revolutionary aspiration of the Muslims in Mindanao.

**Government peace initiatives.** In accordance with his policy objective of ending armed challenges to the state to achieve political stability and economic growth, President Ramos offered the olive branch of peace to the MILF in 1996. Government officials initiated meetings with top leaders of the MILF during that year, culminating in the creation of the GRP and MILF Peace Panels. Exploratory talks began in January 1997 and were upgraded into formal negotiations in October 1999.

The two parties signed several important documents where both the GRP and the MILF, among others, agreed to commit their respective forces to a general ceasefire, renounce violence in redressing grievances, follow the rule of law in resolving disputes, and ensure development efforts in Muslim areas. Accordingly, a general cessation of hostilities was declared effective 21 July 1997 and a body called the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities, was activated to monitor and ensure the implementation of the ceasefire agreement.

In a further effort to reach out to the MILF and to build confidence during the exploratory peace talks, the government undertook several projects in Camp Abubakar, the MILF’s main headquarters. In particular, the government concreted a “friendship highway” inside the camp, installed a solar-powered water pump, funded a fruit nursery and provided a power generator. It also implemented various socio-economic projects in other areas where the MILF maintained a strong presence, particularly in North Cotabato. These included distributing farm animals and implements, constructing mosques and housing settlements for rebel returnees and funding an irrigation project.

**Bad faith behind MILF response.** As the ceasefire agreement started to take effect, the MILF simply took advantage of the peace process by recruiting and training more members, building up its armaments, regrouping and consolidating its forces, and expanding its areas of influence. It used its camps as staging points for armed attacks not only against military personnel and structures in the field but also against civilian communities. The MILF claimed to have a total of 46 camps, 13 of which it classified as “major” and the rest as “established.” These camps were located in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur,

__________

* Government of the Republic of the Philippines*
Cotabato, Sarangani, Davao Oriental, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Lanao del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Bukidnon and Davao del Norte.

Unlike conventional camps of the AFP, these MILF “territories” were not defined by perimeter fences; they had no set limits or boundaries. They were basically Muslim communities with religious, social, economic and military structures, over which the MILF leadership exercised total control. Camp Abubakar, for instance, was complete with schools, mosques, sharia courts, multi-purpose cooperatives, a military academy, an arms manufacturing center and a prison.

The government's acknowledgment in 1999 of seven of these MILF camps “as a confidence-building measure in furtherance of the peace process,” further emboldened the rebels to commit provocative activities. It appears that the rebels interpreted the acknowledgment as government’s recognition of their control and sovereignty over these territories, where they run their own affairs in complete disregard of Philippine laws and seek sanctuary whenever they commit hostile activities.

*International terrorist links.* International intelligence monitoring of activities of emerging “terrorist” groups and personalities in the 1990s detected links between the MILF and the more criminally-oriented Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) with Arab-based proponents of *jihad* (Islamic holy war), later to be branded by the Americans as “al Qaeda” (referring to “the Base” of *mujahideen* [holy warriors] training and deployment originally against the Soviet regime in Afghanistan), and with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), an Indonesian-based group seeking “to radicalize Islam and to create a pan-Asian Islamic union”. These two streams of extremist influence appeared to be distinct but mutually reinforcing.

Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda figurehead and top financier, reportedly instructed his brother Khalifa to convince Hashim Salamat to field hundreds of MILF fighters to support the *jihad* in Afghanistan. In exchange for access to MILF camps where local and JI could get training in terrorist tactics from battle-tested *mujaheddin*, al Qaeda provided “generous funding” to MILF.
On the other hand, JI established four sub-regional commands or *mantiqi*. The Philippine terrorist cell operating in Mantiqi 3 “acquired explosives and forged ties with MILF to gain access to training camps for JI operatives.”

**Ceasefire Violations.** From the signing of the ceasefire agreement in July 1997 up to May 1999, the MILF was recorded to have committed over 400 violations, more than half of which occurred in Maguindanao. Most of these violations were harassments of military detachments, CAGFU units and even unarmed civilian residents, causing several deaths and serious injuries to others, as well as damage to property.

For instance, the rebels conducted harassing actions against nine detachments of the 39th Infantry Battalion (39 IB), based in Garigayan-Logpond Complex, Buldon, Maguindanao on 16 January 1999. The following day, the MILF targeted the 57 IB detachment in Upper Kambingi, Datu Piang, Maguindanao.

Even purely civilian structures and facilities were not spared. On 26 January 1998, for example, the rebels lobbed a grenade inside the public market of Carmen, Cotabato, wounding 17 civilians. On 15 April of the same year, they raided Barangay Elian in Esperanza, Sultan Kudarat, burning several houses and killing three civilians in the process.

The rebels went as far as enforcing their own laws against suspected criminals. On 6 October 1997, a six-man MILF firing squad executed two men allegedly found guilty of multiple murder by the MILF Shariah court in Masiu, Lanao del Sur.

On the other hand, the AFP’s record on ceasefire compliance was not entirely spotless. On the whole, however, its activities were essentially defensive in nature. Committed to respect the ceasefire agreement, government troops limited their activities to conducting patrols and retaliatory strikes until President Joseph Estrada decided to finally take on the MILF challenge.

THE PRESIDENT DECIDES

**Policy Framework.** From the start, President Estrada declared that he was for the peaceful settlement of the Mindanao conflict and that the government would exhaust all means toward this end. At the same time, he made known his firm commitment and obligation as President to protect the people, territory and government of the Philippines, no matter what the cost.
In his first State of the Nation Address delivered on 27 July 1998, President Estrada expressed his readiness to hold talks with the secessionist rebels fighting for social reforms but bluntly told the terrorists that he had no heart for them. He suggested that justice to the Filipino Muslims meant they had to be compensated for long years of neglect. At the same time, he called for an end to violence and appealed for the strengthening of brotherhood bonds.

In his second State of the Nation Address delivered on 26 July 1999 where he bared his dream of a poverty-free Philippines, President Estrada appealed to both the communist and secessionist rebels to give peace a chance. He told the local dissidents to lay down their arms and return to the fold of the law and hold peace talks. But he warned them: “we will give your rebellion no air to breathe, no space to move, no time to prosper …,” adding in Pilipino “… hindi binebeybi ang rebelyon, pinipisa. Kaya huwag ninyo kaming hamunin.”

As regards the secessionist rebels, he stressed that the government “initiative to bring about stability in Mindanao are directly related to poverty elimination” and vowed that the government will develop Mindanao as “the country’s food basket”, which he said was possible only amidst “an environment of political tranquility.”

An elusive peace. But political tranquility in Mindanao remained as elusive as ever. The ceasefire agreement only gave the secessionist rebels the opportunity to intensify their manpower and logistics buildup activities and to fortify their strongholds while engaging the government in protracted “peace talks”. They resorted to terrorist activities in increasing tempo to attain tactical objectives even as the government widened its threshold of tolerance, hoping that the secessionists would finally accept the futility of their separatist goal.

Then the MILF launched daring attacks on military detachments in Lanao del Norte beginning 15 March 2000 and occupied the Kauswagan Municipal Hall on the morning of 17 March, resulting in some 294 civilians taken hostage. These bold moves provided the proverbial last straw, forcing the government to adopt a sterner stand of clearing the MILF camp bases in Lanao del Norte. Six days later, President Estrada issued a directive to “go all-out” against the MILF.

It was also around this time when the Abu Sayyaf Group intensified its terrorist activities in Western Mindanao, highlighted by the kidnapping of 80 students, teachers and a Catholic priest in Basilan. The Central Mindanao situation further deteriorated when the MILF placed the Narciso Ramos Highway under its full control, exacting “toll fees” from motorists.

The road to war. On 30 April, the AFP started clearing operations in the Narciso Ramos Highway, where the government security forces met stiff
resistance. As the operations raged the President on 5 May declared through the press that: 1) peace is the government’s overriding concern; 2) the integrity of the Republic is non-negotiable; 3) any form of terrorism, torture, murder and kidnapping is abominable; 4) the cause of secessionist rebels and their use of violence have no public support; and, 5) the roots of the Mindanao conflict are so deep and complex that they need a comprehensive political, economic, social and cultural approach.

The President stressed the government’s determination to institute reforms and thus address the legitimate grievances of the secessionist rebels. He further clarified that the government had to resort to its military might because of the “use of arms by the MILF and the outright criminal acts of the Abu Sayyaf” and then reiterated: "our hands remain extended to those who seek genuine peace. But I promise defeat to those who want war. We will not compromise this conviction.”

Shortly thereafter, on 25 May, AFP operations to recover all MILF camps and/or bases, as well as other occupied areas started. Before long the AFP drive against the MILF was in full swing.

But the President, still hoping that the conflict could be peacefully settled, revealed, during the 31 May meeting at Malacañang with “peace activists”, that he was offering self-rule to the MILF and implementing a strategy that was consistent with the President’s mandated duty to protect the Constitution. Essentially, the offer entailed the expansion of the areas of self-rule already enjoyed by the members of the ARMM. On 2 June, the President urged the MILF to accept meaningful autonomy instead of independence as a permanent solution to the Mindanao rebellion.

The President re-stated the government position on the Mindanao conflict in his 24 July State of the Nation Address. While conceding the centuries of historical wrongs committed by successive colonial powers and decades of inequities tolerated by successive Philippine governments, he stressed: “Mindanao is an integral, inseparable, and organic part of the Philippines. It has been so for the past four and half centuries. It is so today, it will be so forever....” And added: “When I took office, I swore to preserve and defend the Constitution. It is my solemn duty under that Constitution to repel the armed rebellion and defend the sovereignty and integrity of the Republic.”

Then he declared that the decision to retake the MILF’s numerous camps was necessary to uphold the “constitutional principle that the Philippines is one state, one republic, with one government, one military answerable to one civilian Commander in Chief, under one Constitution and one flag, in one undivided territory.” Nevertheless, the President was conciliatory. He invited the MILF to
peace talks and to help “create a new order for Mindanao” that would pave the way for its development into an agricultural paradise and manufacturing base.15

ENDNOTES

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Islam in the Philippines (Mindanao Studies Reports, No 3) (Quezon City: Center for Investigative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1995).
10 For a fuller discussion, see Toshi Yoshihara, “Philippines”, Chapter 10 of Derek S. Reveron and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism (Arlington: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006).
12 See “A poverty-free Philippines” (State of the Nation Address of President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, 26 July 1999).
13 The Philippine Star, June 1, 2000, p 1
15 See “Toward New Beginnings” (State of the Nation Address by President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, 24 July 2000).
PART TWO

THE BATTLE IS JOINED

PART TWO

47
CHAPTER 3

THE THEATER OF CONFLICT: CENTRAL MINDANAO

TOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS: AREA OF OPERATIONS

Location, Topography and Climate. Central Mindanao refers to the old Cotabato province, the biggest in the Philippines before it was partitioned into the provinces of Maguindanao, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and Sarangani; and the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Except for South Cotabato and Sarangani, all the provinces share common water and land boundaries with some provinces of the other regions in Mindanao. Only Cotabato is land-locked. A large part of the expansive plains in Central Mindanao is found in Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat. The Rio Grande de Mindanao and its tributaries crisscross this area. Water and land boundaries with some provinces

Until recent years, the region has been known to lie outside the typhoon belt. Except for the coastal parts of Lanao del Norte, which have a short dry season during the last quarter, the region has rains throughout the year, with the period of heaviest precipitation from April/May through August/September.²

Lanao del Norte. Located on the western coast of the Northern Mindanao area, Lanao del Norte is bounded on the north by Iligan Bay and Misamis Oriental, on the east by Bukidnon, on the west by Panguil Bay and Zamboanga del Sur, and on the south by Lanao del Sur and Illana Bay.³ The province’s capital, Iligan City, is strategically located in the northern coast of Mindanao which faces Iligan Bay.

Lanao del Norte has sloping terrain from the shoreline of Panquil Bay in the west to the mountains adjoining Lanao del Sur in the southeast. The province has an irregular topography. Its plains comprise 44% of the land area including Kapatakan Valley. The southern part is mountainous, but towards the north, the land surface is slightly rolling with low hills and gentle slopes along the coast

* For purposes of this publication, “Central Mindanao” is defined to include portions of Northern Mindanao, where MILF forces had to be neutralized early in the campaign to protect the flank of the AFP forces tasked to lead the assault on Camp Abubakar, as explained in the narrative.
of Panquill Bay, where poorly drained lowlands covered with mangrove can be found. Traversing the province are several rivers, the most important of which is the Agus River which feeds the Maria Cristina Falls, the major source of hydro-electric power in Mindanao. The province has 27 waterfalls, most of which are found in iligan City.

Lanao del Norte has a non-seasonal climate. The province has a short, mild dry season from January to April. The wet season lasts from May to December but rainfall occurs throughout the year.\(^4\)

Half of the total land area of the province at the time was made up of areas for residential, industrial and institutional structures, and for agricultural production. The other half of the provincial territory then consisted of forestland.
The total road network of Lanao del Norte in the 1990s stretched 1,892 kilometers. Most of this network consisted of village (barangay) roads; the rest were provincial and municipal roads. The Iligan-Aurora road, the major national road, traversed the coastal municipalities of the province. At the time, almost 40% of this road was concrete.

The province then had four municipal ports, six fishing ports and two private ports along the coastal municipalities. There was also a secondary airport in Baloi, with a 1.4-km. runway, which could only handle light aircraft.

**Lanao del Sur.** Lanao del Sur is bounded on the north by Lanao del Norte, on the east by Bukidnon, on the west by Illana Bay, and on the south by Maguindanao and Cotabato.

The province forms the western portion of the extensive plateau of Northern Mindanao. Adjoining Illana Bay on the southwest are a narrow coastal plain and rolling hills that give way to mountain ranges along the boundary with Cotabato and lowlands going east to the boundary of Bukidnon.

Lake Lanao, around which most of the province’s towns are located, covers 357 square kilometers and is the second largest lake in the country. Agus River, the lake’s outlet, flows for 30 kilometers into Illigan Bay.

The province has a cool and pleasant climate because of its elevation. Summertime is not quite distinct in Lanao del Sur. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year. The province is also off the typhoon belt.

**Cotabato.** Cotabato stretches west from Mt. Apo, which separates it from Davao, to the Piapayungan Range on its boundary with Lanao. In the midst of these uplands is the basin of the Rio Grande de Mindanao, which rises in Bukidnon and flows south to Maguindanao and Illana Bay. The province’s fertile plains are traversed by tributaries of this great river.

The climate is cool and humid. There are no typhoons but rainfall is frequent. The plains of Cotabato also lie between long mountain ranges, which are the source of cool breezes.

**Maguindanao.** The province of Maguindanao is bounded on the north by Lanao del Sur, on the east by Cotabato, Moro Gulf on the west and Sultan Kudarat on the south.

The eastern side of the province is part of the Cotabato plains crisscrossed by the Rio Grande de Mindanao and its tributaries. The western part is mountainous, except the area around Cotabato City at the mouth of the great Mindanao River.
Maguindanao has a vast plain in the northwest and scattered hills, rolling lands and isolated mountains in the southeast. Its four mountain ranges are Montod, Talayan, Daguma and Peres Hill. The Daguma mountain range is the natural boundary with Sultan Kudarat and South Cotabato.

The province has the biggest marshlands in the country, the Liguasan, which is approximately 100,000 hectares. Another rich marshland is the Butilin marsh at the Dinaig-Kabuntalan boundary.

At the time, agricultural, residential, institutional and industrial sites comprised 61% of the total land area while the rest was still forestland.

The province had three national irrigation systems: the Alip Irrigation System, the Kabacan Irrigation System (Pagalungan extension) and the Libungan Irrigation System (Kabuntalan area). These served 4,233 hectares of riceland.
The province had no power generating plants. It relied solely on the power generating plants in Lanao del Sur. Only 15% of the total households in the province were served with electricity.

The total road network in the province, including Cotabato City, stretched 1,722 kilometers at the time. Sixty percent of this consisted of barangay roads. One half of the national roads was concrete; the rest were mostly made of gravel.

In the 1990s, there were four public ports of entry and two private wharves in the province. The principal port of entry is the Cotabato City River Wharf, which would later be transferred to Polloc Harbor.

A trunkline airport located in Awang, Dato Odin Sinsuat (formerly Dinaig) served the air transport needs of the province.

The climate is characterized by more or less even distribution of rainfall throughout the year. Compared to other provinces of the country, Maguindanao has the lowest frequency of cloudy or overcast days.
Sultan Kudarat. Sultan Kudarat is bounded on the north by Cotabato and Maguindanao, on the west by the Moro Gulf, South Cotabato on the east, and Mindanao Sea on the south.\textsuperscript{10}

The province’s topography ranges from plains to rolling hills and mountains. The three coastal towns on the western side are lined with mountain ranges which wall the central portion from the sea. These are balanced by the mountain ranges of Columbio on the eastern side, leaving flat and undulating land in between.\textsuperscript{11}

Sixteen big rivers, including the Allah River, traverse the province. The Kulaman and Kabulnan rivers are considered for hydro-electric and irrigation purposes. Lakes Buluan and Blingkong are major fish grounds. There are also 23 large creeks, 11 major springs and waterfalls, two lakes and several marshes in the province.

The road network of the province totaled 2,175 kilometers at the time. Five national roads comprised only 7% of this network, which is made up mostly of barangay roads.

There were two municipal ports at the time: one in Lebak and another in Palimbang.

In lieu of a public airport, a private airstrip in Kalamansig, owned and maintained by Consunji Corporation, was used by private and commercial planes.

The climate is characterized by a short dry season of one to three months. The hottest months are from March to June and the coldest are the months of December and January. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year.\textsuperscript{12}

South Cotabato. South Cotabato is located in the southernmost part of the island of Mindanao. It is bounded on the north and west by the province of Sultan Kudarat, on the east by Davao del Sur, and on the south by the Sarangani Bay.\textsuperscript{13}

The province is subdivided into three areas: Allah Valley, Koronadal Valley and the Coastal Plain. It is crisscrossed by two mountain ranges: the Apo range which forms the boundary between South Cotabato and Davao del Sur; and the Roxas range which separates the Allah and Koronadal Valleys. Mt. Matutum, a 2,292-meter-high extinct volcano, dominates the southern landscape. The terrain is generally flat with scattered hills and isolated mountains.\textsuperscript{14}

Lake sebu in the municipality of the same name is a 365-hectare lake surrounded by rolling hills and mountains, some reaching 900 feet above
sea level. The area surrounding the lake is home to the T’boli tribe. Another lake, the Lake Maughan in the municipality of T’boli, is the source of five big rivers including Allah River. The province also has six waterfalls in Tantangan, Koronadal and Nurallah.

The province has the driest climate in the country. The hottest months are March to June and the coldest months are December to January. The months of June, July and September have the most number of rainy days although rainfall is more or less distributed throughout the year.15

**Sarangani.** Located at the southern tip of Mindanao, Sarangani is cut in half by General Santos City at the head of Sarangani Bay. The province is bounded on the north by South Cotabato and Davao del Sur, on the east also by Davao del Sur, on the west by Sultan Kudarat and on the south by the Mindanao sea.

The terrain of Sarangani is characterized by flatlands, rolling hills, and mountains. The flatlands are found along the coastal areas. Except for Malungon, all the towns of Sarangani are located along the coast. Rolling hills and mountains dominate the landscape of Malungon and the northern areas of the coastal municipalities. The mountains of the western municipalities form part of the Alip mountain range which connects the provinces of South Cotabato and Davao del Sur.

The towns of Maitum and Kiamba have forests stretching inland from the shore. Mt. Busa, with a height of 2,083 meters, is its highest peak. More than 50% of the total land area of the province is hilly and mountainous.

Rainfall in Sarangani is evenly distributed throughout the year. Heaviest rainfall occurs from June to August. The driest months are March, April, and May. November to January are the coolest months of the year.16

**KEY TERRAIN FEATURES**17

**Rivers.** Central Mindanao is traversed by 12 major rivers: Tamontaca, Pulangi, Rio Grande de Mindanao, Malitubog, Maridagao, Ambal, Maganoy, Kabuianan, Kabacan, Allah, Libungan and Simuay.

These rivers and their tributaries provide the MILF mobility from their main base at Camp Abubakar to the rest of their camps and sanctuaries in the area. These also serve as the MILF’s main supply route (MSR). Besides, control of the rivers is also useful for kidnapping and extortion activities of the MILF and MILF Lost Command among fishermen, traders and farmers transporting their
products through the rivers.

**Liguasan Marsh.** The Liguasan Marsh is the virtual food basket of local inhabitants in terms of aquatic resources and other agricultural products during the dry season. The marsh is also known to have mineral and oil deposits. It covers a vast area in Maguindanao and Cotabato and provides a good refuge for MILF rebels and other criminal elements.

**Reina Regente mountains.** The Reina Regente mountains straddle Cotabato and Maguindanao amidst the Liguasan Marsh and the river tributaries. The area used to be the site of Camp Didagen, an MILF major encampment where control of rebel activities in Liguasan Marsh and Pulangi River was then centered. Reina Regente affords good observation and fields of fire in the area where one may control strategic movements along the rivers and marshlands.

**Nabalawag Hill.** Located on commanding ground between Datu Piang, Maguindanao and Midsayap, Cotabato. Nabalawag Hill serves as a tactical relay/staging point from Camp Abubakar in the north to Reina Regente and Rajamuda in the south. Notably, the hill is a vantage point overlooking the 6ID headquarters, and practically the whole of Cotabato and Maguindanao.

**GOVERNMENT HIGH-IMPACT PROJECTS**

**MALMAR Irrigation Project.** This covered the towns of Pikit and Carmen in Cotabato, and Pagalungan in Maguindanao. This project aimed to utilize the two main rivers, Malitubog and Maridagao, to irrigate about 20,000 hectares of land in the area. The construction was suspended because of sporadic MILF attacks in the past.

**PNOC Oil Drilling Project.** The area covers 2.5 hectares south of Liguasan Marsh, particularly in Brgy Tukanakuden, Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao.

**Kabulnan Irrigation and Area Development Project.** This project was designed to utilize the Kabulnan River to irrigate about 65,000 hectares covering the towns of Ampatuan, Datu Piang, Shariff Aguak (formerly Maganoy) and Sultan sa Barongis in Maguindanao.

**Parang-Malabang Road Project.** This road, connecting Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur became known as the Narciso Ramos Highway. Completed on 15 April 1996, this highway extended to Langkong junction, the access road leading to Camp Abubakar. The MILF put under its control strategic positions on the highway for security reasons and “tax collection” purposes.
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Based on the 1995 census, Central Mindanao had a total population of 4,909,126, comprising 30.29% of the Mindanao-wide population. The population density, 156 persons per square kilometer, was slightly higher than the Mindanao average. The most populous provinces were South Cotabato (948,328), Cotabato (862,666) and Lanao del Norte (713,787). (Table No 1)

Of the total Central Mindanao population at the time, around 35.24% were Muslims. More than 70% of the 1.73 million Muslims could be found in Lanao del Sur (including Marawi City), Maguindanao (including Cotabato City) and Lanao del Norte.

Central Mindanao had a relatively young population at the time, with males slightly outnumbering females. More than half the population was considered a potential labor force. Of those employed, 60-70 percent were in the agricultural sector.

The region then was 70% rural, with poverty incidence placed at 34 percent.
Of the provinces and cities comprising the Central Mindanao area, the Muslims were the overwhelming majority in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Marawi City. In Cotabato City, the Muslims enjoyed a slight majority (52%).

These Muslim communities are not ethnically homogeneous. The kinship system that characterizes the existing Sultanates in Lanao and Maguindanao has polarized loyalties and interest along bloodlines. It has caused rivalries and dissension, which would result occasionally in bloody conflicts.

Lanao del Norte. Migrants from the Visayas have densely populated the north coast, while the relatively few Muslims live in the interior communities. Some Subanons are found in the western part of the province.

Based on statistics at the time, about 64% of the people speak Cebuano, while some 33% speak the Maranao dialect.

Iligan City’s population then consisted of 92% Cebuano-speaking Visayan migrants and 3% Maranao.

Lanao del Sur. The province has a predominantly Maranao population. The Maranao are just about the last group to be Islamized but turned out to be the strongest adherents of Islam. They are mostly found along the edge of Lake Lanao and along the banks of the small rivers which lead into it. Their relative isolation has rendered them more conservative; they cling tenaciously to traditional ways more than do their Tausug or Maguindanao counterparts.

The Maranao are sensitive to maratabat, the controlling factor of their social actions. It is intricately linked to family honor and is manifested in the extravagant display of wealth and in exacting violent revenge. The province’s status-conscious society boasts of numerous sultans.

The Maranao dialect is commonly used; almost all Christians residing in Marawi City can understand and speak it.

Cotabato. Cotabato is a veritable melting pot of people, being home to diverse ethnic groups and varied cultures. Of its population, 71% are migrants from Luzon and the Visayas, while 18% belong to cultural communities – Manobo, T’boli, and Maguindanao. The major dialects spoken are Ilonggo (43%), Cebuano (31%), Maguindanao (16%), and Ilocano (10%).

Maguindanao. Like the Maranao, the Maguindanao possess an intense degree of Islamic consciousness. They belong to the Sultanate of Maguindanao which is centered on the lower valley of the Rio Grande de Mindanao.
The Maguindanao make up about 60% of the population of the province. Cotabato City, on the other hand, is about 60% Christian. Cultural communities include the Tiruray, T'boli, and Manobo.

The main dialects are Cebuano and Maguindanao.

Traditionally, the Maguindanao are rice farmers who live in the valley. Those living near the coasts have become fishermen and traders. The Tirurays are found in Dinaig and in the densely forested hills. They are basically a horse riding people living in communal households.

**Sultan Kudarat.** The area occupied by Sultan Kudarat at the time was a well-established settlement before the arrival of the Spaniards. It had been home to Muslim Maguindanao or “People of the Foot Plains”. Other major tribes, such as the Muslim Iranon, the animistic Tiruray and the Manobo, have also settled in the area over the centuries.

By the 1990s, Christian migrants had outnumbered Muslims and highlanders in the province.

The predominant dialect of the Christian migrants is Ilonggo. In some municipalities, Cebuano and Ilocano are spoken. Maguindanaon is the dialect of the local Muslim population.

**South Cotabato.** The area occupied by South Cotabato used to be populated mainly by Bilaan and Maguindanao, before the arrival of migrants from Luzon and the Visayas. In time, Ilonggo and Ilocano became the most widely spoken dialects in the area.

South Cotabato has a tribal population that includes the T'boli, Ubo, B'laan, Tagabili and the controversial Tasaday. The T'boli live around Lake Sebu, a lake in the mountains surrounded by rolling hills. The Ubo, who live a few hours’ hike from Lake Sebu, have much in common with the T'boli.

**Sarangani.** The population of Sarangani is a mixture of people from various regions and tribes. The languages and dialects spoken by its people are equally varied.

Cebuano is the most widely spoken language, particularly in the municipalities of Alabel, Glan, Malapatan, and Malungon. In the municipalities of Maitum and Kiamba, Cebuano is second only to Ilocano as the most spoken dialect. The major dialects of the ethnic groups include B’laan, Tasgakaulo, Maguindanao, and T'boli.
**Lanao del Norte.** As of 1995, Lanao del Norte had a population of 713,787, of whom 22% were Muslims. Almost two-fifths of the total population of Lanao del Norte resided in the municipalities of Lala (12.7%), Tubod (9.4%), Kapatagan (8.4%), Karomatan (8.2%) and Baloi (7.3%). Muslims predominated in nine of the 22 towns of the province: Balo-i, Matungao, Munai, Nunungan, Pantao Ragat, Poona Piagapo, Tagoloan, Tangcal and Pantar. Muslims also had significant numbers in Karomatan, Magsaysay, Salvador and Sapad.

There were more males than females in Lanao del Norte at the time.

The people lived predominantly in the rural areas, with only 24% living in urban areas. Young people accounted for 42% of the total population. The potential labor force was around 56%.

There were about 429,000 residents classified as part of the province’s potential labor force (15 years old and over). About 63% actually worked or were actively looking for jobs. Agriculture employed 52% of the labor force. More than 70% of the potential labor force resided in the rural areas. Unemployment rate was higher in rural rather than urban areas.

Poverty incidence in the province was at least 44%.

**Lanao del Sur.** Except for the town of Wao, all the municipalities of Lanao del Sur were Muslim-dominated.

**Cotabato.** Sixteen out of Cotabato’s 17 towns were Christian-dominated at the time. The only Muslim-dominated town was Pikit. However, there was a considerable Muslim population in four towns—Pigkawayan, Carmen, Kabacan and Midsayap—each with 10,000 to 20,000 Muslims.

**Maguindanao.** Fourteen out of the province’s 17 towns were Muslim-dominated in the 1990s.

About 29% of the provincial population resided in three of the 17 municipalities: Sultan Kudarat (11.5%), Datu O Din Sinsuat (9%) and Datu Piang (8.3%). Maguindanao had more male than female inhabitants—a ratio of 1.09:1. More than 50% of the population comprised the potential labor force, as the population was predominantly young.

The potential labor force numbered 867,000 in the province and 71,000 in Cotabato City. Majority of the working-age population lived in the rural areas. In the province, 67% of the labor force was actually working or actively looking for work. In Cotabato City, the labor participation rate was 69%. Unemployment
rate was placed at 5% in the province and 10% in Cotabato City. Majority of the unemployed were in the urban areas.

Poverty incidence in the province at the time was 31%.

**Sultan Kudarat.** The Muslims enjoyed a majority in only two out of 12 towns of the province. These were Palimbang and Lutayan.

The province had a population of 522,187 as of 1995. Of the 12 municipalities in Sultan Kudarat, Tacurong was the largest in terms of residents, accounting for 13.4% of the provincial population. This was followed by Isulan (12.5%) and Lebak (11.9%). The smallest was Columbio (4.1%). Around 20 percent of the population of the province were Muslims.

Males (51.42%) outnumbered females in the province. Around 56.9 percent of the population was considered part of the potential labor force. The provincial populace was fairly young, with 40.6 percent below 15 years of age.

The working-age population at the time was 295,000, of which 85% had been working or actively looking for work. The agricultural sector accounted for 62% of the employed manpower.

Poverty incidence was estimated at 27%.

**South Cotabato/Sarangani.** All the towns in South Cotabato and Sarangani were predominantly Christian in the 1990s. However, almost 14,000 Muslims lived in General Santos City, while a considerable number of Muslims resided in the Sarangani towns of Malapatan, Kiamba and Glan.

ENDNOTES

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.
4 See http: www.philippine.org
5 Lancion, Fast Facts, p. 94. Note: Mindanao's climate patterns have changed since then. The massive destruction wrought by major typhoons like Sendong (2011) and Pablo (2012) indicates that Mindanao may no longer be sheltered from severe tropical storms, as it once had been.
6 Ibid. p. 64.
7 See http:www.philippine.org
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. See also Note 4.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 This may need to be qualified. See Note 4.
13 See www.philippine.org
14 Lancion, Fast Facts, p. 146.
15 Climate patterns may be changing. See Note 4.
16 Ibid.
17 Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2, “Threat Estimate on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front” (June 8, 1997).
18 Ibid.
Before launching counteroffensive operations, the AFP reckoned the MILF to be a formidable insurgent force relentlessly and fanatically pursuing a secessionist goal. In fact, the MILF already had a semblance of a shadow government in its occupied areas. The MILF had its own armed forces and administrative infrastructure, performing police functions, administering justice and collecting taxes.

**Political Leadership.** The MILF had in effect been running an alternative or parallel government in its camps through the years. It had adopted the Maududi* model of an Islamic state where executive functions are performed by the Chairman and the Jihad Executive Committee (JEC), the legislative function by the Majlis-Al-Shura and the judiciary by the Shariah Court.²

The MILF had 13 functional committees, the most important of which were those for Military Affairs, headed by Ahod Ibrahim a.ka. Al Haj Murad; Political Affairs, led by Ghadzali Jaafar; and Internal Affairs, headed by Aleem Abdulazis Mimbantas.

Under the JEC were several regional committees operating at the provincial level. They took charge of the municipal and barangay committees, organized primarily to facilitate the MILF’s *zakat* collection. Each Regional Committee had six staff committees responsible for education, information, finance, internal security force, social welfare (SWC) and Dawah, which took charge of the MILF’s Islamization program. These committees, except the SWC, were replicated at the municipal and barangay levels.

**Military Leadership.** The MILF has a military arm—the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF). MILF Vice Chairman for Military Affairs Murad was its Chief of Staff, and then MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat was its Commander. It was organized into six field divisions including the so-called National Guard.

---

* Abdul ala Maududi (1903-1979), a Muslim scholar and prolific writer, was the founder and, until his death, the leader of the conservative Pakistan political party called Jama-at –i-Islami, whose avowed platform is to establish Pakistan as an Islamic state.
The 1st Field Division, BIAF had nine brigades operating in the Davao Provinces, Cotabato, and portions of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat. The 2nd Field Division, BIAF had ten brigades operating in South Cotabato, Sarangani and portions of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Cotabato. The 3rd Field Division, BIAF had eight brigades operating in the Lanao provinces. The 4th Field Division, BIAF had three brigades each operating in Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Basilan.

The MILF at the time had a typical military structure with staff units for Administration, Intelligence, Operations, Supply and Logistics, Training, Transportation and Communications, plus staffs for Dawah and Religious Affairs. All divisions and brigades had a Special Operations Group (SOG), normally composed of demolition experts, primarily tasked to undertake income-generating activities such as kidnapping, sabotage and bombing operations.

The MILF hierarchy wielded loose control over the BIAF since its rank and file owed the greater part of their loyalty to their immediate superiors. Most BIAF divisional units, specially the 4th Field Division, had been composed of disparate armed groups which had been lumped into one brigade. In other words, while their loyalty to their immediate commanders was almost absolute, obedience to higher chiefs was not.

Objectives. In one of the earlier publications of the MILF, *The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His Objectives and Responsibilities*, Salamat stated that the ultimate objective of the MILF is to make supreme the Word of Allah by:

1. establishing a true Muslim community;
2. setting up a genuine Islamic system of government; and,
3. leading an Islamic way of life.

According to Salamat, these conditions are possible only if the Bangsamoro people “are free and unfettered in the exercise of legitimate rights to self-determination,” which means “complete independence or, in the least, meaningful autonomy.”

In its earlier pronouncements, the MILF declared that it aimed to gain recognition for their right to self-determination and to achieve genuine autonomy for the Bangsamoro people. Later on, the MILF became increasingly insistent in demanding the establishment of a separate and politically independent state for Muslim Mindanao. Before MILF mujahideen and members of foreign media in 1997, Salamat stated that the MILF did not recognize the Philippine Constitution and was bent on establishing an Islamic state as the real solution to the Bangsamoro problem.

**Plans of Action.** During its formative years, the MILF adopted a 20-year program of action. The plan called for certain courses of action designed to facilitate the Islamization process, strengthen the MILF organization, accelerate military buildup, and attain self-reliance. Along this line, the MILF conducted lectures and seminars on Islamic teachings among its members and applied the Islamic laws through Shariah Courts. Toward organizational restructuring, the MILF leadership created political and military bodies and reshuffled leaders, designating ustadz in sensitive positions. To achieve self-reliance, the MILF adopted mechanisms such as the creation of a parallel government to effectively implement zakat collection.

*Inside the camps, the MILF harnessed virtually the entire community, including women, for military and political ends.*

*Photo Source: Minda News*
To sustain the MILF’s development, the group adopted ambitious plans of action. A 50-year program that would end in 2050 focuses on: 1) establishing an effective justice system; 2) freedom and respect for human rights; 3) measures to overcome criminality, poverty, ignorance and sickness; 4) guaranteeing equal opportunity and equal rights to earn and live honorably; 5) eliminating graft and corruption; 6) eliminating exploitation of public property for personal interests; and 7) adopting proper measures to solve social problems in addition to the four original strategic objectives.5

To advance force and arms build-up in the short to medium term, the group sustained recruitment activities and military training among its members. It also embarked on a campaign for support from local and foreign sources of finances and logistics.

Islamic extremist influence. In the course of courting international support for their secessionist cause, the MILF attracted non-state actors with an Islamic extremist agenda. These included Osama bin Laden, a top financier and ideologue of what would come to be called “al Qaeda” (“the Base”) and the Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a network aiming to spread a radical form of Islam across Southeast Asia.

It would later come to light that both “al Qaeda” and JI considered Camp Abubakar and the other MILF camps as excellent sites for clandestine training of their warriors. In exchange for granting access to those facilities, the MILF is presumed to have received substantial support from these foreign entities in terms of funds, weapons, explosives, and advanced commando training.6

Clever Strategy. To facilitate implementation of the plans of action—particularly, those geared toward organizational strengthening and military buildup—the MILF exploited the GRP-MILF Peace Talks and the Agreement for the General Cessation of Hostilities. In addition, the MILF took advantage of the peace talks to improve its political standing and to gain concessions in line with a clever strategy toward de facto statehood.

The MILF believed that it had all the prerequisites for being called a state.

It had people—the Bangsamoro people, or at least the Maguindanao variety.

It had territory. It publicly declared its 46 camps, which covered vast tracts of land mostly in Central Mindanao, as MILF-controlled areas. Getting the Philippine government to acknowledge seven of these camps was a small strategic victory for the MILF.
Inside these camps, it had a government—complete with armed forces and a taxation system.

Finally, the MILF believed that it had sovereignty. Some MILF officers claimed to have visited various countries and conferred with foreign personalities, particularly members of Islamic organizations. On the basis of these meetings, the MILF claimed support from various international groups. At any rate, these overseas activities were obviously undertaken in preparation for the smooth conduct of MILF external affairs in the future.

As early as November 1994, the MILF adopted a tactical plan of action codenamed Oplan Zero Hour (OPZH), which called for an all-out offensive in the form of attacks, ambushes, harassments, hostage-taking, liquidations and bombings of vital government and AFP/Philippine National Police (PNP) installations, in Christian-dominated areas in Mindanao. As originally conceived, the signal to launch OPZH was the MILF’s declaration of an independent Islamic state.

On 20 March 2000, the MILF formulated a five-point complementary tactical plan to be carried out once OPZH was implemented. This plan called for the following courses of action: 1) attack AFP camps; 2) blow up bridges to prevent AFP reinforcements; 3) conduct bombing activities in urban areas; 4) blockade strategic points along national highways; and 5) cut off power lines.

**Areas of Operation.** The MILF had long deployed its forces in Central Mindanao, particularly in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. From there, the MILF expanded to the adjacent provinces of Cotabato, South Cotabato, Lanao del Norte and Sultan Kudarat either through forcible occupation or intensified recruitment and Islamization. Before long, the MILF had established footholds in Sarangani, the Davao Provinces and Basilan. Most armed operations were limited to the hinterlands as the MILF had minimal presence in urban areas.

These operations affected a number of villages (barangay) in the following provinces: 336 in Lanao del Sur; 275 in Maguindanao; 139 in Zamboanga del Sur; 95 in Cotabato; 94 in Sultan Kudarat; 87 in Sarangani; 47 in South Cotabato; 45 in Lanao del Norte; 40 in Zamboanga del Norte; 21 in Basilan; and an undetermined number in Davao Oriental and Davao del Sur.

**Strength and Armaments.** As of yearend 1999, MILF strength was estimated at 15,690, equipped with 11,280 firearms. MILF strength has been increasing at an annual average rate of 25% and 18%, respectively, since 1996. (Figure 1)

The MILF had an impressive array of armaments of various types and
caliber. Weapons in its armory included the Cal 30 LMG, Cal 38 revolver, 60MM mortar, M16 Cal 5.56 rifle, Cal 30 M1 Garand, Cal 30 M1 Carbine, M14 Cal 7.62 rifle, 81MM mortar, M79 GL, M60 LMG, RPG, Cal 50 HMG, Cal 45, BAR, AK47, FN FAL assault rifle, and M203 GL. It was even reported that the MILF had four surface-to-air missiles. The MILF enhanced its armed capability by procuring additional weapons and by developing a modest capability to repair, convert and manufacture firearms and ammunition in Camp Abubakar.

**Allied Elements.** To broaden mass support, the MILF tapped several Muslim militant organizations, most of which are based in Cotabato City, Marawi City and, to a lesser extent, other urban centers with a significant Muslim population.

**Major and Satellite Camps.** As part of its effort to employ conventional warfare, the MILF sought to strengthen its camps in areas near major AFP camps. For instance Camp Abubakar (MILF main HQ) in Barira and Camp Badre (202nd Bde, and 2nd Division, BIAF HQs) in Brgy Marader, Talayan, both in Maguindanao, were supposed to confront H6ID, PA in Awang, in Datu Odin Sinsuat. On the other hand, Camp Busrah and Camp Ali (3rd Division, BIAF, HQs), both in Butig, Lanao del Sur, were geared up against the H4ID, PA in Camp Evangelista, Cagayan de Oro City.

In the Zamboanga peninsula, the MILF established Camp Salman Al Farisi in Tungawan, Zamboanga del Sur, which government forces were able to capture on 6 June 1998.

The MILF had 16 encampments in Maguindanao; nine in Lanao del Sur; six in Sarangani; four in Davao del Norte; two each in Davao Oriental, Lanao del
Norte, North Cotabato and South Cotabato; and one each in Zamboanga del Sur and Sultan Kudarat. The AFP had estimates of MILF troop strength in 26 of 45 camps identified.

In the 8th GRP-MILF Technical Committee meeting on 17-18 September 1998 at the Dawah Center in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, the MILF panel submitted a list of 13 “major” camps and 33 other “established” camps. The camps claimed by the MILF span several municipalities and practically cover two-thirds of Mindanao, including the whole of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur.

A two-day workshop, hosted by OJ2 on 12-13 October 1998 to evaluate the MILF’s claim, revealed that several of these alleged camps—particularly in Palawan, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi—did not exist. Their inclusion in the MILF list might have been for propaganda purposes only or were possible sites for expansion.

**Capabilities.** Based on the standing enemy strength and disposition, organization, armaments and logistical support, the AFP estimated that if attacked by government forces, the MILF may have the ability:

1. to employ limited conventional warfare, complemented by guerrilla tactics, such as ambushes, sniping and other hit-and-run operations;
2. to put up armed resistance against the attacking AFP troops first in minor camps and peripheral outposts, then retrograde to the major camps they were guarding;
3. to mount diversionary operations to relieve military pressure in areas under strong AFP attack and to disperse the AFP forces thinly over an extended combat area;
4. to conduct terroristic attacks, such as bombings, arson, sabotage, liquidation, abduction, and the like against non-military targets to attain limited tactical objectives;
5. to mobilize both active and reserve forces for combat duty in areas under—or threatened by—AFP attack;
6. to conduct crash recruitment and training activities in MILF-controlled areas.
7. to procure more firearms from local and foreign sources;
8. to intensify “diplomatic offensive” among members of the international Islamic community.

**Weaknesses and Vulnerabilities.** Long before the start of its drive against the MILF, the AFP had already identified a number of exploitable weaknesses
and vulnerabilities besetting the enemy. These included the following:

1. **Inadequate firearms and ammunition.** Of the MILF standing strength of 15,690, only 11,260 or 71.77% were armed. Ammunition was equally inadequate with no assurance of sufficient replenishment after a few days of gunbattles. This was especially true in the case of their much-vaunted sophisticated weapons, which had no adequate stockpile of ammunition.

2. **Weak logistical support.** Providing a big standing force with food, clothing and other basic provisions was a big problem for the MILF. Transportation, communications and other basic military equipment were also inadequate.

3. **Lack of coordination among, and control over, widely scattered units.** On paper, the MILF/BIAF appeared to be a tightly organized fighting force. In reality, lack of dependable communications equipment and transportation facilities, hampered troop movement, coordination, supervision and control in overextended MILF operational areas.

4. **Thinly scattered field units.** To secure its overextended “territory”, the MILF thinly dispersed its field units in occupied areas without ample provisions for rapid redeployment or repositioning of combat units in times of emergency. In case of a massive attack on a given point, the MILF might not be able to apply the principle of economy of force, an integral part of tactical doctrine for an irregular armed group to make up for limited manpower.

5. **Identified locations of MILF camps, outposts.** Early on, the AFP had already pinpointed the location of MILF camps and outposts where the rebels had entrenched themselves. The MILF did not make any effort to conceal them—apparently intending them to serve as “landmarks” to indicate the extent of the “MILF territory.”

6. **Vulnerability of MILF location and disposition.** MILF forces had a strong first line of defense, but its main camps lacked a strong defense structure. The location and disposition of the MILF forces appeared to be based mainly on the need to defend their major camps. This indicated their intention to engage in positional and semi-conventional warfare, for which the irregular MILF forces were not adequately prepared in terms of training, equipment, manpower and firepower. Their camps, designed more as “landmarks” than as deliberately developed field fortifications, lacked defensive installations, making them easy targets for artillery fire and air strikes.

7. **Weakening mass support.** Rampant extortion and terroristic activities, victimizing both the Muslim and non-Muslim populace, had alienated the MILF rebels from their supposed mass base.
8. **Lack of international recognition.** Unlike the MNLF, the MILF had never been recognized by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) as representative of the Bangsamoro people. The absence of such “diplomatic” clout had impeded the MILF effort to get foreign support.

**Probable Courses of Action.** Based on enemy intentions, strength and disposition, strategic and tactical orientations, and overall capabilities, the AFP listed certain courses of action that the MILF might take should the GRP-MILF peace talks collapse:

1. Continue the struggle for an independent Islamic state and, at the same time, lobby in the United Nations to initiate an East Timor-type referendum in Muslim Mindanao.

2. Intensify terroristic activities (bombings, arson, sabotage, liquidations, abductions, etc.) against non-military targets to attain limited tactical objectives.

3. Intensify tactical armed offensives against small AFP/PNP units and installations to harm, confuse and harass government security forces and to make a show of force for psywar purposes.

4. Launch all-out war as contained in “Operation Zero Hour.”

5. In case of large-scale military engagement with the AFP/PNP, resort to unconventional/guerrilla warfare.

6. Mount diversionary operations elsewhere to ease military pressure in areas under AFP attack and/or to create multiple fronts to force the AFP to disperse its forces.

7. Forge tactical alliance with other insurgent groups, notably the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army (CPP/NPA).

8. Intensify military buildup, including procurement of more firearms and ammunition and reinforcing defense installations/positions.

9. Intensify recruitment and training activities.

10. Intensify *zakat* collection and other fund raising activities.

11. Intensify “diplomatic offensive” and seek recognition by the OIC.
ENDNOTES

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.


4 “Primer on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front” (Printed by Committee on Information, Central Committee, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, 10 Nov 1996).


6 Toshi Yoshihara, “Philippines” in Derek S. Reveron and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer (eds), Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism, Arlington: Routlege, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.

7 All data in this section were culled from the Workshop on MILF Camps conducted by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, OJ2, in Camp Aguinaldo on 18 February 1998.
The AFP campaign to restore government authority over Camp Abubakar and the other MILF-occupied territories in Mindanao was the largest and most audacious military campaign undertaken by the Philippine Government since the 1970s. An estimated 70% of the AFP’s strength was committed to this task. In addition, substantial contingents from the Philippine National Police were mobilized and assigned to protect urban centers in Mindanao and the rest of the country against terrorist attacks.

Tracing its institutional roots to the pre-World War Two Commonwealth Army, which began as an external defense force, the AFP for much of its existence has been engaged in internal security duties. Its experience of large-scale conventional war has been limited to the Second World War, the Korean War and to a certain extent the Mindanao Campaign of the 1970s. Although it had a respectable external defense capability up to the late 1970s, primarily by virtue of the US defense umbrella, the need to confront local insurgencies transformed the AFP from a balanced military to an internal security oriented force. In terms of capability, the AFP essentially has become especially adept in light infantry, small-unit type wars.

In this sense, the rise of the MILF, as it began organizing and deploying its forces for a semi-conventional type of war, presented the AFP with a formidable military challenge. To address the situation, the top military leadership took the calculated risk of redeploying and massing the forces from other areas of operation to wipe out the MILF bases and camps. This risk appeared even greater, given the fact that the AFP was weaker in terms of supporting assets than it was in the 1970s. All these and other considerations had to be factored in as the AFP began the drive against the MILF.
AFP UNITS: COMPOSITION AND DEPLOYMENT

**Southern Command.** As one of the five AFP Area Commands that replaced the twelve Regional Unified Commands* after the EDSA Revolution,² the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) has operational control over all AFP land, sea and air units in Mindanao. Thus, it has to face not only the MILF threat but also the challenge posed by the CPP-NPA and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Its commander during the campaign was Lt. Gen. Diomedio Villanueva.

In preparation for the AFP counteroffensive against the MILF, SOUTHCOM deployed two divisions with a third in reserve. These were backed up with armor, artillery, engineers, Scout Ranger, Special Forces and CAFGUs.

By the beginning of year 2000, several AFP units were placed under the operational control (OPCON) of SOUTHCOM.³

**Philippine Army.** Three Infantry Divisions (1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>) composed of eleven (11) brigades—with 38 infantry, six Special Forces, three Scout Ranger, and three light armor battalions—were deployed for the offensive. Providing support to these maneuver units were five artillery battalions, three of which were assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, one to the 4<sup>th</sup> ID and another to the 1<sup>st</sup> ID. Two Engineer Brigades plus a Task Force and Task Group were also placed under SOUTHCOM control. The 4<sup>th</sup> ID, deployed in Northern Mindanao, CARAGA Region and the Lanao Provinces, and the 6<sup>th</sup> ID, deployed in Central and Southern Mindanao, would bear the brunt of the operations. The 1<sup>st</sup> ID, deployed in Western Mindanao, was designated as the strategic reserve.

**Philippine Navy and Marine Corps.** Naval units in Mindanao were brought under the command of Naval Forces South (NAVFOR SOUTH). Organized into Task Forces (TF) 51, 61 and 71, they were tasked to support the naval requirements of SOUTHCOM units. In addition, two Marine Brigades were assigned for the upcoming land campaign. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade from Palawan, with three battalions, was attached to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division,⁴ while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Brigade, with three battalions, was deployed in 6<sup>th</sup> ID area of responsibility (AOR). The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Brigade which was initially deployed in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi was redeployed to 6<sup>th</sup> ID area in the last week of March 2000.⁵

---

* Aside from the SOUTHCOM, the other area commands are the following: Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM); Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM); Visayas Command (VISCOM); and, Western Command (WESCOM)
**Philippine Air Force.** Composing the air support component of SOUTHCOM were four Composite Tactical Groups (9, 10, 11 and 12) under the 530th Composite Tactical Wing (CTW). They were given numerical designations and assignments corresponding to Regions IX to XII in Mindanao.

**CAFGU.** In addition to its line units, the AFP mobilized its back-up components, including 24,618 civilian volunteers who joined the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU). These volunteers were organized into 387 companies and assigned to SOUTHCOM headquarters and to the three Army divisions in Mindanao.

**Additional Units**

With the escalation of the MILF attacks and terrorist activities, the AFP committed additional troops to Mindanao to mass sufficient combat power against the enemy. By May 2000, units from Luzon and the Visayas were redeployed to the campaign area under the operational control of SOUTHCOM’s maneuver units.

![Southern Command Organizational Chart](image)

From Eastern Samar, the 802nd Infantry Brigade (Bde) and 52nd Infantry Battalion (IB) were redeployed to Northern Mindanao under the 4ID control. The 63IB from Northern Samar as well as the 302IBde, 6IB and 7IB from Iloilo were likewise placed under the 4ID’s operational control. The 16IB and 68IB from
Quezon and Pangasinan, respectively, were placed under the 6ID’s control in Central Mindanao. The same was the case with the 15th and 17th Scout Ranger Companies (SRC) from Capiz and Quezon, respectively. The 1ID assumed operational control over the 1SRC and the 7SRC, both from Bulacan.

4ID. The 4th Infantry (Diamond) Division has been constituted by units raised from the old 10th Military District comprising the whole of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Activated on February 1, 1970 and based at Camp Edilberto Evangelista, Cagayan de Oro City, the 4ID is a veteran of the 1970s Mindanao campaign against the MNLF. It was also active in the anti-insurgency campaign against the CPP/NPA in northeastern Mindanao.

For the offensive against the MILF, the 4ID would be strengthened beyond its normal complement before being restored to its standard strength after the campaign. The division’s strength (including the Marines) during the year 2000 fluctuated from 20,261 in January to 18,459 in April; 20,497 in July, and 11,848 in August. Commanding the 4ID was BGen. Roy Cimatu.
6ID. The other spearhead of the AFP drive towards Abubakar was the 6th Infantry (Kampilan) Division led by Maj. Gen. Gregorio Camiling Jr. This Division developed from the 6th Bde (Provisional) under the 4ID. It was tasked primarily to control all ground forces in Central Mindanao by the CEMCOM until its deactivation in 1974. On October 24, 1987, the 6ID (based in Camp Gonzalo Siongco, Maguindanao) was formed for the Government’s anti-insurgency drive in the region.

In terms of numbers, the 6ID was the strongest of the three divisions ranged against the MILF in the SOUTHCOM area. It enjoyed the support of three artillery battalions. The Division (including Marines) had 24,651 troops in January; 19,954 in April; and a peak of 29,444 in July.

6ID Organizational Chart as of July 2000

6ID Organizational Chart as of July 2000
1ID. SOUTHCOM’s strategic reserve, the 1st Infantry (Tabak) Division, is considered the oldest and most battle-experienced of all AFP ground force units. Activated in 1936 as the 1st Regular Division of the Philippine Commonwealth Army in Camp Murphy, it served in the Battle of Bataan during the early months of the Second World War. Reactivated in 1957, it was involved in the anti-insurgency campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s as well as the training and sending of forces to fulfill the country’s international commitments (as in the case of the Korean War).

The Division’s long acquaintance with Mindanao began in 1973 when it was deployed in Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi at the height of the MNLF rebellion in 1973. From then on, the Tabak Division’s battle history had been against the Muslim secessionists. Its darkest moment occurred in 1977 when one of its commanders, BGen. Teodulfo Bautista and more than 30 of his officers and enlisted men, were treacherously killed by MNLF rebels led by Usman Sali while in the midst of a peace negotiation. The division is based in Camp Sang-An, Pulacan, Labangan Zamboanga del Sur.

1ID Organizational Structure as of July 2000
Other Army Units. To augment the three divisions, the Philippine Army sent other combat formations to Mindanao. Among these were the 1st Scout Ranger Regiment (FSRR), the Special Forces Regiment (Airborne) and the Light Armor Brigade (LABde).

The FSRR was organized in 1950 by Captain Rafael Ileto, a World War Two veteran of the US Army Alamo Scouts. He envisioned it to be a unit that could penetrate deep into enemy territory, not only to gather intelligence but also to conduct swift, independent and deadly combat operations. Scout Ranger teams, made up of a few soldiers who have to pass a most rigorous selection process, quickly became the elite of the Philippine Army. For the campaign, SR companies were attached to the three PA divisions.

Another elite outfit attached to SOUTHCOM maneuver units was the SFR (A). Organized in 1958 by Cpt. Ramon Cannu, who had proposed a system to integrate special operations into the overall defense strategy of the Philippines, SF soldiers are highly trained in intelligence, demolitions, weapons, communications, medical operations and unconventional warfare. They are also airborne-qualified. Like the Scout Rangers, several SF companies were committed to the campaign.

Providing heavy and mobile fire support to the PA units are the armored fighting vehicles (AFV) of the Philippine Army Light Armor Brigade (LABde). Contrary to the belief that Philippine terrain is unsuited for mechanized operations, the largest tank battles of the Pacific War in 1944-1945 were fought in the country. As a result, the AFP decided to include a mechanized unit to its combat components. From an armored cavalry troop unit, the Philippine Army formed a light armor brigade. For the Abubakar campaign, its 2nd Light Armor Battalion (2LAB) was attached to the 6ID.

Supporting the three PA divisions and their attached combat units were a host of assets organic to, or controlled by, SOUTHCOM. These included artillery, engineer, civil relations, intelligence and communication units. The most important of these were the artillery battalions tasked to provide heavy fire support to PA combat units. The 10th Field Artillery Battalion (FAB) was attached
to and operationally controlled by the 4ID; the 6th FABde (12FAB, 14FAB, and 16FAB) operated under the 6ID. The 52nd and 55th Engineer Brigades were deployed for combat support and rehabilitation and development work. The 54EBde was redeployed from Luzon to SOUTHCOM AOR to implement rehabilitation efforts in Camp Abubakar after the offensive.

ARMS AND EQUIPMENT

**Philippine Army.** Infantry units participating in the government drive against the MILF were equipped with standard PA weapons for its ground troops, such as the M-14 and M-16A1 assault rifles. The M-14 was developed in the 1950s from the World War Two-era M1 Garand .30 caliber rifle. With a 7.62 millimeter (mm) round, the M-14 has remained in service with many PA units, with a number of M-14s converted to sniper rifles. The bulk of the Army units however were armed with the Vietnam-era M-16A1 assault rifles firing a 5.56 mm round. Since these two weapons were becoming obsolete, the military had been seeking their replacement with the more modern and efficient M-16A2 rifle.

A number of PA soldiers assigned to Mindanao were also armed with the carbine version of the M-16 more popularly known as the Colt Commando. CAFGU militia were armed with M-16A1s as well as World War Two (WW2)-vintage weapons like the M1 Garand rifle and M-1 Carbine. PA contingents were also provided with Vietnam-era M-60 7.62 mm machine guns. The M-60 is a powerful but heavy weapon with no quick barrel change capacity. Special Forces units were armed with a number of its lighter variant, the M-60E3, plus Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifles and night-vision goggles (NVG).

The Mindanao-bound troops were provided with heavier weapons such as two mortar varieties: the light 60 mm mortar, commonly used by companies, and the medium 81 mm, used at higher level formations. The troops were also equipped with 1960s-era 90 mm and 106 mm recoilless rifles; and several 105 and 155 mm howitzers—an improvement over WW2 counterparts, with newer and longer barrels—for artillery support.

For safer mobility on hostile grounds, the Army troops were provided with tracked and wheeled armored vehicles. The M-113 tracked armored personnel carrier had been the backbone of PA mechanized units. Designed in the 1950s, this US-built personnel carrier is armed with a .50 caliber machine gun but is vulnerable to modern anti-tank weaponry. To complement the M-113, the Army tapped a number of APC variants, the most heavily armed version of which is equipped with a turret mounting of a 76-millimeter cannon. Wheeled vehicles in the PA inventory include the Vietnam-era US V-150 Commando and the
more recent British-designed Simba armored personnel carriers. The Simba APC is armed with a .50 caliber machine gun mounted in the turret while the V150 Commando is armed with .50 caliber machine gun and co-axial 7.62 mm machine gun.

**Philippine Navy and Marine Corps** Since the AFP operations were to be conducted mainly in the hinterlands of Central Mindanao, the Philippine Navy’s role was limited to providing the necessary sealift for men and materiel. However, its type command, the Philippine Marine Corps (PMC), shared the brunt of the ground operations to an appreciable extent.

Created in 1950 as a seaborne strike force, the PMC evolved into one of the AFP’s finest and most dependable ground combat units. It is a highly disciplined force with strong *esprit d’ corps*. Trained with an offensive *élan*, it is especially adept at small-unit anti-guerrilla operations and larger formation maneuvers, as well. For the Abubakar campaign, nine of the ten PMC battalions were placed on combat footing, leaving only a training battalion in Metro Manila.

Three Marine brigades were deployed in the SOUTHCOM area and operationally assigned to the three Army divisions in Mindanao. The 1st Marine Brigade (MBde) under the command of BGen. Emmanuel R. Teodosio was moved from Palawan and attached to the 4ID. The 3MBde under the command of BGen. Orlando G. Buenaventura was redeployed from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi and assigned to the 6ID area. Tasked as reserve was the 2MBde under Colonel Renato P. Miranda, also deployed in 6ID area. In addition to these brigades were PMC armor and artillery contingents. With these troops, SOUTHCOM had a striking force of formidable combat capability.

Philippine Marine weapons, individual or crew-served, were virtually identical to those used by the Army. However, as part of its modernization program, the PMC had been able to equip its reconnaissance elements with the M-16A2 assault rifles. Included in the PMC armaments were modified M-14s, M-16s and the more current and powerful Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifle. The Marines were also provided with V-150 and V-300 wheeled armored personnel
carriers to strengthen their amphibious capability. One particular vehicle put in
PMC service was a variant of the V-300, armed with a turret-mounted 90 mm
gun to provide heavy direct fire support to the ground troops. At the time, this
was the most powerful armored fighting vehicle in the AFP.

The Philippine Air
Force. To lend air support
to the campaign, PAF’s 530th
Composite Tactical Wing (CTW),
commanded by BGen. Nemesio
M. Sigaya AFP, was harnessed.

Within the parameters of its
broad mission, the Wing was
to perform the following roles:
battlefield interdiction; close
air support; troop insertion
and extrication; forward air
control; combat air patrol; air
surveillance; air reconnaissance;
air evacuation, and aerial
supply. These assignments
were no less difficult and hazardous than ground combat.

Supervision over the 530CTW was exercised by the Tactical Operations
Command (TOC), which had jurisdiction over the different tactical wings of the
PAF. The CTW had command and control over four Composite Tactical Groups
(CTGs 9 to 12). The areas of operation of these CTGs corresponded to the
numbers assigned to them (e.g., CTG 9 covers Region 9). During the campaign,
CTG 10 and 12, which were based in Lumbia Airport, Cagayan de Oro City and
Awang Airport, Maguindanao, respectively, were to provide air support to the
ground units.

Likewise, the 530CTW had command and control over three Composite
Tactical Squadrons and the 610th Air Base Group. Aside from these, the Wing
exercised operational control over some contingents of the 15th Strike Wing
Advance Command Post in Mindanao, such as the 206th Tactical Operations
Squadron as well as elements of the 6th Air Reserve Center, Air Intelligence
Reconnaissance Detachment, 678th Finance Service Unit, and the 586th Aircraft
Control and Warning Squadron.

To ensure a well-coordinated effort with the ground forces, the 530CTW
was designated the air component of SOUTHCOM. At the lower level, the CTGs
had similar roles in conjunction with the divisions or brigades in their respective
areas of responsibility. The Wing Commander closely coordinated with the SOUTHCOM staff and its line units, as did the CTG Commanders with their ground counterparts.

For the anti-MILF operations, the 530CTW deployed 58 officers, 670 enlisted personnel, 125 pilots and 145 crew members. The pilots were concentrated in the 15th Strike Wing, 206th Tactical Operations Squadron and the 5053rd Air Rescue Squadron. They constituted a select group of the most technically proficient and rigorously trained. The CTW deployed 33 aircraft of all types: six (6) OV-10A Light Attack Aircraft; four (4) F-5A Jet Fighters; one (1) Nomad Light Utility Transport; three C-130 Medium Lift Transports; ten (10) MG-520 Light Attack Helicopters, and nine (9) UH-1H General Purpose Helicopters.

In an unprecedented move, the PAF fielded female pilots and weapons officers on board OV-10s and MG-520s in Mindanao, making the Philippines quite possibly the first in Asia to deploy women flyers for combat duty. For this reason, its women pilots are probably among the most experienced in air combat.

The problem of the PAF lay in the quantity and quality of aircraft. Considering the array of missions that it had to perform, the 530CTW had a remarkably small number of air assets under its control. Once these assets are broken down by aircraft type, it becomes apparent that organic units are grossly under-strength. Hence, PAF air support was seriously limited during the entire campaign period. Only four jets—all of them outdated F-5s—were actually used to support the drive.

The problem of insufficient aircraft was made worse by the obsolescence of these assets. Except for the MG-520s, the airframes of the assets used by the 530CTW were more than 20 years old. Further, no upgrading and improvements were done to these units in terms of systems and structures. For this reason, the PAF was forced to use air assets that could not perform according to their original specifications. Despite these shortcomings, the 530CTW pilots carried out their assigned tasks very efficiently. Fortunately, they did not have to contend with enemy aircraft or anti-aircraft fire, except possibly rifle fire from the rebels.

The PAF contingents deployed in Mindanao were armed with weapons just a bit more advanced than those of WW2 vintage. The MG-520 was armed with a .50 caliber machine gun and a rocket pod mounting 2.75-inch rockets. The OV-10A Light Aircraft can be armed with either a 7.62mm or a .50 caliber machine gun and a rocket pod mounting 2.75-inch rockets.

* Although women pilots have fought in the Second World War, as in the case of the former Soviet Union, there are currently very few airforces in the world that assign service women in combat units.

** A typical Wing usually has around 40 or more aircraft, depending on the nationality of the air force.
machine gun or even a 20mm cannon. It has a maximum bomb load of 3,500 pounds and has the ability to carry 260, 500 or 750-pound ordnance. The F-5A, aside from having two 20mm cannons, can deliver a 3,000-pound maximum bomb load. As for the UH-1H Helicopter, its standard armament is made up of two M-60 7.62mm Machine Guns. Financial limitations have conspired against PAF’s effort to acquire more modern delivery systems, such as laser guidance kits or night targeting devices. And what compounded PAF’s problem was that the NVGs it had ordered did not arrive on time.

Despite these limitations, the 530CTW provided a most effective support multiplier to the ground offensive in the campaign, reaffirming the importance of air superiority in any conflict.

**CAMPAIGN PLANNING PREPARATIONS**

The AFP worked on the premise that the MILF threat is a classic case of insurgency—classic because it has a political, socio-economic and historical character. At the policy level, AFP strategy dovetailed with the National Peace and Development Plan (NPDP) that employs a “Total Approach” strategy, taking into account the political and socio-economic dimensions of national life in addressing the country’s internal security problem. This approach made it imperative to develop and strengthen political and socio-economic institutions to ensure the nation’s ability to preserve and enhance freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity. With development comes the need to beef up its military capability so that the state can effectively defend itself from such threats as insurgency and invasion.

To implement the military aspect of the NPDP, the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (J-3), under Maj. Gen. Antonio Santos, through the guidance of the Chief of Staff, drafted Campaign Plan BALANGAI on January 28, 2000. BALANGAI entailed a Win-Hold-Win campaign strategy, and its initial thrust had been the defeat of the Local Communist Movement (LCM) within five years while containing the MILF. The plan thus considered the
CPP/NPA to be the priority target although in the calculation of the CSAFP, this prioritization could change if the peace talks with the MILF collapsed and the latter wantonly violated the ceasefire. In such a case, the AFP would have to shift its priority to win against the Muslim secessionists while holding the LCM. In this regard, the CSAFP directed the preparation of a contingency plan—to be implemented on his orders—to seriously degrade the politico-military capability of the MILF to force them to go back to the negotiation table and sue for peace.

BALANGAI’s operational methodology involved three stages: clear, hold, and support. The clear stage contemplated the conduct of combat, intelligence and psychological operations with the end in view of dismantling the LCM’s politico-military infrastructure as well as decisively defeating the main enemy armed groups. The hold stage entailed using the territorial defense forces to limit the freedom of action, movement and access to resources, as well as to reduce the mass base support of the CPP/NPA. The support stage involved military assistance to the consolidating and developing activities of other government agencies.

Before BALANGAI was enunciated, SOUTHCOM formulated a plan known as SAMBISIG. Issued on December 5, 1999 to address both the communist and secessionist threats, the plan had political, socio-economic and security components. Like BALANGAI, SAMBISIG prioritized the LCM as its main target, while containing the MILF at the same time.

In order to address the MILF threat more specifically, the AFP leadership implemented Letter of Instruction (LOI) 15/97 code-named Contingency Plan PISCES-ALFA. It was aimed at neutralizing the secessionist and other lawless groups’ threat to the communities as well as the programs and projects of the government in the Southern Philippines. Under this plan, SOUTHCOM was tasked to provide the main effort, with the Visayas Command (VISCOM) initially designated as AFP reserve.
PISCES-ALFA was designed to address three scenarios. The first envisaged the continuation of exploratory talks between the GRP and the MILF, with military build-up activities by the MILF and other threat groups, as well as limited terrorist actions by the Abu Sayyaf and other lawless groups. Under this scenario, the AFP and PNP forces would assume the role of conducting security and law enforcement operations to contain the various threat groups in accordance with the provisions of the existing GRP-MILF ceasefire agreement.

Scenario Two was premised on the breakdown of exploratory talks between the GRP and the MILF with limited terrorist actions conducted by the ASG and other lawless groups as well as selected attacks by the secessionist rebels on Christian communities and government installations. The government response would be similar to that of Scenario One, but with provisions for the entry of AFP-PNP forces to identified MILF areas and camps.

Scenario Three assumed the collapse of the peace talks and widespread fighting or full-scale war between the AFP and the merged MILF-ASG forces. It also anticipated the possibility of a tactical alliance between the latter and the CPP/NPA. Hostilities could take the form of attacks, seizure and/or destruction of vital government installations, seats of local governments and on AFP/PNP camps/stations. Under these circumstances, the AFP and PNP would have to conduct offensive operations against key enemy areas/concentrations and “centers of gravity,” including MILF camps. Optimum utilization of fire support assets would be made to effect a quick and decisive defeat of the enemy.

To implement SAMBISIG and PISCES-ALFA, SOUTHCOM Headquarters prepared Contingency Plan SOVEREIGN SHIELD, tasking its forces to conduct internal security operations to preserve peace and stability and establish a favorable environment in Mindanao that would allow unhampered holding of the GRP-MILF peace talks (underscoring supplied). The SOUTHCOM Commander would launch a swift and decisive operation to reduce the military capability of the Southern Philippine secessionist groups (SPSG) and drive them back from their occupied forward positions to their points of origin. It was expected that the AFP should have recovered all MILF-occupied areas upon conclusion of the campaign.

SOVEREIGN SHIELD had three objectives. First, it sought to contain MILF movements and expansion while preserving the peace talks. It contemplated that effective protection of the communities and AFP operations would enable the GRP to negotiate from a position of strength at the peace table. Second, SOUTHCOM intended to contain—swiftly and decisively—any large-scale provocations by the MILF in violation of the ceasefire agreement so that the latter would be forced back to the negotiation table. Third, SOUTHCOM wanted to neutralize the MILF with a view to protecting the country’s territorial
integrity and ensuring the welfare of the people of the southern Philippines. SOVEREIGN SHIELD operations were also meant to bear favorably on the peace and development efforts of the government.45

Given the magnitude of SOUTHCOM’s responsibilities in the face of the formidable MILF threat, the AFP issued Fragmentary Order 01/00 that concentrated and redeployed AFP units from other parts of the country, massing them in Central Mindanao.46 These redeployments began in March 2000 and were completed in May, in time to beef up the SOUTHCOM units for the subsequent operations.

ANALYSIS OF AFP PREPARATIONS

Analysis of the preparations in terms of planning, organization, equipment and deployment of troops reveals an uneven performance on the part of the AFP. In matters of organization, the AFP infantry divisions were structured more as truly infantry units rather than as combined arms formations capable of sustained and independent operations. Support assets, with few exceptions, were only operational and not organic attachments. As a result, the pre-campaign build-up tremendously increased the SOUTHCOM’s divisional strengths but such increase had more to do with their rifle and territorial defense strength rather than with their overall combat and support capabilities.

On the positive side, once the decision for military action was made, the AFP began and accomplished in record time the deployment of an impressive number of troops. An estimated 70% of the AFP personnel were deployed to the SOUTHCOM area of operations. These included more than 20,000 CAFGU militia who added much to the strength of the PA divisions for the campaign.

Part of this quick and orderly deployment was the movement of two Philippine Marine Brigades from Palawan and the Sulu area to Central Mindanao. The 1MBde and 3MBde greatly contributed to the hitting power of the Army’s 4ID and 6ID.

The AFP was also able to integrate to the campaign other assets such as air support, sealift, communications and engineering. These were force multipliers that the MILF could not hope to match.

As for the planning preparation, the AFP was forced to resurrect an earlier plan instead of developing a more current version to more accurately address the situation at hand. While not bad if used as a broad framework, this could become problematic in terms of specific details, which might have been overtaken by recent developments. A number of elements in the strategic and
operational plans also dealt too much on matters beyond the military sphere, such as the over preoccupation with peace negotiations. These matters should have been addressed by the political, not the military leadership.

**SUPPORT COMPONENTS**

**AFP Engineers.** AFP Engineers had been helping in the rehabilitation and development efforts of the Mindanao Coordinating Council (MCC) and the Presidential Executive Task Force for Relief and Rehabilitation of Mindanao (PETFRRM). Under the direction of the Office of the Chief of Engineers (OTCE), the AFP engineers were involved in various projects designed to facilitate the rehabilitation of war-affected areas in Mindanao.

The OTCE’s mission is to assist the Chief of Staff, AFP “in the planning, policy formulation and supervision of engineer programs and projects.” Among its functions are: 1) to assist the Chief of Staff, AFP, in the planning, policy formulation and supervision of projects; 2) to participate in preparing the AFP construction program and to support implementation of the socio-economic development programs of the national government; 3) to provide engineer construction services to all AFP units; and 4) to evaluate all construction and major engineering, maintenance and repair works and to coordinate involvement of AFP engineer units in disaster control and relief operations.

The AFP’s engineering complement consists of the 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, and 55th Engineer Brigades (EBdes) of the Philippine Army, the 355th Aviation Engineering Wing of the Philippine Air Force and the Naval Construction Brigade (Seabees). The OTCE set Task Force priorities and allocated projects among the various engineer units for execution.

**AFP Engineers’ Role in the Mindanao Campaign.** The AFP engineers have been undertaking development projects in various areas in Mindanao, particularly Basilan and Sulu, geared toward the economic development of these areas. The AFP Engineer Task Force (AFPETF) ZAMBAST and the 52nd and 55th EBdes were involved in the following projects:

1. Site development of Kamahardikaan Village Housing Project in Indanan, Jolo, Sulu (43.92 hectares)
2. Concrete paving of runway pavement (Phase II) of Jolo Airport
3. Construction of perimeter fence, Jolo Airport
4. Construction of Kabuinian Bridge, Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao
5. Construction of Sapakan Bridge, Sultan sa Barongis, Maguindanao
6. Construction of Pag-asa-Little Baguio Road, Alabel, Sarangani
7. Construction of Cotabato City-Kabuntalan Road, Pangalamatan, Cotabato City
9. Construction of Tungawan-Siraway Rd Phase II, Zamboanga del Sur
10. Construction of Manacab Port/Budiaposo, Buntong, Lanao Sur
11. Dredging of Rio Grande de Tamontaka River, Cotabato City

Even as the campaign against the MILF went on, the projects of the AFP engineers continued. However, the AFP engineers stationed in Central Mindanao were also tasked to undertake combat engineering which included bases development, repair and rehabilitation of main supply routes, repair of bridges and transporting military hardware, materiel and personnel to the frontlines.

Transport assistance provided by the engineer units involved the dispatch of engineer equipment and ordnance. The AFP engineers conducted 26 times such assistance whereby military hardware, materiel and personnel were transported to the frontlines.

In the post-hostilities relief and rehabilitation of Mindanao, the AFP engineers were tapped to undertake infrastructure repair, rehabilitation and construction located in security-risk areas because the AFP engineer units were the only ones capable of dealing with security problems; the concerned civil government agencies did not have security capability. Majority of the infrastructure projects designed for the relief and rehabilitation of Mindanao were undertaken by the AFP through the Office of the Chief of Engineers, AFP. In turn, the projects were assigned to the AFPETF and to the 52nd and 55th EBdes of the Philippine Army for the actual work. The 54th EBde based in Manaoag, Pangasinan was assigned to augment the engineers in Central Mindanao.

Infrastructure and engineering projects in Mindanao under Operation Tulong Kapatid included: repair and rehabilitation of roads, bridges and low-cost housing units; construction of farm-to-market roads; repair and construction of school buildings and mosques.

Right after the Central Mindanao campaign, there were three Philippine Army Engineer Brigades stationed in Mindanao, along with contingents from the Seabees and the 355th Aviation Engineering Wing of the PAF. By 8 September 2000, they had completed the following:

1. Repair and rehabilitation of three mosques in Barangays Sarmiento,
Mandayan and Bayanga #1, Matanog, Maguindanao
2. Repair and rehabilitation of two mosques in Barangays Tacupan and Manacapan, Carmen, Cotabato
3. Repair and rehabilitation of two school buildings in Barangay Bayanga, Matanog, Maguindanao
4. Repair and rehabilitation of Matanog Municipal Hall in Maguindanao.

As of September 2000, their on-going projects included:
1. Repair and rehabilitation of Narciso Ramos Highway, including widening of its shoulders (52.4 kms)
2. Repair and rehabilitation of six mosques in Matanog, Maguindanao (543.85 sq m)
3. Repair and rehabilitation of seven school buildings, also in Matanog, Maguindanao (1,288.58 sq m)
4. Road improvement and widening of the Sarmiento-Abubakar Road
5. Repair and rehabilitation of the Camp Busrah mosque
6. Concreting of runway at Jolo Airport, Jolo, Sulu
7. Site development of Kamahardikaan Village, Bo. Tan Estate, Indanan, Jolo, Sulu
8. Construction of 120 housing units at Kamahardikaan Village under the sponsorship of the National Housing Authority
9. Inspection and validation of damaged school buildings.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) also tasked the AFP Engineers with the rehabilitation of damaged roads—the 27-km. Parang-Buldon Road and the 23-km. Mercedes-Barira-Abubakar Road—in Camp Abubakar, Maguindanao. The DPWH also passed the 26-km. Guling-Barangiran Section of the Barinsalan-Alamada-Libungan road project in North Cotabato to the AFPCOE.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) requested the AFP engineers to take over the concreting of the Langkong-Sarmiento-Abubakar Road, which had been suspended due to the armed conflict. The road project was essential to the development of Camp Abubakar and to the military operations in the area. The NIA also transferred P30 million worth of irrigation projects to the DPWH for the AFP Engineers to undertake in Region 12 (Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat). The projects had been expected to provide irrigation benefits to 4,221 farmers in the region.
AFP Engineers also constructed Community Based Convertible Structures (CBCS) in Region 12 and farm-to-market roads for the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Agriculture, respectively.

Supporting Units in the Field. In addition to the composite group that makes up the AFPETF ZAMBAST, three Army Engineer Brigades and additional contingents from the Seabees and the 355th Aviation Wing were stationed in various parts of Mindanao:

- 967 52EBde personnel, based at Camp Natividad in Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon
- 723 54EBde personnel, based at Camp SK Pendatun in Parang, Maguindanao
- 1,157 55EBde personnel, based in San Gabriel, Davao City
- 96 NCBde (battalion) and 19 355th AEW (contingent) personnel, based in Indanan, Jolo, Sulu.

The personnel were complemented by mission-essential engineering equipment and ordnance: 74 units for the 52EBde; 42 for the 54EBde; eight for the 55EBde; and five for the 355th AEW contingent. The two battalions of the Naval Construction Brigade brought two mobility assets, one dump truck, one pile driving barge, two desilting and dredging barges and one transport barge.

The rehabilitation of the various structures that were damaged during the campaign and the construction of new ones, coupled with the various measures of other government agencies within their capabilities and mandates, were an essential element of the campaign. They served to mitigate the economic and social dislocation of the affected communities and to speed up their ability to rejoin the mainstream of social and economic life. The presence of AFP engineers at the forefront, particularly in high risk areas, fostered greater trust and confidence among the local populace.

The AFP engineer effort in Mindanao had its share of problems. First, the shortage of operational equipment among the engineer units in the area was exacerbated by lack of funds for the repair and rehabilitation of these assets. Second, with the exception of the AFP Engineer Task Force, the OTCE did not have direct operational control over the engineer units since they were all under the OPCON of the Major Services to which they were attached. The time wasted going through channels, when rapid execution is essential, hindered the OTCE from effectively contributing to developmental efforts.

**Philippine National Police.** Through its police regional offices (PRO), particularly PRO ARMM and PRO 12, the Philippine National Police provided significant support to the AFP campaign.
Each PRO is headed by a regional director who exercises control over police provincial offices (PPO) in a region. There is one PPO in every province with a provincial director as its chief, who has direct line of control and supervision over its operating units, called provincial police mobile groups (PPMG) and municipal/city police stations. Some provinces also have the so-called kababayan centers, which are small police detachments that provide assistance and maintain visibility in strategic areas.

The provincial offices under PRO ARMM and PRO 12, which participated in the campaign, were those located in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Cotabato, Sarangani, Sultan Kudarat and South Cotabato*.

Composed of 15 mobile groups and 97 municipal/city stations, these six PPOs have a combined strength of 3,784 who are equipped with some 5,329 long and short firearms, as well as standard crew served weapons.

These police units maintain close working relations with tactical AFP units deployed in their AOR especially during the conduct of internal security operations, investigations and dialogue with local officials and civilians. For instance, Lanao del Sur PPO coordinates with the 402Bde, based at Maria Cristina, Iligan City; Maguindanao PPO, with the 6ID, based in Datu Odin Sinsuat; and Cotabato PPO, with the five Philippine Army battalions deployed in the province as well as the 602Bde, based in Carmen.

At the height of the conflict, these PPOs and their operating units and personnel were placed on red alert. They intensified their routine tasks in law enforcement and the maintenance of peace and order. In addition, they rendered service in the following: security assistance to the civilian populace during mass evacuation in affected areas; distribution of relief goods to the evacuees in coordination with the DSWD, concerned LGUs and NGOs; security in all designated evacuation centers, vital government and private installations and main thoroughfares; manning of check/choke points; and conduct of foot and mobile patrol including sea borne patrol in coastal areas.

During the campaign against the Muslim rebels, the police fought side by side with AFP units under the supervision of the AFP ground commander. Police units were deployed in the vicinity of MILF strongholds in Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Cotabato.

The PNP Cotabato backed up AFP units in several skirmishes, especially in

* Lanao del Norte PPO did not submit a report on its participation.
the municipalities of Carmen, Aleosan, Midsayap, Pikit, Mlang and Tulunan as part of OPLAN DOMINANCE from 28 April 2000 to June 2000. At least two PNP personnel were wounded in these incidents.

In Maguindanao, police personnel temporarily occupied and guarded the vacated detachments of 15IB in Labu-Labu Bridge in Shariff Aguak at the height of armed confrontation between government troops and the MILF in the town of Matanog.

During MILF attacks, harassments and other armed activities, the police would initially deploy against the enemy until the arrival of AFP troops. In some instances, the police took control of AFP-cleared areas, such as portions of the Narciso Ramos Highway, to free the military troops for combat operations in other areas.

The PNP also helped in the field of intelligence, providing timely reports on enemy plans/activities and other valuable information. Only shortage of FAs prevented the PNP from enlarging their support of the AFP.

Throughout the campaign, the police—made up of Christians and Muslims—remained steadfast behind the government. Their morale remained high even in the face of several problems such as the shortage of personnel, including explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) experts, weapons, communications facilities and other equipment. The campaign made them realize the need for periodic retraining on counterinsurgency and psywar operations to enhance their capability and combat readiness. It also underscored the need for a barangay-based police system and the importance of organizing civilian volunteers for village defense.

ENDNOTES

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.  
2 Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, GHQ, Armed Forces of the Philippines, AFP GHQ Primer (Quezon City: Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, 1997), pp. ix-x.  
4 Report of Operations, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3. The redeployment of the 1st Marine Brigade from Palawan to the 4ID was made from the last week of March to April 2000.  
5 Ibid. The 3rd Marine Brigade was redeployed from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi to the 6ID area from the last week of March to April, 2000.  
7 Ibid.  
8 Ibid, p. 266  
9 Ibid., p. 256  
10 Ibid.  
11 Ibid., pp. 124-125.  
12 Ibid., pp. 134-135
See Steven Zaloga, “Tank Battles of the Pacific War.” (Hong Kong: Concord Publications, 1995). The Imperial Japanese Army sent the 2nd Armored Division to the Philippines in 1944, one of only three such formations raised by the IJA.


Discussion with Lieutenant Colonel Amadeo Azul, Chief, War Plans Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, J5, November 930-5508, 2000..

Ibid

Most of the data on the Philippine Marine Corps were gathered through interviews with selected officers and men of the PMC 1st and 3rd Marine Brigades conducted at the PMC Headquarters, Fort Bonifacio last October 26, 2000.

Franz Tinio Lopez, Gallant Warriors From the Sea, October 1997.

Interview with Major Milner F. Dela Cruz, Chief Policy Research Division, Office of Strategic and Special Studies, AFP, October 20, 2000..

Report of Operations, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3., p. 23

Ibid


Ibid

Interview with Captain Glinoga, PAF OV-10A pilot, October 27, 2000.

Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Nestor P. Deona (PAF), Assistant Chief, Office of Strategic & Special Studies, GHQ AFP, October 20, 2000., Lt. Colonel Deona was an F-5A fighter pilot in the Philippine Air Force.

Report of Operations, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, p. 1

Ibid.


Balangai, p. 6

Balangai, p.7. See also Annex C of Balangai

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 8.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Report of Operations, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, p. 9

Ibid., p. 20-21

Ibid.

Ibid., pp. 21-22

Ibid., p. 22

Ibid.

Ibid., p.23

Ibid..
CHAPTER 6
THE AFP CAMPAIGN: FROM VALIACY TO FREEWAY

PRIORITY AREAS AND OBJECTIVES

Main Areas of Operations. As shown below, AFP operations for the year 2000 focused on the priority areas affected by communist insurgency, per revalidation of the Order of Battle at the end of 1999.

**AFP Area Commands and Communist Guerilla Fronts, 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Commands</th>
<th>Areas Covered</th>
<th>LCM Guerilla Fronts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOLCOM</td>
<td>Aurora &amp; Nueva Ecija</td>
<td>Supra Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLCOM</td>
<td>3rd Dist., Aurora &amp; Marinduque</td>
<td>KLG MXL – 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Dist., Quezon &amp; 3rd Dist., Albay</td>
<td>KLG - MXL – 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>KLGL1-KOM (KLG-77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VISCOM</td>
<td>SW Negros</td>
<td>SW Negros Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Bohol</td>
<td>Front 1-Bohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N. Samar</td>
<td>N. Front Committees 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Parts of S. &amp; W. Samar</td>
<td>S. Front Committees 1 &amp; 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHCOM</td>
<td>Prosperidad, Talacogon, San Luis &amp; Esperanza; all of Agusan del Sur</td>
<td>Front 8 (Front 88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tagum City, Mabini, San Mariano, all of Davao del Norte, Pantukan, Maragusan,</td>
<td>Front 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maco &amp; portions of Nabunturan, Mawab &amp; New Bataan all of Compostela Valley,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asuncion, New Corella &amp; San Vicente all of Davao del Norte</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHCOM</td>
<td>Compostela, Monkayo and part of New Bataan all of Compostela Valley</td>
<td>Front 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Makilala, N. Cotabato Columbio, Sultan Kudarat, all of S. Cotabato</td>
<td>Front 72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**MILF-affected Areas.** However, with unprovoked and willful violations of the ceasefire agreement by the MILF, the AFP shifted its priority effort to the following areas in Central Mindanao including the Lanao provinces:

![MILF Camps Map](image)
Disposition of BIAF Units among MILF Camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area Covered</th>
<th>MILF Camp</th>
<th>BIAF Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buldon, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>201st Bde and BINA/NGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barira, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>201st Bde, BINA/NGD &amp; GHQ Div</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matanog, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>201st Bde &amp; BINA/NGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampatuan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>203rd Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datu Piang, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>206th Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sultan SA Barongis, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Rajamuda</td>
<td>203rd Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>203rd Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagalungan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Rajamuda</td>
<td>104th Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabuntalan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Bader</td>
<td>202nd Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talayan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Bader</td>
<td>202nd Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butig, Lanao del Sur</td>
<td>Busrah</td>
<td>304th Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barira, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>201st Bde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barira, Maguindanao</td>
<td>Abubakar</td>
<td>Hqs Bde, 3rd Div</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ORGANIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES

In consonance with the provisions of Contingency Plan Pisces-Alfa, the AFP issued Fragmentary Order 01/00 to Campaign Plan Balangai on 01 March 2000. The order sought to concentrate the AFP’s forces in Mindanao, redeploying all units that could be spared to the area. In March 2000, the Philippine Marine Brigade and their OPCON units from Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan to Central Mindanao and Lanao Provinces arrived. Between the last week of March to April 2000, other AFP units moved in.

The 3rd Marine Brigade from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi was moved to 6ID Area and the 1st Marine Brigade was redeployed from Palawan to 4ID Area. The 77IB of the 6ID; 4IB of 1ID and the 26SFC under the operational control (OPCON) of 6ID were directed to augment Task Force (TF) Sultan. Headquartered at Kampo Heneral Teodulfo Bautista, Bus-bus, Jolo, Sulu under Col. Romeo Tolentino PA, the TF took over the responsibility of the 3rd Marine Brigade in Sulu.

The escalation of MILF activities, prompted the AFP to commit more troops to Central Mindanao in order to sustain the momentum of degrading the military capability of the MILF. By May, additional troops found themselves in Mindanao. The following units were deployed to N. Mindanao and were placed under the
OPCON of the 4ID, namely: the 802Bde and 52IB (from E. Samar); the 63IB (N. Samar); and the 302Bde, as well as the 6IB and 7IB (Iloilo). Under the 6ID, were the following augmentation units: 16IB and 17SRC (Quezon), 68IB (Pangasinan); and the 15SRC (Capiz). The 1ID in Western Mindanao took the 7SRC and 1SRC (Bulacan) under its OPCON.

By the end of 1999, prior to the campaign against the MILF, the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) under Lt. Gen. Villanueva had three infantry divisions and two marine brigades deployed in the whole of Mindanao. In addition, it had a combat support force of one division artillery unit and two artillery battalions. It also had two engineer brigades, one engineer TF and engineer TG.

Assigned to cover Western Mindanao, the 1ID led by BGen. Narciso Abaya, consisted of nine infantry, one SR, one light armor and two SF battalions. Attached to provide artillery support to the 1ID was the 9FAB.

The 4ID, under the command of BGen. Roy Cimatu, was deployed in Northern Mindanao, the CARAGA Region and the Lanao Provinces. It was composed of one SF and eleven infantry battalions. The 10FAB provided the artillery support to the division.

The 6ID, commanded by Maj. Gen. Gregorio Camiling, Jr. and deployed in central and southern Mindanao, was the largest division with one marine and five infantry brigades. It had a total of 18 infantry, three marine, one SR, one light armor and three SF battalions. It also had its organic artillery arm consisting of three artillery battalions. The 3MBde was based in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, and consisted of four marine battalions.

Under OPCON of SOUTHCOM were two engineer brigades: the 52nd and 55th. Among the infantry divisions, the 1ID had under its OPCON the Engineer TF ZAMBAST and TG Sulu. Naval support was provided by NAVFORSOUTH, which consisted of three naval task forces, TFs 51, 61 and 71. The SOUTHCOM air component consisted of the 530CTW, which was organized into four CTGs.
(9th, 10th, 11th and 12th CTG) to support the air requirements of SOUTHCOM units.

In addition, a total of 24,618 CAFGU Active Auxiliaries (CAA) were organized into 387 companies and deployed with three infantry divisions. The 1ID had 110 companies consisting of 6,591 CAAs, the 4ID with 106 companies (6,048 CAAs), and the 6ID with 163 companies (10,275 CAAs). In addition, HSOUTHCOM had eight companies with 704 CAAs.

**THE AFP STRIKES**

*Provocative Acts.* The MILF intentions became increasingly clear when it launched a series of attacks and terrorist actions in Mindanao from January to March 2000. During this period, a total of 392 MILF-initiated armed incidents consisting of 34 standard tactical operations, 221 guerilla operations, and 137 terrorist activities were reported.

Significant among the MILF armed activities were the setting up of road blocks along the Talayan-Shariff Aguak National Highway on 08 January 2000 and the occupation of the Talayan Municipal Hall two days later. These actions were followed by a series of attacks and harassments of AFP and CAFGU detachments in Carmen, North Cotabato during the latter part of January.

The rebels caused the death of innocent civilians after bombing buses on board M/V Beatrix in Ozamis City on 25 February and a radio station in Cotabato City two days later. The MILF also threatened to bomb, among others, the National Power Corporation power lines in Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte.

Utilizing the clear-hold-support-develop* operational methodology spelled-out in Campaign Plan BALANGAI, the AFP conducted clearing operations in Central Mindanao to contain the various MILF armed actions.

**OPERATION VALIANCY**

The 6ID conducted Operation VALIANCY from 15 to 23 February 2000 to neutralize MILF elements in Talayan-Shariff Aguak-Datu Piang complex in Maguindanao to restore effective government control in the area.

---

* The “develop” phase is supposed to be the responsibility of the concerned civil government agencies.
The operation involved three Task Groups (TGs): TG “A” as the main effort (ME), TG “B” as the supporting effort (SE) and TG “C” as the reserve. Maj. Gen. Camiling’s troops were to put the MILF forces out of action in his area of operations (AO) and prevent them from expanding their area of influence. He was instructed to use the full force of the law against the MILF who were responsible for the series of hostilities.

TG “A” consisted of 301Bde, 3ID; 2SRB, FSRR; 15IB, 6ID; 57IB, 6ID; 37IB, 6ID; 47IB, 3ID; 78IB (-), 3ID; and the 24LAC, 2LAB.

TG “B” was composed of 601Bde, 6ID; 64IB, 6ID; 25IB, 6ID; 38IB, 6ID; and the 26MIC.

TG “C” consisted of a composite battalion from the 701Bde; a pltn from the 2MBde; and a Prov’il IB.

Under Division Control were the 6Division Artillery (-); 2LAB (-); CTG 11, PAF; CTG 12, PAF, and the combat trains.

**Plans.** The operation was to be carried-out in two phases by utilizing the three TGs as maneuver, holding and reserve forces, respectively. In Phase I, TG “A” would attack to clear the objective, designated as “Vietnam,” to neutralize the rebel forces, flush them out and dislodge them from the area. After clearing the area, TG “A” would establish strong points along Phase Line (PL) “Blue.”

TG “B” would then establish strong points, hold and secure the main supply route (MSR) to block the enemy’s withdrawal route and prevent enemy reinforcements. Thereafter, it would conduct limited active defense (AD) and feint operations in Obj. “Korea” to draw in enemy forces from Obj. “Vietnam.” Task Group “C” (1 & 2) would act as reserves.

All other units would intensify the conduct of security operations (including combat patrols) within their respective AORs to preempt the possible escalation of conflict in other municipalities and cities. The 602Bde and 603Bde were to conduct holding operations in their respective AORs, and effect limited strike operations against targets if the opportunity arises, as well as limited interdicting fire at enemy concentrations on sight.

Phase II of the operation called for TG “A” to attack and clear Obj. “Korea” of MILF forces. In the meantime, TG “B” would maintain active defense and establish strong points and prevent enemy reinforcement from the north and east. Additionally, it would support the clearing operations of TG “A” in Obj. “Korea.”
**Operations.** The two-phased operational plan was carried out smoothly. In Phase I, TG “A” mounted a successful attack that led to the clearing of objective “Vietnam.” The same TG subsequently established a strong position in PL “Blue.” TG “B” likewise established strong points along the Isulan National Highway from Datu Odin Sinsuat (DOS) up to Crossing Salvo, Datu Piang, all in Maguindanao, and strategic areas north of PL “Blue.” It then conducted limited active defense and feint operations in objective “Korea.” TG “C”, as the reserve, secured the firebases.

In Phase II, the attack of TG “A” led to the clearing of Obj. “Korea”. TG “B”, on the other hand, conducted active defense activities and established strong points north and east of Obj. “Korea” to prevent the enemy reinforcements from aiding their beleaguered comrades, even as it supported the clearing operation of TG “A” of Obj. “Korea”.

CTG 12 provided CAS (close air support) to the operating units, evacuated battle casualties and conducted re-supply, air evacuation and troop insertion. The Division Artillery provided general artillery support and the 2LAB engaged in armor support, security and escort missions.

**Results.** Operation VALIANCY resulted in the capture of two MILF camps—Omar and Jabal Uhob—and a number of assorted MILF weapons (see table below). Located in Upper Kabingi, Datu Piang, Maguindanao Province, Camp Omar was the site of the headquarters of the 206Bde, 2FD, BIAF. The Brigade’s 3rd, 4th, and 6th Battalions had their headquarters at Camp Jabal Uhob situated in Upper Tuayan, Upper Maitumaig, and Upper Limpongo, Shariff Aguak, respectively. Another battalion, the 8th, was posted in Barangay Datu Piang.

**MILF Materiel Recovered during Operation “VALIANCY”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 60mm Mortar Tube</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – cal .50 HMG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Cal 50 HMG (less the Barrel)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Cal 50 AA HMG w/ Mono-Pod</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Cal 50 HMG Tri-Pod</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Rocket-Propelled Grenade Launchers (RPG)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – M79 Grenade Launchers (GL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – M79 Grenade Launchers (HM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – M203 Tubes (HM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – M16 Rifles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 12 Gauge Shotgun Barrel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 12 Gauge Shotgun (HM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – RPG Rounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 – 60MM Mortar Ammo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 – Rds 40mm Ammo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Rifle Grenades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Hand Grenades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – BAR Magazines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – M16 Long Magazines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – M16 Short Magazines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – Hand held ICOM Radio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – ICOM Antennas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Rolls Antenna Transmission Lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Improvised Landmines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Combat Packs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 – Rds Cal. 50 HMG Ammo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MILF casualties totaled 130, body count of 32 killed, 10 of whom were as reported by soldiers, and an additional 88 also confirmed killed as reported by the police, local officials and civilians. On the government side, two soldiers from the 15IB were KIA and 27 were wounded—three from the 57IB; four from the 2SRB; 19 from the 15IB (13 EP, 2 CAA, 4 CVO); and one from the 78IB.

**OPERATION AUDACITY**

On 15 March 2000, the 6ID turned its attention to the continuous MILF attacks and terrorist activities in Cotabato and launched Operation AUDACITY. The Division would operate in the Carmen-Basilan Complex in Cotabato to dislodge the MILF.

Similar to Operation VALIENCY, Operation AUDACITY utilized three TGs with TG “A” as the ME, TG “B” as the SE and TG “C” as the Reserve.

TG “A” consisted of the 602Bde, 6ID; 2SRB, FSRR; 39IB, 6ID; 64IB, 6ID; one company from 40IB, 6ID; another company from the 25IB, 6ID; 2nd Recon Company, 6ID; and the 25MIC, 2LAB.

TG “B” was made up of the 603Bde, 6ID; 77IB, 5ID; one company from 37IB, 6ID and one company from 25IB, 6ID; 1 Recon Company from 6ID; and the 21MIC, 2LAB.

Under TG “C” were one company from 25IB, 6ID and a Prov’l IB from the 6ID.

The 6 Division Artillery (-); 2nd LAB(-), LABde and the two CTGs and combat trains were placed under direct control of the Division HQ.

**Plans.** Maj. Gen. Camiling’s objectives were basically the same as those of Operation VALIENCY and as such, Operation AUDACITY would be carried-out by utilizing three (3) TGs. One TG was designated as maneuver force, one as holding force and another as reserve.

TG “A” would clear Obj. “Dragon”, putting the MILF forces out of action or flushing out and dislodging them from the area so that they would not be able to expand their areas of influence. TG “B” was tasked to clear Obj. “Cobra” to neutralize the MILF forces, block the enemy withdrawal route and prevent enemy reinforcements, with TG “C” standing by as reserve force.

**Operations.** As expected, TG “A” successfully attacked and cleared Obj. “Dragon” of MILF rebels. By way of supporting the maneuver force, TG “B”
attacked and cleared Obj. “Cobra.” TG “C” conducted security operations within its AOR, which prevented the possible spread of the conflict in other municipalities. CTG 12 provided CAS, air evacuation, resupply and troop insertion operations. The 6 Division Artillery provided general artillery support and the 2LAB(-) provided armor support and carried out resupply, security and escort missions.

**Results.** Operation AUDACITY resulted in two KIA (1 AFP, 1 CVO) and seven WIA on the government side and five killed on the MILF side.
In an effort to divert the attention of the AFP and relieve the pressure on the rebels in Central Mindanao, the MILF launched simultaneous attacks on 15 March in different areas in Lanao del Norte, resulting in the blocking of the Cagayan de Oro-Iligan-Kapatagan National Highway and occupation of Kauswagan and Munai municipal halls. To counter the enemy action, the 4ID launched Operation SOVEREIGN, set for 18-30 March 2000. The Division’s mission was to take the rebels’ Camp Bilal (GS 1588), located in Dalama, Munai, Lanao del Norte on 18 March 2000; destroy the MILF forces in Lanao del Norte and force the MILF hierarchy to unconditionally negotiate a peace settlement with the government. In pursuit of the mission, all MILF satellite camps were to be destroyed, so as to deny the rebels of staging points for terrorist activities.

Further, the 4ID sought to deter MILF expansion; to ensure the security of government centers and NAPOCOR installations in Lanao del Norte; and to preempt the closure of the Kapatagan-Iligan-CDOC National Highway. The division aimed to seize and occupy Camp Bilal so that, among others, the local government of Munai could be reinstalled. The division commander sought to accomplish this by conducting offensive operations with extensive close air support (CAS) for the ground operations, even as active defense measures would be adopted in the process. The operation, in sum, was geared toward the complete destruction of the enemy’s center of gravity in Lanao del Norte.

Operation SOVEREIGN employed three brigades and one task force. The 1MBde constituted the main effort, while the 402Bde and TF Diamond III played the supporting role. The 401Bde was held in reserve.

The 1MBde, consisted of the Marine Battalion Landing Teams (MBLTs) 1, 4, 10; 61MC (Recon); and the 73MC (Armor).

The 402Bde had the 9IBn (-); 67IB (-); 30IB (-); 1 DRC, 4ID; and a sniper team from the 4SRB.

TF Diamond III was composed of the 30IB; 78IB; 4SRB (-), FSRR; and “A” Co, 58IB. The 401Bde consisted of the 29IB; 20IB, 8ID; and the 62IB, 8ID.

Under Division Control were the 18IB (-), 1ID; 10FAB, 4ID; 5LAB (-), LABde; and the CTG 10.

The recapture of Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, eventually paved the way for the assault on the major MILF camps.
**Plans.** The Division deemed the decisive point of this operation to be the destruction of the MILF command and control facilities in Camp Bilal. BGen. Cimatu sought to attain this objective with minimum casualties by optimizing the use of all available combat multipliers in every phase of the operation against enemy bunkers, fortifications and strong points. Appropriate measures to secure mobility corridors for the rapid deployment of armor assets and firearms were included in the plans.

The ME was to attack Obj. “D” (GS 1895), “P” (GS 1962), “T” (GS 1693), and eventually Obj. “B” (GS 5880), which is actually Camp Bilal. SE 1 was to attack through Axis Thunder to clear and seize Objectives Bronze (GS 2097), Silver, (GC 1993), and Gold (GS 2091); then, clear and establish a blocking position at Hill 831 (GS 1789), Hill 885 (GS 2088), and Hill 871 (GC 183880) to prevent possible enemy withdrawal from Bgy Dalama, Munai, Lanao del Norte. Two battalions would act as the reserve.

Critical in this operation were the destruction of enemy forward defense lines, where they had arrayed the majority of their forces and the capability of government forces to secure the rear. Under no circumstances should the enemy be able to infiltrate forces and hit vital installations and civilian targets, particularly local government centers. Such enemy action could relieve the pressure being brought to bear on them and divert the AFP from its objectives.

---

**Operation SOVEREIGN**

[Map of the region showing the areas of operation.]
**Operations.** The plans were executed in three phases: Phase 1 – Active Defense, Phase 2 – Territorial Offensive, and Phase 3 – Final Offensive.

In Phase 1, from their jump off positions, the 1MBde and 402Bde as maneuver and territorial forces, respectively, moved to secure the Kapatagan-Iligan City-Malabang National Highway and all municipal buildings and bridges along the coastal areas of Lanao del Norte and Misamis Oriental including the NAPOCOR installations.

In Phase 2, the 1MBde attacked along Axis Lightning and seized Obj. “D” in Delabayan, Kauswagan, Obj. “P” (GS 1962) in Pangao, Munai, and Obj. “T” (GS 1693) in Tambo, Munai. The 402Bde on the other hand, as SE 2, searched for and neutralized the MILF rebels in Iligan City and secured the NAPOCOR installations (VGL 28-32 and HGL 94-99). Subsequently, the same Brigade attacked and seized Obj. India (GS 1194) in Inoma, Maigo, and Obj. Sierra (GS 9987) in Upper Sapad. TF Diamond III, for its part, attacked and seized Obj. Bronze (GS 2097), Obj. Silver (GS 1993) and Obj. Gold (GS 2091), passing through Axis Thunder, as planned.

In the final phase of the operation, the 1MBde attacked and seized Obj. “B” (GS 5880), or the enemy’s Camp Bilal in Dalama, Munai, Lanao del Norte, while TF Diamond III cleared and established blocking positions at Hills 831 (GS 1789), 885 (GS 2088) and 871 (GC 183880), preventing precisely the enemy’s withdrawal from Bgy Dalama, Munai, Lanao del Norte. TF Diamond III cleared and occupied Obj. Diamond (GS 1685) passing through Pantao Ragat, cleared the area southwest of Balo-i, and established blocking positions. The 402Bde, on the other hand, established a stronghold in Matungao and Balo-i as the attack on Camp Bilal progressed.

As planned, the 5LAB provided armor support, escort and security missions in all phases and the PAF’s CTG 10 provided CAS to operating units, evacuating battle casualties and conducting resupply operations. The 10FAB provided artillery support to the 4ID operating elements.

**ASSAULT ON MINOR CAMPS**

The relentless assault by the 4ID in Lanao del Norte considerably weakened the MILF rebels in the province. While most of them evaded the AFP forces by retreating deeper into their enclaves in Lanao del Sur, a considerable number of the rebels tried to hold on to some of their satellite camps in Balo-i, Lanao del Norte. From these camps, they could mount terrorist activities in Lanao del Norte and threaten the NAPOCOR power plants along Agus River, the National Highway from Iligan City to Marawi City, other vital infrastructure
and facilities, and the population centers in Northern Mindanao.
Realizing the precarious security situation in Lanao del Norte the 4ID began operations in the area, in accordance with the Fragmentary-Order 02-2000 to Operation SOVEREIGN on 24 April 2000.

For this operation, the 4ID reconfigured its forces with 1MBde as ME, TF Diamond III as SE and 402Bde as Reserve. The 1Mbde consisted of MBLTs 1, 4, 10; the 61MC (Recon), and the 73MC (Armor). TF Diamond III utilized the 36IB, 4ID; 78IB, 3ID; 4SRB (-), FSRR; and the “A” Co, 58IB, 4ID. The 402Bde employed the 9IB (-), 41D; 67IB (-), 41D; 30IB (-), 41D; 1DRC; and the Sniper Team from 4SRB.
Under the Division’s control were the 18IB (-), 1ID; the 10FAB, 4ID; 5LAB (-), LABde; the CTG 10, PAF; and the 98MICO of 4ID. There were also division troops consisting of DISCOM; 4ASBn (-) of 4ID; CESH (-); and COLT 980 (SIGINT).

The 4ID planned to attack the MILF satellite camps and rebel concentrations in Balo-i, Lanao del Norte on 240600 Apr 2000. It would also seize and hold key terrain points, destroy the enemy C2 facilities, allow safe passage of motorists in the Iligan-Marawi National Highway, ensure the safety of NAPOCOR installations, and deny the MILF the use of these areas as staging areas for terrorism.

The 1MBde’s attack would be preceded by CAS from which would be carried out through OV-10s and MG520s, and FA fire. This preceding action was meant to conceal the consolidation of friendly forces and their movements to designated LD/LC and attack positions. It was important to deceive the enemy by making it appear that the main attack was moving toward Pendulunan in the south. It was also imperative that the ME would be able to avoid a decisive engagement before PL Blue. The expected immediate outcome of the operation was destruction of the enemy C2 in the vicinity of Apo Hill, the clearing of Balo-i from enemy presence and the elimination of the threat to power lines and NAPOCOR installations.

**MILF Camps/Concentration Areas Captured in Lanao del Norte**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enemy Installation</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camp John Mack</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Inudaran, Kauswagan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp John Mack</td>
<td>303 BIAF Bde Hqs</td>
<td>Delabayan, Kauswagan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Bn Hqs, 305 BIAF Bde</td>
<td>Vic Pob, Sapad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Tagoloan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Apo Hill</td>
<td>Command Base, 303 BIF Bde</td>
<td>Apo Hill, Balo-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Defense Line</td>
<td>Maigo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Delabayan, Kauswagan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Concentration Camp</td>
<td>Matampay, Balo-i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bn Hqs</td>
<td>2nd Bn, 301 BIAF Bde</td>
<td>Tambo, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Strong Position</td>
<td>Pangao, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Nunang, Piagapo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Upper Pango, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>BIAF Bde/Bn Hqs Outpost, OP</td>
<td>Upper Pango, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Concentration Area</td>
<td>Tambo, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Concentration Area</td>
<td>Dalama, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>MILF Stronghold</td>
<td>Dalama, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Camp</td>
<td>Forward Defense Line</td>
<td>Tambo, Munai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Bilal</td>
<td>Hqs 301st BIAF Bde, 3rd Fld Div</td>
<td>Dalama, Munai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Operations.** The 1MBde attacked along Axis Tiger and seized the MILF satellite camps, strong points and command and control facilities located in Obj. “Zebra”–Apo Hill and its immediate vicinity and the west bank of Balut Island. TF Diamond III, on the other hand, attacked along Axis Panther and seized Obj. “Rabbit”, paving the way for the clearing of Bgy Pacalundo, Balo-i, Lanao del Norte from MILF rebels and denying Obj. “Zebra” from MILF reinforcement. After clearing Obj. “Rabbit,” the TF attacked along Axis Lion and conducted feint operations which had the effect of fixing the enemy in Obj. “Deer” and allowing them no chance to reinforce their beleaguered comrades at Obj. “Zebra.”

As division reserve, the 402Bde put up blocking positions in Bgy Kalangalan to prevent the MILF from reinforcing its troops in areas east and southeast of Tagoloan Uno and Kapay. It also secured the entry points to Poblacion Balo-I, the Iligan-Marawi MSR and NAPOCOR installations; and established blocking positions to prevent the rebels from crossing Pantar town, especially from the South. For its part, CTG 10 conducted a bombing mission south of Munai and provided CAS to troops that seized Objectives “ZEBRA” and “DEER.”

**Results.** Operation SOVEREIGN led to the capture of various MILF camps and concentration areas. Below is a table of the captured MILF camps:

**Casualties.** In Operation SOVEREIGN, the AFP took more casualties than in all previous operations. But the MILF casualty count was even higher. While there were 33 AFP soldiers KIA (31 AFP; 1 CAA and 1 CVO) and 147 WIA (146 AFP & 1 CAA), the insurgents suffered 284 killed (217 HUMINT/SIGINT; 67 BC) and 352 wounded (HUMINT/SIGINT).

**CLEARING OF THE NARCISO RAMOS HIGHWAY**

The expansion of MILF armed activities from the central portions of Mindanao to the Lanao provinces compounded the MILF’s logistical requirements, both in terms of military hardware and daily subsistence. After months of sustained pressure from AFP operations, the MILF resources significantly dwindled, forcing its leadership to consider the intensification of extortion activities. Among the areas most conducive to carrying out such activities were those along the Narciso Ramos Highway, which border the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao.

Undisturbed by military operations, the MILF had in the recent past constructed well-entrenched defensive positions along the highway, evidently in recognition of their strategic importance. A well-established defensive position along the peripheries of the highway could cut the movement of AFP troops.
and hamper logistical flow between the 4ID and 6ID AORs. Hence, the MILF increased its checkpoints and roadblocks along the highway by March 2000, extorting and demanding fees from commercial and private vehicles passing through the area, and claiming that the highway formed part of the Camp Abubakar perimeter.

**OPERATION DOMINANCE**

These developments prompted the 6ID to launch Operation DOMINANCE on 29 April 2000 in order to reassert government authority and control over the Narciso Ramos Highway. The operation involved TG “A” as the ME and TG “B” as SE. TG “A” consisted of the 603Bde, 6ID; 2SRB, FSRR; 38IB, 6ID; 25IB, 6ID; and the 21MIC, 2LAB. TG “B” was the 3MBde, which consisted of MBLTs 2, 6, 9; and OPCON CSU.

TG “C” consisted of the 601Bde, 6ID; 7SFB, SFR(A); 64IB (-), 6ID; and OPCON CSU. TG “D” had the 602Bde, 6ID; 39IB, 6ID; 401B, 6ID; 56IB, 7ID; 75IB, 6ID; 1st Recon Co; and the OPCON CSU. TG “E” was made up of 603Bde, 6ID; 31B, 6ID; 27IB (-), 6ID; One Company of 47IB, 3ID; One Company of 64IB, 6ID; 2nd Recon Co; and the OPCON CSU. TG “F” consisted of the 301Bde, 3ID; 15IB, 3ID; 37IB, 6ID; 2SFB, SFR(A); 47IB (-), 3ID; One Company of 57IB, 6ID; and the OPCON CSU. Lastly, TG “G” was composed of the 2MBde, which included MBLTs 3, 5, and 7; and the OPCON CSU.

Serving as the first echelon reserve force was the 57IB (-), 6ID and the Prov’l IB, 6ID (2nd Echelon Reserve). Under division control were the CTG XII, PAF; 6 Division Artillery (-), 6ID; 2LAB (-), LABde; TF 61.3, NAVFOR SOUTH, PN; and the division trains.

**Plans.** Maj. Gen Camiling conducted the operations in two phases, utilizing TG “A” as the ME and TG “B” as SE. The four TGs (C,D,E,F) were to execute feints in their respective AOs, while TG “G” would carry out limited offensive actions in its AOR.

In Phase 1, the ME would attack from the south to clear the Narciso Ramos Highway, from Teba to Crossing, Langkong, both in Matanog, Maguindanao. The SE would initially clear the highway from Parang to Matanog then follow the axis of advance of the ME, prepare to reinforce the ME, establish strong points at strategic areas, and prevent the possible envelopment of the ME by the rebels. Four other TGs were tasked to make feints in their respective area objectives to draw the enemy from the main objective and prevent them from reinforcing their positions while still another TG would conduct limited offensive operations within the AOR to prevent enemy forces from conducting hostile actions in nearby areas. Reserve battalions would provide ready reinforcement.
In the execution of Phase 2, the ME would continue to clear the highway from Crossing, Langkong to Maguindanao-Lanao Sur boundary or, on orders, to shift operations towards Camp Abubakar or Darapanan. SE would support the ME and reinforce and establish strong points along strategic areas. The five other TGs and the Reserve would continue their current missions. Critical to this operation were the synchronization of movements; the immediate destruction of enemy crew-served weapons, communication centers to paralyze its command/control; and the delivery of indirect fire and CAS. Also decisive were the immediate clearing of the highway and the establishment of strong points in strategic areas by the SE and placing them in effective government control.

**Operations.** The operations started on 29 April 2000 with the clearing of the periphery of Narciso Ramos Highway by TG “B” (3MBde). Troops jumped off from their line of departure/line of contact (LD/LC) and were immediately met by heavy fire from the MILF forces positioned approximately 400 meters from their LD/LC. Artillery bombardments and aerial bomb runs/air strike missions were unleashed to soften enemy resistance from well-fortified, concrete bunkers and trenches with connecting tunnels. Heavy firefights and exchange of mortar fire consumed the whole day.

The following day, 30 April, as the Marine forces began assaulting the enemy positions after intense artillery bombardment and mortar fire, the troops were met by strong enemy resistance. A heavy firefight again ensued, lasting for almost 3 hours. At about 0930H, TG “A” (2SRB) crossed the LD/LC and moved toward the north. More heavy exchange of gunfire ensued.

The firefight was particularly severe in the Matanog area. A suspected enemy communications center at Hill 326 was assaulted by elements of MBLT 2, and eventually seized on 06 May 2000. The seizure of this strategic enemy position reduced the threat along the Narciso Ramos Highway from Parang to Matanog, both in Maguindanao.
At 0530H of 03 May 2000, the 2SRB assaulted enemy positions on the north. The ensuing fierce fight cost the AFP nine MIAs and several casualties. Shortly thereafter, operating troops of TG “B” (3MBde) attacked enemy positions west of the Narciso Ramos Highway in Poblacion Matanog. By about 1430H, the most forward enemy bunkers were seized by the attacking troops. However, due to heavy enemy reinforcement the Marines had to vacate the area. Another 12 MIAs and other casualties on the AFP side were sustained in the process.

At this point, the operation had taken the form of a frontal attack. It was a bold move against a strong and determined enemy entrenched in well-fortified positions—connecting trenches running in a zigzag course and bolstered by a series of strongly fortified dug-outs tactically constructed. The inherent weaknesses of this manner of attack could be offset only by employing mass and superior combat power, which turned out to be unavailable. Consequently, the assault proved costly on the part of the government troops. But the aerial and artillery strikes exacted their toll on the enemy, too. Shock action resulting from exploding bombs and artillery shells no doubt lowered the enemy’s will to fight.

Meanwhile, on 11 May 2000, FRAG-O 04 to OPLAN DOMINANCE was issued placing the 2SRB under OPCON of TG “B.” This unit was directed to make a wide, flanking movement on the western side of the Highway together with MBLT 2. This surprise maneuver caught the enemy off-balance, since MILF defenses in this area were weak compared to those in the north (Teba-Sarakan Complex).

By evening of 16 May 2000, the series of aerial and artillery strikes and aggressive offensive action of the ground forces exacted heavy casualties and losses on the part of the rebels, forcing them to withdraw from the Narciso Ramos Highway. The succeeding days were spent, redeploying the government forces in strategic areas along the highway, the recovery of MIAs who were later confirmed as KIAs, and the reprovisioning and resting of troops in preparation for the next offensive action.

On 28 May 2000, the troops moved to seize the MILF stronghold in Bgy Sarmiento, Matanog, Maguindanao. After five days of heavy fighting aided by aerial bombing, artillery bombardment and careful sweeping of the minefields, Bgy Sarmiento was taken by troops of MBLT 2, 2SRB, 6IB, and 25IB.

On its AOR, the 601Bde (TG “C”), launched a feint, particularly in the Lutayan, Sultan Kudarat area. No encounter with the enemy occurred, although MILF forces undertook several attacks and terrorist activities in Gen Santos City and South Cotabato, apparently as diversionary moves to reduce the military pressure on the Narciso Ramos Highway.
In the 602Bde AOR (TG “D”), feint operations were likewise conducted at Rajahmuda, even as MILF forces perpetrated terrorist activities along the Davao-Cotabato Highway. Three of these were significant: (1) the seizure of two public transport buses with an undetermined number of passengers bound for Davao City in the vicinity of Lindongan, Aleosan, Cotabato on 0400H of 02 May 2000, (2) the taking of ten civilian hostages in Taguan, San Mateo, Aleosan; and (3) the harassment of the Bagolibas Detachment (Det) and Pagangan Det of the 27IB by an undetermined number of MILF rebels. In response, TG “D” shifted its efforts to Aleosan and Pikit, both in Cotabato.

Feints were similarly staged by the 603Bde (TG “E”) on the Nuyo-Bobong Complex of Buldon, Maguindanao. The enemy, occupying vantage positions, offered unexpectedly stiff resistance against the operating troops. Artillery bombardment complemented the ground assault troops, who eventually succeeded in occupying the key grounds of the Nuyo-Bobong Complex.

The 301Bde (TG “F”) proceeded with its own feints on the Talayan-Datu Piang Complex (Camp Bader) area. Camp Bader was seized without enemy resistance, but MILF forces launched diversionary attacks along the Cotabato-Isulan Highway. These included the harassment of the 4SCAA Company Det in Sitio Bentana, Brgy Daguma of the town of Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat by about 50 MILF rebels and the simultaneous attack on the Tanuel, Bitu and Taviran Detachments, all in Maguindanao.

The 2MBde (TG “G”) deployed its forces from the periphery of Darapanan, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, to Parang, both in Maguindanao, to prevent the enemy forces from conducting attacks that might divert the concentration of government forces which were engaged in clearing the Narciso Ramos Highway. TG “G” further provided security to the main supply route (MSR) during the conduct of logistics runs and other administrative movements.

As part of the enemy’s diversionary moves, H6ID in Camp BGen Siongco, Awang, Maguindanao was subjected to RPG fire from the north and northwest direction just beyond the perimeter fence of the Awang airport runway on 0400H of 03 May 2000. Four RPG rounds exploded inside the camp but no structures were damaged. Due to the alarming situation and frequent enemy sightings within the vicinity of H6ID in Camp Siongco and Cotabato City, TG “H” was created to relieve in-place troops of TG “G” in the Darapanan area, so that the latter could clear the areas within the periphery of Cotabato City, employing the Cotabato City Internal Defense Force under 2MBde in the vicinity of H6ID.

**Results.** OPLAN DOMINANCE was officially terminated on 03 June 2000. The operation led to the capture of the MILF camps/concentration areas, as shown below:
**MILF Camps/Concentration Areas Captured During Operation DOMINANCE in Matanog, Maguindanao**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enemy Installation</th>
<th>Site (Barangay)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MILF post</td>
<td>Campol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILF Bunkers</td>
<td>Mandayan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILF Post</td>
<td>Teba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill 326 (MILF Encampment)</td>
<td>Pinantao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill 144 (7 MILF bunkers)</td>
<td>Bugasan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 MILF Bunkers</td>
<td>Lagaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill 504 (MILF Encampment)</td>
<td>Langkong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILF occupied Barangay</td>
<td>Sarmiento</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the operations resulted in the recovery of several MILF weapons: two M60 GPMGs; 16 M16 rifles; two M1 Garand rifle; four M79 GLs; seven RPGs; two M203 GLs; one 90mm recoilless rifle; three landmines; 400 rds Cal .50 ammo; five rds 81mm mortar ammo; two rds 90mm RR ammo; 29 rds RPG ammo. However, the government side also lost several weapons and equipment, among them: eight M60 GPMGs; six M14 rifles; 15 M16 rifles; two M1 Garand rifles; one Racal radio set; eight PRC 77 radio sets; one URC 126 radio set; one GP68; two night-vision goggles (NVGs); three HH ICOM radios; and three binoculars.

**Casualties.** Operation DOMINANCE resulted in the death of 63 AFP soldiers (including three CAFGU troopers). An additional 277 soldiers were wounded. On the other side, some 365 MILF rebels were killed, as reported by HUMINT/SIGINT and 59 by body count. HUMINT/SIGINT also disclosed 283 enemy fighters wounded.

**OPERATION FREEWAY**

**Plans.** With the 4ID as the lead unit, Operation “Freeway” was designed to seize, clear and hold the remaining stretch of Narciso Ramos Highway, as well as to threaten Camp Abubakar so that the Government would have a stronger and more favorable position in its future negotiations with the MILF. At the same time, the 4ID would contain the MILF in the two Lanao provinces, conduct PSYOPS there with the involvement of the political leadership and the populace in the province and dissuade the remnants of the MILF’s 3rd Field Division from staging any form of violence. The enemy-initiated disruptive activities on the Marawi-Balabagan MSR would trigger the launching of air interdiction missions against predetermined targets in the province.
Upon completion of the operation, the Narciso Ramos Highway was expected to be totally cleared from MILF control, and the threat posed by government troops against Camp Abubakar would become clear, forcing the MILF to drop its secessionist demands as pre-condition for the resumption of the peace negotiations.

Operation FREEWAY had four major components: 1) 1MBde; 2) TF Diamond III, 4ID; (3) 302Bde, 3ID; and (4) 402Bde, 4ID.

The 1Mbde was composed of the MBLTs 1, 4, 10; the 61st Recon Company; and the 73MC (FA).

TF DIAMOND III, 4ID was composed of the 36IB (-), 4ID; 78IB, 3ID; 4SRB, FSSR; 1Pltn, Bty “C,” 10FAB, 4ID; and the 23LAC, 5LAB, LABde.

The 302Bde, 3ID had the 6IB, 3ID; 7IB, 3ID; 28IB, 4ID; and the 10FAB, 4ID.

The 402Bde, 4ID included the 30IB; 26IB; 56IB; 67IB; 9IB (-); 18IB (-); 1st DRC; “A” Co, 62IB; “C” Btry, 10FAB (-), 4ID; 23LAC, 5LAB (+), LABde; 18EODT and TF KALILINTAD, 4ID. Under division control would be the 2nd DRC, 4ID; 10FAB (-), 4ID; 5LAB (-), LABde; CTG 10 (+), PAF; 4ASBn, 4ID; 98MICO, 4ID; 4EODT, 4ID; DISCOM, 4ID; SSBn, 4ID; CESH, 4ID; and the 10FSSU, 4ID.

*Operation FREEWAY*
Revised marching orders.² After neutralizing MILF forces in Lanao del Norte and clearing the southern portion of the Narciso Ramos Highway from Malabang, Lanao del Sur to the Maguindanao boundary under Operation FREEWAY, 4ID troops set their sights on Lanao del Sur. To gear up for the offensive against Camp Busrah, the 1MBde would start moving toward Pualas, while TF Diamond would head toward Marawi City, with one battalion positioned at Bubong.

But when the two main DOMINANCE TGs got pinned down in the most heavily defended section of the highway at Matanog, HSOUTHCOM had to act swiftly to relieve the pressure on the beleaguered troops and avert heavier government casualties. Maj. Gen. Diomedio Villanueva, SOUTHCOM Commander, issued an order extending FREEWAY clearing operations from the Lanao del Sur boundary to Langkong Crossing in Matanog, Maguindanao and directing a feint toward the western portion of Abubakar to draw some MILF forces away from the highway. The 4ID forces would then rendezvous with the 6ID troops at Langkong Crossing.
**Operations.** The 4ID deployed two brigades, moving abreast for FREEWAY. The 1MBde, under BGen. Emmanuel Teodosio, was tasked with the ME in clearing the designated portion of the Narciso Ramos Highway. TF Diamond III was tasked with SE1, keeping up with 1MBde and clearing Hill 537 and another hill at GS 3630 and GS 3530, west of the highway. SE2 called for the 302Bde to follow 1MBde, secure the rear and the MSR, as well as the cleared portions of the highway south of the Lanao del Sur-Maguindanao boundary, to sustain the momentum of the attack.³

FREEWAY combat operations started on 3 May when MLBT4, supported by V-150 and V-300 AAVs of the 73MC, jumped off from Brgy Igabay, Balabagan, Lanao del Sur, to attack MILF encampments along the highway. Meanwhile MBLT1 with MBLT10 close behind, moved from Brgy Igabay to the LD, awaiting the order to attack.⁴

For the next two days, identified enemy fortifications, bunkers and strong points were subjected to airstrikes and artillery/mortar fire preparatory to ground assaults. The main objective was the destruction of enemy strong points, bunkers and camps along the Narciso Ramos Highway and the occupation of key terrain features in the area.

Meanwhile, FREEWAY maneuvers, artillery fire and close air support on 03-04 May opened opportunities for extrication of the embattled DOMINANCE TGs in Matanog. Elements of MBLT2, 25IB and 38IB resumed clearing operations in their respective areas in the next few days. The other TG “A” and TG “B” units prepared for the final attacks to dislodge the MILF from their positions along the highway.⁵

Phase 1 of FREEWAY saw the ME clear the highway from the boundary of Lanao del Sur-Maguindanao up to the road junction Langkong (GC 382308). TF Diamond III cleared Hill 507 and the northern portion of an unmarked Hill (GS 3630). Another brigade secured the highway and its outskirts from Igabay, Balabagan up to the Lanao del Sur-Maguindanao boundary (VGL 31-38 and HGL 33-35) and further south of the highway after the ME brigade cleared the highway of MILF concentration. A brigade from the 6ID cleared the western portion of the Highway (from GS 3726 towards the GS 3629). Then the brigade from 6ID and the TF maneuvered toward an established link-up point at GC 351304.

In Phase 2, after establishing a stronghold at junction Langkong (GC 362308), the ME cleared the highway down to Sarakan, Matanog (CS 3827) while the brigade from the 6ID moved abreast with the TF, and cleared the eastern outskirts of the highway from junction Langkong (GC 382308) toward Sarakan, Matanog (GS 3827). Prior to the movement, the TF relieved-in-
place the ME brigade at junction Langkong and conducted a feint attack two kms east of Langkong junction, threatening Camp Abubakar and, on orders, attacked the MILF concentration at Bgy Sarmiento, Matanog (GS 4091). The back-up brigade established a stronghold at Bayanga (GS 3633) and Dagoon (VGL 36-38 and HGL 32-33), ready to reinforce the Task Force.

In Phase 3, to consolidate the maneuver forces, the 6ID’s brigades established a stronghold along the Highway cleared by the ME from junction Langkong to Sarakan in Matanog, Maguindanao. The ME then pulled back towards its stronghold at junction Langkong.

On 16 May, after aggressive offensive action of the operating troops, coupled with relentless artillery and aerial bombardment, the MILF withdrew from the highway. At 1120H, key officers of SOUTHCOM, 6ID, 3MBde, and 603Bde linked up with the 4ID and 1MBde commanders at Crossing Langkong, Matanog, Maguindanao. After 19 days of heavy fighting, the whole stretch of Narciso Ramos Highway had finally been cleared.

Operation FREEWAY led to the capture of MILF camps and concentration areas including the 4Bde Hqs, NGD in Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur; the MILF’s Abdulrahman Bedis Memorial Military Academy and Training Center; Camp Norham in Bayanga, Matanog, Maguindanao; 4Bn Hqs, 2Bde, GHQ Div in Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur; 2 Bn Hqs, 201 Bde in Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur and 19 other satellite camps. The cost of operations included 8 KIA and 46 WIA. On the MILF side, 147 were reported killed by HUMINT/SIGINT sources; 48 by body count; and 21 found in a mass grave. HUMINT/SIGINT also reported 424 wounded among the rebels.

ENDNOTES

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
BATTLES FOR MILF SATELLITE CAMPS

OPERATION GRAND SWEEPERS

In Operation Grand Sweeper, the 4ID attacked and destroyed the Headquarters of the Eastern Ranao Sur Revolutionary Committee in Masiu and the MILF satellite camps in Marugong to disrupt the enemy lines of communication with the MILF forces in Maguindanao. It also sought to restore the local government seats of power in the lake towns. The operation employed combined air and ground assaults with a view to destroying enemy concentration in Masiu, blocking the movement of enemy forces towards Camp Busrah, and occupying tactically advantage points in Marugong so as to disrupt the enemy lines of communication with Camp Abubakar. BGen. Cimatu, the 4ID commander, concentrated the bulk of his forces in Lanao del Sur during the operation. The main objective was to occupy key terrain points in Masiu and Marugong to further strengthen the AFP’s hold over Camp Busrah and isolate the remnants of the Lanao-based MILF hierarchy from Camp Abubakar.

The participating units included the 1MBde, composed of MBLTs 1, 4, 10; the 61MC (Armor); and the 18MC (FA). Other participating units were the 802Bde, 8ID, which consisted of the 52IB, 63IB, 67IB, and 8FAB, all of the 8ID; and the TF KALILINTAD, 4ID. The 402Bde, 4ID, had the 9IB (-), 18IB, 30IB and 62IB, 4ID; 1st DRC, 10FAB (-), 4ID; 26IB, 1ID; 23LAC, 5LAB (-), LABde; and the 18th EODT, 4ID.

TF Diamond III was composed of the 36IB and 58IB (-), and the 10FAB of the 4ID; 78IB, 3ID; 4SRB, FSRR; and the 5LAB, LABde. The 302Bde included the 6IB and 71B, 3ID; 28IB and 10FAB, 4ID. Under division control were the 2nd DRC, 10FAB (-), 4ID; 5LAB (-), LABde; CTG 10 (+), PAF; 4ASBn (-), 4ID; 98MICO (-), 4ID; DISCOM, 4ID; SSBn (-), 4ID; CESH (-), 4ID; and the 10th FSSU (-), 4ID.

1 This is an updated version of the chapter that appears in AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001.
**Concept of Operation.** The operation was to be conducted in two phases. During Phase I, a TF with four battalions as ME would attack east from Lumbayanague to seize and hold the encampment of the 308th MILF Brigade at Obj. “TISA”, Brogue Balaygay, and the HQ of the ERSRC Obj. “Marang,” Brogue Sawir, all in Masiu. One reserve brigade would secure the Pualas-Lumbayanague MSR and another brigade would consolidate and strengthen the government troops at Butig and Camp Busrah.

In Phase II, a brigade with three battalions as the ME was tasked to attack north from Malabang to occupy Obj. “Apple” [GS 2842] (Camp Al Madina) and Obj. “Jackfruit” [GS 2839] (Camp Jabal Nor) in the vicinity of Dos Hermanos Mountains, Marugong. One TF with two battalions as SE would attack south from Tubaran to occupy Obj. “Mango” (VGL 26-29 and HGL 48-50) (Camp Akir-Akir) in Marugong, and one reserve brigade would detach a battalion to support the SE’s attack of Obj. “Mango.”
Operations. On D-Day, H-Hour plus one minute, artillery fire pounded enemy positions preparatory to ground assault on Obj. “Tisa” and Obj. “Marang.” The TF attacked on D+1 to seize and hold Obj. “Tisa” and “Marang.” The attack was preceded by OV-10 bombing runs with MG-520s providing CAS. The reserve brigade secured the MSR and lent a battalion to support the attack. Another brigade was sent to consolidate the AFP positions in Camp Busrah and Old Butig to prevent any enemy attempt to reoccupy them. One battalion under division control conducted territorial defense in the Calanugas-Malabang-Balabagan area and threatened Obj. “Mango” without becoming decisively engaged. This phase ended NLT D+3.

Effective D+3, one brigade received OPCON one battalion and attacked north from Malabang to seize and occupy Obj. “Apple” (Camp Al Madina) and Obj. “Jackfruit” (Camp Jabal Nor) also of Marugong. Due to very heavy enemy resistance, the brigade concentrated its attack on Obj. “Jackfruit” and fixed the enemy at Obj. “Apple” to facilitate its attack by another brigade. Still on D+3, two battalions were reconstituted into a TF. On D+4, the designated SE attacked south from Tubaran to seize and occupy Obj. “Mango” (Camp Akir-Akir) and Obj. “Apple” (Camp Al Madina) while being fixed initially by the ME. This phase of the operations ended NLT D+8.

**OPERATION SUPREME**

The 4ID’s next target was Camp Busrah to isolate Camp Abubakar and dismantle the MILF shadow governments in the southern lake towns of Lanao del Sur. BGen. Cimatu sought the destruction of the Hq of the 3rd Field Division, BIAF, MILF in Camp Busrah at Butig, Lanao del Sur to neutralize their influence and shadow governments in the surrounding lake towns, restore the local government seats of power in the affected municipalities.

Plans. As conceived, the combined and coordinated air and ground forces would be employed in the seizure of Camp Busrah, disruption of the enemy lines of communication with Camp Abubakar and clearing of the southern portion of Lake Lanao of enemy satellite camps. Again, the commander took the risk in Lanao del Norte while concentrating the bulk of the 4ID in Lanao del Sur for the duration of Operation SUPREME. The operation was calculated to destroy the enemy’s command and control capability in Lanao del Sur, restore seats of government of the isolated towns in the periphery of Camp Busrah, secure the Malabang-Marawi highway, and isolate the Lanao-based MILF hierarchy.

The participating units included the 1MBde as ME, consisting of the MBLTs 1, 4, and 10; 61MC (Armor); 73MC (Armor); 18MC (FA); and 28IB, 4ID.
TF Diamond III, 4ID (designated as SE) was composed of the 36IB (-), 4ID; 78IB, 3ID; 4SRB, FSRR; 10FAB, 4ID; and the 5LAB, LABde.

The 402Bde, 4ID (designated reserve force) consisted of the 9IB (-), 4ID; and the 30IB, 4ID.

Two task groups were made up of TG ALFA with the 18IB (-), 1ID; 26IB, 4ID; and the 62IB, 4ID; and TG BRAVO, which was composed of the 58IB, 4ID; 67IB, 4ID; 1stDRC, 4ID; 10FAB (-), 4ID; and the 23LAC, 5 LAB(-), LABde.
Under Division control were the 2nd DRC, 4ID; 10FAB (-), 4ID; 5LAB (-), LABde; and the CTG 10 (+), PAF. Placed under the division troops were the DISCOM, 4ID; SSBn (-); CESH (-); 10th FSSU (-); 4ASBn, 4ID; 38th MICO, 4ID; 4th CAU (-), 4ID; TF KALILINTAD; and the 18th EODT.

**Operations.** One brigade and one TF were used in the attack. Another brigade was held in reserve. The operation was undertaken in three phases. Phase 1 involved the consolidation and strengthening of the territorial defense systems in Lanao del Norte. Phase 2 involved the movement of forces to secure the Marawi-Pualas MSR and the conduct of feint attacks to threaten the enemy satellite camps west of Pualas and Buadiposo Bontong. It ended with the occupation by the attacking forces of their designated assembly areas in Lanao del Sur. Critical in this phase was the uninterrupted movement of the two components of the ME to its AOR in Lanao del Sur. Phase 3 commenced with the occupation of the LD/LC in Binidayan and Lumberton. On orders, the ME and SE launched attacks to seize and destroy Obj. “Billboard” (Camp Busrah). This was preceded by air strikes against predetermined targets.
Objective: Camp Abubakar

Operation Terminal Velocity

After the successes scored by the AFP in the course of the campaign in Central Mindanao and the Lanao provinces, only Camp Abubakar remained as the MILF symbol of arrogant defiance to the government.

On 14 June 2000, during his remarks before the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), President Joseph Estrada set 30 June 2000 as the deadline for the MILF to drop its bid for secession and to stop its terrorist and criminal activities as pre-conditions for the suspension of military operations. When the MILF failed to meet these pre-conditions on the date set, military operations to capture Camp Abubakar became necessary.

On 01 July 2000, the AFP through SOUTHCOM, launched Operation TERMINAL VELOCITY. It was designed to capture Camp Abubakar and to seize and destroy the MILF’s command, control, communication and other facilities to neutralize its military capability.

Operation TERMINAL VELOCITY employed the 6ID as the ME, 4ID as SE and 1ID as reserve. On the next page is the table of organization for the AFP forces employed in the operation.

Plans. Offensive operations were carried out by one infantry division as ME, one infantry division as SE, and one infantry division as reserve. The ME would attack from the south, and the SE from the west. The operation would be conducted in two phases: Phase I, Preparation; and Phase II, Attack. During Phase I, the ME and SE would move to their respective assembly areas. Preparatory artillery and aerial bombings would be conducted to soften enemy positions.

During Phase II, ME would attack from the south towards Obj. “BRAZIL” within VGL 44-48 and HGL 31-37, while SE would attack Obj. MEXICO within VGL 42–44 and HGL 36-39. The SE would move southwestward through the ME. This move was felt critical, and so was the destruction of enemy command, control, and communication (C3). Continuing the use of fire assets to soften enemy positions and break the defense lines of Camp Abubakar was likewise deemed vital.
### AFP Forces during Operation TERMINAL VELOCITY

#### Main Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6th INFANTRY DIVISION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>301st Infantry Brigade, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>57IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15IB, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2SRB (-), FSRR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Pltn + (6 Armor Veh), LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>603rd Infantry Brigade, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7IB, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>27IB (-), 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Co, 3IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Sec (2 Armor Veh), LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Marine Brigade, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT5, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT6, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT7, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT9, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPCON CSU</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TF &quot;KAMPILAN&quot;, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Co, 73IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Co, 36IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Co, 19RSC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>601st Infantry Brigade, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>64IB (-), 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>68IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7SFB, SFR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Marine Brigade, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT10, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT2, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT4, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT7, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPCON CSU</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TF 61.3, NAVFORSOUTH, Division Control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>75IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reserve</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1SR Co</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CTG XII, PAF</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Supporting Effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th INFANTRY DIVISION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st Marine Brigade, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT1, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT4, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MBLT10, PMAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>73MC (Armor)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18MC (Artillery)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Force Recon Co</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EODT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>302nd Infantry Brigade, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6IB, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>78IB, 3ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>58IB, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Mech Co.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;C&quot; Bty (-), 10FAB, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18EODT, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>802nd Infantry Brigade, 8ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>52IB, 8ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>63IB, 8ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>&quot;B&quot; Bty, 8FAB, 8ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1Pltn of 23LAC, LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>402nd Bde (Division Reserve)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>30IB, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9IB(-), 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Pltn/&quot;C&quot; Bty/10FAB(-), 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>23LAC, LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TF &quot;DIAMOND&quot; III</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1Pltn of 23LAC, LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1Pltn of &quot;C&quot; Bty, 10FAB, Division Control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>98MICO, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10FAB(-), 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISCOM</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4ASBn, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4CAU, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10FSSU (-)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TG &quot;KALILINTAD&quot;, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10Intel Service Unit (-), Division Control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4EODT, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CTG 10, PAF</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5LAB, LABde</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Prov'l Co, 4ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9IB, 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>56IB (-), 6ID</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1st INFANTRY DIV
**Operations.** The operations to capture Camp Abubakar were carried out from two directions, with the 6ID attacking from the south of Camp Abubakar and 4ID attacking from the north of the camp. In this aspect of the overall operations, the 6ID employed the 301Bde as the ME; and 603Bde and 3MBde as SE. On the other hand, the 4ID employed the 1MBde as the ME and 302Bde as SE.

With Narciso Ramos Highway and the MILF satellite camps under government control, the troops linked up at Langkong for the assault on Camp Abubakar.

To ensure maximum impact and minimal collateral damage, PAF pilots got pre-mission briefings to pinpoint close air support targets.
28 June 2000 (D - 3). Three days prior to the start of operations on 1400H of 28 June 2000, two sorties of OV-10 aircraft bombed Camp Abubakar, specifically the residence of MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat which also housed a conference room, the Bedis Memorial Academy, the MILG fortified post, rehab center, the barricaded fortified post, and another fortified post with a concrete building in the vicinity. A second bombing mission on same target was conducted two hours later. From 1700H to 1735H, 105mm howitzers based near crossing Langkong, Matanog, Maguindanao lobbed shells at the same targets. One MILF commander, Commander Minandang, was killed, along with an undetermined number of MILF rebels.
01 July 2000 (D-Day). Early in the morning of D-Day at 0600H, the 155 Howitzer Fire Base at Crossing, Langkong, Maguindanao delivered preparatory fire on enemy positions in the vicinity of Mt Bitu, a part of Camp Abubakar, to soften enemy resistance and support the elements of 3MBde. Likewise, at about 0700H, the 603rd Brigade Buldon Fire Base delivered preparatory fire on the MILF position in Obj. “I” in the vicinity of Camp Abubakar to support the maneuvering elements of the advance brigade.
02 July 2000 (D+1). In the 6ID AOR, two OV-10 aircraft provided interdiction fire at dawn against MILF cal .50 HMG gun emplacements on Hill 779 in Bgy Langkong until 0730H. The bombing caused heavy casualties on the MILF according to SIGINT reports. While elements of the 3MBde were advancing, an undetermined number of MILF rebels harassed troops of the 49MC, MBLT 9 in the vicinity of Sarmiento, Bgy Langkong, Matanog, Maguindanao with cal .50 HMG sniper fire.

As this developed, three F-5A aircraft from MAB made air strikes in Camp Abubakar from 1030H to 1045H, specifically targeting MILF positions at GS 4534 and 4535, after having determined their exact locations through the SIGINT Intercept.
At 1530H, troops of the 57IB, 301Bde encountered an undetermined number of MILF rebels in the vicinity of Barira, Maguindanao. The ensuing firefight lasted until 1840H when elements of the 57IB seized an MILF defensive position that could accommodate about 1,000 rebels at GC 493266 in Barira. Subsequently, the same unit captured two more MILF satellite camps in Bgy Minabag and overran and seized Hill 338 (GC 480278), the Hqs of Bangsa Moro Islamic Women Auxiliary Brigade and the HQ of 2 Bde, BIAF, MILF.

03 July 2000 (D+2). On the other hand, the 603Bde, which initially bypassed Obj. “G” and Obj. “H,” cleared two areas in Minabag, Buldon, Maguindanao.

In the AOR of the 4ID, the 302Bde continued consolidating at the designated attack positions along the Lanao del Sur-Maguindanao provincial boundary in the vicinity of Bgy Daguan, Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur. For its part, the 1MBde continued consolidating at its assembly area in Balabagan, Lanao del Sur while waiting for MBLTs 1 and 4 that jumped-off from Butig in the same province. Every four hours, artillery interdiction fire hit enemy positions at the northern periphery of Camp Abubakar.

D+2 started with an encounter at about 0810H between MBLT 7, 3MBde and MILF rebels, while the government troops were maneuvering near Sarmiento, Langkong, Matanog toward Obj. “F”. As this developed, two OV-10 aircraft interdicted enemy positions at 0915H in the vicinity of Obj. “OPAL” (GS 4034) in Matanog in support of 302Bde operations. This was followed by two more OV-10 bombing sorties at vicinity GS 4034. Subsequently, at about 1120H, two OV-10 aircraft and two MG-520 helicopters interdicted enemy positions at GS 4929, 4830/1, 4728, 4528/9 and 4428, all in Barira, to support 301Bde movements. Additionally, two OV-10 aircraft interdicted enemy position at Obj. “F” near Barira at about 1330H to support 3MBde actions. At about 1345H, elements of MBLT 9 TCP encountered an undetermined number of MILF rebels near Langkong, Matanog.
04 July 2000 (D+3). At about 0700H, troops of the 57IB, 2SRB and 15IB of the 301Bde encountered an undetermined number of MILF rebels during their maneuver toward their objective near Barira. After a brief firefight, the enemy withdrew toward Camp Abubakar. The incident was followed by the encounter between the 27IB, 603Bde and an undetermined number of MILF rebels near Sitios Bagangan and Pontor in Barira. At 1155H, 301Bde operating elements (57IB and 2SRB) seized the HQ of 2nd Provisional Bde, GHQ DIV, BIAF located in that area. Meanwhile, interdiction fire from three OV-10 aircraft and two MG-520 attack helicopters were delivered to enemy positions near Buldon, Maguindanao. Before the day ended, elements of 301Bde maneuvered south of Obj. “I”.
06 July 2000 (D+5). In the 6ID’s AOR, operating troops encountered enemy resistance while moving toward their objectives. Troops of MBLT2, 63MC and FR Bn/armored vehicle met MILF rebels in Langkong, Matanog, while elements of 27IB were twice harassed by MILF rebels at Pontor, Barira. After neutralizing enemy resistance, elements of the 57IB seized the Hqs and the Supply and Logistics Department of the BIAF near Hill 405, Nabalawag, Barira. Meanwhile, in the 4ID’s AOR, elements of the 1MBde maneuvered toward Obj. “ONYX”; and troops of the 302Bde, toward Obj. “OPAL”.

07 July 2000 (D + 6). Back at the 6ID AOR, three OV-10 aircraft and two MG-520 helicopters launched air strikes at enemy positions near Camp Abubakar at about 0800H. Late in the afternoon at about 1750H, troops of the 2SRB and 57IB, along with armor assets, encountered MILF rebels near Camp Abubakar (GS 4433). At the end of the day, elements of the 603Bde cleared Obj. “C.” At the same time, after clearing Obj. “E” and Obj. “F”, the 3MBde proceeded to Obj. “E-1”. The maneuvering elements of the 4ID, the 78IB, 302Bde, collided with MILF rebels in Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur and Matanog (GC 344354) at about 1600H. Subsequently, it cleared Obj. “OPAL” and proceeded to Obj. “RUBY”. Elsewhere, at about 1010H, elements of MBLT 1,
1MBde fought MILF rebels in Bgy Sarmiento, Matanog. Thereafter, the 1MBde cleared Obj. “ONYX”, then moved to Obj. “SILVER”.

07 July 2000 (D+6) Early the next day, elements of MBLT 2 clashed with MILF rebels near Langkong, Matanog. After continuous pressure, troops of the 7IB, 603Bde seized the Madraza Mosque, as well as the elementary school and Arabic schools including the Bedis Academy in Camp Abubakar. Elsewhere, after clearing Obj. “D,” the 301Bde proceeded to Obj. “D-1.” On Camp Abubakar’s northern front, MBLT 1, 1MBde cleared Obj. “SILVER” in the face
of light resistance, then went on to Obj. “GOLD”. Likewise, the 302Bde seized enemy defensive positions made up of 15 bunkers, overhead cover, running trenches and watchtower. While elements of the 4ID were closing in on their respective objectives, supporting interdiction fire were delivered.

08 July 2000 (D+7)

09 July 2000 (D + 8). Finally, after nine days of sustained military operations, the AFP captured the MILF main headquarters in Camp Abubakar.
**Results.** Operation TERMINAL VELOCITY led to the capture of the last MILF camps and concentration areas. Compared to Operation DOMINANCE, casualties on both sides were lighter this time. The AFP got 12 KIAs and 91 WIA while 23 MILF fighters were killed, based on body count. Shown below are the facilities captured within the Abubakar complex.
The camp’s fall marked the culmination of almost five months of military offensives that sought to recover the MILF-controlled areas, particularly in Central Mindanao, and to restore government authority and services there.

**MILF Camps captured during operation TERMINAL VELOCITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camp Abubakar Al Siddique</th>
<th>MILF Chairman’s Quarters &amp; Conf Rm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hqs Bangsa Moro, Islamic Women Aux Bde</td>
<td>So Bombaran, Tugaig, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Jaguar</td>
<td>Hill 388, Brgy Clingalan, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs 2nd Battalion, Brigade, GHQ Div, BIAF</td>
<td>So Bombaran, Tugaig, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs 2nd Provisional Brigade, GHQ Div, BIAF</td>
<td>Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs Logistic Command</td>
<td>Bgy Nabalawag, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs 7th Brigade, GHQ Div, BIAF</td>
<td>Old Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply &amp; Log Ofce, Hqs, National Guard Div, BIAF</td>
<td>Bgy Nabalawag, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs 7th Bde, GHQ Div, BIAF</td>
<td>Old Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hqs GHQ Div, BIAF</td>
<td>So Bombaran, Tugaig, Barira, Maguindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILF Abdurahman Bedis Memorial Military Academy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### AFP CENTRAL MINDANAO CAMPAIGN TIMELINE
(JAN-JUL 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan-March</td>
<td>MILF launches series of attacks and terrorist actions in Mindanao. By March, rebels conduct extortion activities through checkpoints and roadblocks along the Narciso Ramos Highway, claiming it as part of the Camp Abubakar perimeter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Jan</td>
<td>MILF roadblocks are set up along the Talayan-Shariff Aguak National Highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jan</td>
<td>MILF occupies Talayan Municipal Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Jan</td>
<td>MILF attacks AFP/CAFGU detachments in Carmen, North Cotabato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb</td>
<td>Terror escalates as bombs explode in buses onboard board M/V Beatrix in Ozamis City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-23 Feb</td>
<td>6ID conducts Operation VALIENCY to neutralize MILF elements in Talayan-Shariff Aguak-Datu Piang complex, Maguindanao.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March</td>
<td>6ID launches Operation AUDACITY to the stem MILF attacks and terrorist activities in Cotabato.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 March</td>
<td>MILF launches simultaneous attacks in various parts of Lanao del Norte; blocks Cagayan de Oro-Iligan-Kapatacan National Highway; and occupies Kauswagan and Munai municipal halls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>President Joseph Estrada directs the AFP to “go all out” against the MILF after the occupation of Kauswagan town, where many civilians had been taken hostage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30 March</td>
<td>4ID unleashes Operation SOVEREIGN to take the MILF’s Camp Bilal in Dalama, Munai, along with satellite camps, in Lanao del Norte to deny rebel forces staging points for terrorist activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 April</td>
<td>With rebels still threatening terrorist attacks on major government infrastructure from satellite camps in Balo-i, Lanao del Norte, 4ID begins new phase of SOVEREIGN operations in the area. Camps Bilal, John Mack, Apo Hill and several satellite camps fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 April-3 June</td>
<td>6ID launches Operation DOMINANCE to reassert government control over the Narciso Ramos Highway against enemy fighters well-entrenched in a network of tunnels. Both sides sustain heavy losses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 03-20 May

Operation FREEWAY is launched to seize, clear and hold the remaining stretch of Narciso Ramos Highway, as well as to threaten Camp Abubakar. 4ID TFs clear the highway segment from the Lanao del Sur-Maguindanao boundary up to the Langkong junction, while a brigade from 6ID clears the western portion of the highway. The eventual 4ID and 6ID link-up paves the way for the assault on Camp Abubakar.

### 20 May

With Operation GRAND SWEEPER, 4ID attacks and destroys the HQ of the Eastern Ranao Sur Revolutionary Committee in Masui and the MILF satellite camps in Marugong to disrupt the enemy lines of communication with the MILF forces in Maguindanao and to isolate remnants of the Lanao-based MILF hierarchy from Camp Abubakar.

### 20-30 May

4ID commences Operation SUPREME, resulting in the capture of Camp Busrah, HQ of the 3rd Field Division, BIAF, further isolating Camp Abubakar and dismantling the MILF shadow governments in the southern lake towns of Lanao del Sur.

### 14 June

President Estrada gives MILF until 30 June to drop its bid for secession and to seize all terrorist and criminal activities as a precondition to cessation of military operations in Central Mindanao.

### 1-9 July

Preceded by bombing sorties and heavy artillery bombardment of Camp Abubakar, SOUTHCOM launches Operation TERMINAL VELOCITY to capture the seat of MILF power and to seize and destroy the enemy’s command, control, communication and other capabilities.

### 9 July

Camp Abubakar falls, marking the end of almost five months of military offensives. Government authority over Central Mindanao is restored, and rehabilitation work begins.
LESSONS FROM THE CAMPAIGN

PART THREE
Having occurred in 2000, long before the focal shift of Philippine Army doctrine toward Land Domination within the framework of Full Spectrum Operations, the 2000 AFP Central Mindanao Campaign against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) presents an interesting case for analytical study in warfighting.

The whole premise behind the campaign had been to reclaim Philippine sovereignty over a network of camps, within which the MILF had been governing a de facto state under Sharia law. To aggravate matters, the MILF instigated provocations and attacks against civilians and Army detachments—eventually forcing the hand of then President Joseph Estrada, who directed the AFP to go “all out” against the secessionists.

Against this backdrop, the Army, in accordance with its mission, clearly had to take a lead role in the campaign to dismantle the MILF camps as part of the joint force under the AFP Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).

Given how the conflict evolved, the Central Mindanao Campaign became, for all intents, a purely military operation. Ongoing peace talks with Muslim secessionists were suspended, and the MILF, which had previously been a major party in the peace negotiations, was now looked upon as an enemy of the state.

* Analytical insights have been drawn mainly from the following sources:

1. AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001
2. GHQ Augmentation Cell Report (SOUTHCOM) to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 10 July 2000 (LO#496)
3. GHQ Augmentation Cell 3 – 4ID, PA, The Fall of Abubakar, the 4th Infantry Division Story: A Documentary and an Analysis, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 26 July 2000
4. Study Group Delta, Philippine Army, The Fall of Abubakar, September 2000
6. Interview with Secretary Roy Cimatu, NAMRIA, 16 Nov 2018
7. Interview with Philip Fortuno, PhD, ORC, 14 Nov 2018
8. Mario F Chan, GRP-MILF Peace Process, MPA paper, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 27 May 2005
From the outset, therefore, there was no room to apply a semblance of the concept of Full Spectrum Operations, which called for Army troops, whether organically or as part of a joint force, to conduct three levels of operations—offensive, defensive, and support to civil governance—simultaneously with a view to turning a situation of “unstable peace” in Central Mindanao into one of “stable peace”.

On the contrary, with a massive military force deployed against the MILF, the situation of “unstable peace” swiftly escalated to one of “general war” in the region. This triggered intense debate between ardent peace advocates, who rejected what they perceived to be a futile attempt at a military solution to a complex, centuries-old problem, and those who saw the MILF camps and actuations as an existential threat to the integrity of the Republic.

This raised a fundamental policy question on whether the National Government’s priority should have been to address the socio-political and economic roots of the conflict or to first stamp out what the Commander-in-chief then believed to be the principal hurdle to peace in Mindanao before focusing on those core issues. A corollary question was whether a military victory in Central Mindanao would mean anything in the larger quest for sustainable peace.

For a more nuanced look at the effectiveness of the campaign from a military perspective, one approach would be to view it from the prism of “The Elements of Army Power” (Figure 8.1).
LEADERSHIP

The quality of the campaign’s leadership, said to be the multiplying and unifying element of Army power, can be examined from both the national and operational levels.

“All-out war”. When President Joseph Estrada, as Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), directed the troops to go “all out” against the MILF on 21 March 2000, many military strategists viewed this as a long-awaited exercise of political will at the highest level. In contrast to his predecessor, President Fidel Ramos, whose administration had been stewarding the peace process, President Estrada forged a policy of national unity that was skewed toward law enforcement and tended to be confrontational to criminals and rebel groups.8

Beyond law enforcement, the more compelling rationale for the “all-out war” directive was that “the MILF challenged the authority, sovereignty and legitimacy of the Philippine government” by subverting the local governments of Barira, Buldon and Matanog in Maguindanao and imposing its will over the communities there.8

Prior to the peace negotiations, there had been only two known MILF “camps”—Abubakar and Bushra. When the talks started, the MILF claimed to possess 13 major camps and 33 satellite camps to manifest their “control” over certain territories. This betrayed their ulterior motives in the peace process: “to talk, expand territories, achieve a status of belligerency, push for secession and, eventually, independence.”5

The “kid-gloves” treatment of the MILF by the AFP, whose hands were tied by the terms of the peace process, allowed the secessionist rebels to gather enough strength—in terms of both warriors and weaponry—to directly challenge the government troops. (The MILF even had a military academy and a munitions factory inside their main camp.) In the view of some analysts, the military could have overrun Camp Abubakar three years earlier when the AFP could mobilize enough troops in Mindanao to confront a much weaker MILF.6

By 1999-2000, the major camps of the rebels-cum peace negotiators had become off-limits to the AFP, under the unstable peace agreement, making the MILF a very real threat to the territorial integrity of the Republic. Invoking the AFP’s is mandate to secure the national territory, safeguard the national interest and sovereignty, and protect the general welfare of the Filipino people, President Estrada unleashed the biggest military campaign since the mid-1970s.8
However, the sudden Presidential directive to wage an “all-out war” vs. the MILF caught the higher AFP command echelons by surprise. In the absence of specific guidelines on how to carry out the mandate, the AFP fell back on old contingency plans—AFP Campaign Plan BALANGAI, dated 28 January 2000, and SOUTHCOM Contingency Plan SOVEREIGN SHIELD, series 1999, based on GHQ OPLAN PISCES ALPHA, which specified the actions to be taken in case full-scale hostilities break out between the MILF and the AFP. SOVEREIGN SHIELD was the basic reference from which the subsequent operations were conducted by SOUTHCOM in reacting to the MILF provocations. However, there was no SOUTHCOM OPLAN made in accordance with SOVEREIGN SHIELD, upon which the 6ID and 4ID could base its operations.2

SOUTHCOM prepared OPLAN TERMINAL VELOCITY only after the visit of the different J-Staff to Davao on 1 July 2000. This plan, supposed to be the basis for the operation launched to capture Camp Abubakar, had not yet been signed by COMSOUTHCOM as late as 11 July 2000. Basically, what was worked out among the conferees was simply the boundary of 6ID and 4ID, specific objectives within the camp, and the target dates in the subsequent operation to seize Abubakar.2

In effect, the President merely set the broad guideline of demolishing the enemy’s apparatus for making war. The AFP leadership translated the guidance and direction for the subordinate field commanders into an ad hoc action program. However, the objective was not clearly and consistently defined across the strategic, operational and tactical levels, thus leaving gray areas with regard to the main direction of the campaign effort.1

Strategically, the objective set in BALANGAI was to “seriously degrade” the politico-military capability of the MILF. This, however, was somewhat confusingly implemented with the aim of attaining peace and stability in Mindanao as prescribed in SOVEREIGN SHIELD. The tactical objectives were primarily aimed at capturing Camp Abubakar, clearing the MILF-controlled stretch of the Narciso Ramos Highway and various MILF satellite camps,
and restoring full government authority in these areas, without necessarily destroying or degrading the military capability of the MILF.¹

From a military standpoint, the early identification and determination of the objectives of the military campaign are vital, and such objectives must always be borne in mind by those involved in the prosecution of the campaign. In the case of the AFP drive against the MILF, however, there were factors that tended to restrain and cloud the primary objectives.

In a way, the AFP objectives were somewhat put out of focus by enemy actions. The MILF conducted harassments, bombings and sabotage operations in various cities in Mindanao during the conduct of the Narciso-Ramos Highway clearing operation. MILF forces staged a series of terrorist activities in General Santos City and Cotabato areas, as well as on the Davao-Cotabato Highway, Cotabato-Isulan Highway, and against the H6ID in Camp BGEN SIONGCO; these were actually diversionary moves to lessen the military pressure on the Narciso Ramos Highway. And because these had to be addressed, the AFP was forced to employ active and passive measures to protect the troops against espionage and hostile intelligence collection.¹

Despite the massive commitment of AFP strength against the MILF, enough forces were left to contain any possible attacks from the CPP-NPA. As a result, the latter was not able to disrupt the AFP’s execution of the Central Mindanao campaign. Indeed, the materialization of any tactical alliance between the two rebel groups was effectively thwarted by adequate measures adopted by the AFP. As a result, the military was free to conduct its offensive against the Muslim secessionists.¹

Overcoming political constraints. Classical doctrine looks at war as “a political instrument, a continuation of political relations”—even in the case of a purely internal war directed against insurgents or secessionists. This is especially true when the rebellion, motivated by political or ideological ends, has become so widespread as to constitute a major internal security threat.

Thus, in fighting the MILF rebels, the AFP had to subordinate military considerations to the overriding imperative of the government’s political agenda for Muslim Mindanao. After all, the issue of secessionism is basically a political problem requiring a political solution, ideally through negotiations.

The impulse to crush the enemy by force of arms immediately and decisively had to give way to the government’s compassionate policy of accommodation, reconciliation and national unity with the end in view of eventually integrating Muslims in the South into the Philippine body politic.¹
Unfortunately, not all of the fighting troops in the field could fully grasp the political underpinnings of the conflict. Indeed, many soldiers, either buoyed up by a string of previous successful operations or angered by the casualties inflicted on their ranks, could hardly comprehend the logic of not exploiting their advantageous military position to finish off the enemy. For those soldiers the campaign, while victorious, left a sense of frustration.¹

Nevertheless, proper orientation and indoctrination of the troops by their commanders on the need to abide by the decisions and policies of the political leadership proved very useful in keeping strong the fighting spirit of the frontline soldiers. They were made to understand that in dealing with internal wars, victory is not all that counts—military initiatives must be subordinated to the higher goal of finding a more meaningful and lasting solution to a complex conflict. After all, since the conflict pitted Filipinos against Filipinos, a win-win solution had to be found.

Confronting moral issues on the ground. Battle stress, the desire to avenge mounting government casualties, and the impulse to “get the enemy before he gets you” tended to undermine the troops’ morale in combat. In fits of human weakness, some soldiers vented their sentiments through acts which proved to be repulsive to the Islamic religion and culture or disrespectful of human rights and dignity of combatants and non-combatants alike.

The MILF is a non-government entity, which is neither a signatory nor a party to the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols. It had not been duly recognized as a belligerent force; neither did it enjoy international recognition as the representative of the Filipino Muslim community. This unclear status of the adversary heightened the temptation to treat the MILF rebels as plain bandits, murderers or common criminals. Nevertheless, the government troops took it upon themselves to enforce strict observance of fundamental international humanitarian laws, consistent with its policy of holding all members of the military accountable for any human rights violation they may commit.

Of course, this self-imposed discipline proved to be quite an obstacle to the effort at containing the enemy’s underground activities, which could not be effectively neutralized without the troops running the risk of stepping on basic human rights and civil liberties. For example, artillery and air support as well as the actual assault by the troops on major enemy camps where the families of MILF rebels also lived were likewise carefully if judiciously applied in order to avoid unnecessary casualties among the non-combatant civilian populace. But the enemy was shrewd: when retreating to safer grounds, the rebels used non-combatant civilians as shields.
During close combat, attacking troops were shocked to find on the sights of their guns armed children manning MILF bunkers and foxholes. Naturally, the soldiers could not fire at those innocent children without any moral compunction. Sustained orientation/indoctrination on the ethics of war and strict enforcement of discipline among the troops greatly helped in dealing with such moral issues.

**Holding back?** During the final assault on Camp Abubakar, it appears that the AFP gave the MILF fighters leeway for retreat. Despite the fact that military common sense dictates vigorous pursuit of a withdrawing enemy who is likely to be confused, in disarray and very low in morale, the troops chose not to pursue and finish off the MILF. Why?

First, total annihilation of the MILF might not have been a policy goal. The government wanted to project a “humane approach” in solving the problem and to avoid possible international repercussions. It did not like to bring the MILF down to its knees because that could result in shame (an affront on maratabat) on its part, something which could only spur its adherents to revenge by continuing and escalating resistance against the government. Keeping the MILF intact, but weaker, would make healing the wounds of war a shorter process and reconciliation easier. This soft approach was evident in the conduct of AFP assaults on other MILF camps.

Clearly, the AFP deviated from BALANGAI’s objective of “seriously degrading” the politico-military capability of the MILF. There may have been apprehensions that an all-out effort to annihilate the secessionists would also have cost the AFP dearly. Given the political and financial constraints gripping the nation, the government might not have the capability to immediately replenish resources depleted by the operation, while retaining enough men and materiel needed to contain other security threats like the New People’s Army and the Abu Sayyaf Group.¹

Revisiting the Strategy. All the foregoing considerations raise a number of points concerning the soundness of the AFP’s campaign strategy and its policy of waging “humane war” against the MILF.
First, the AFP took a big risk and spent much in removing substantial forces from other critical areas in order to support the campaign against the MILF. Were the risk and expenditure necessary, since the forces posted in Mindanao at the time might have been sufficient to achieve campaign objectives? The consequent concentration of 70% of the AFP’s strength in Central Mindanao can be justified if the drive in fact resulted in the degrading of the MILF’s military capability.

Second, the MILF deployment and tactical stance during the campaign indicated their desire to engage the AFP in semi-conventional warfare, in which their forces were massed to defend what for them were critical areas.

This provided an opportunity for the AFP to outmaneuver and destroy them, given the former’s superiority in number, fighting quality, mobility and firepower.

Third, leaving avenues of retreat for the MILF during the attack on the enemy camps for “humanitarian purposes” was questionable. Had the MILF decided to remain and fight, the government troops could have killed a lot of them just the same, the “humane” consideration notwithstanding, for in battle the destruction or at least subjugation of the enemy is paramount. The “humanitarian” intent of the AFP seriously compromised the military objective, which in this case was the degradation of the MILF strength and firepower. Had their army been destroyed, the MILF leadership might have been compelled to sue for peace. As it turned out, the rebels abandoned their camps, including Abubakar, out of their own volition to escape annihilation and remain largely intact for future battles against the AFP under better circumstances.

One good effect of the campaign, however, was the return of around 200 MILF fighters to the fold of the law. Some national dailies reported that at least eight MILF commanders and 3,650 of their followers sent feelers to the government concerning their desire to surrender. Alarmed by the demoralization within the ranks of the MILF, its executive committee issued a shoot-to-kill order against members intending to surrender to the government. The AFP triumph, however limited, may have inflicted a wound on the credibility of the MILF even within its ranks.

**Center of Gravity.** It is argued that the fall of Abubakar diminished the MILF’s military capability, especially its ability to conduct a conventional type of war. A parallel view is that the fall of the camp resulted in the dismantling—or at least disruption of—the MILF political machinery, and, reportedly, its command, control, and communication center.

Abubakar was more than just a military objective. It served as a source of prestige and a rallying point of the enemy because of the image it projected.
as a virtual “state within a state”. With the capture of the camp, the MILF lost a major symbol of its struggle, as well as its main logistical base.

However, the claim that the MILF military capability had been degraded is debatable. Based on estimates, the AFP’s campaign reduced the MILF personnel strength and firearms by about 3% and 2%, respectively. These figures are not significant. Subsequent events would show that, despite the loss of their camps, particularly Abubakar, the MILF could continue pursuing its political objective because it still had the capability to wage war, thus posing a real threat to the government’s peace effort in Mindanao.¹

While strategically and tactically vital, Abubakar did not prove to be the MILF’s center of gravity. Despite its fall to government hands, the desired “serious degradation” of the MILF’s capability did not materialize. Neither did its fall ensure the MILF’s return to the negotiation table.

Operationally, Camp Abubakar was one of the MILF’s strong points, and so its capture was presumed imperative in unlocking the enemy’s center of gravity. It was a necessary step for the AFP to attain its ultimate objective, the serious degradation of the MILF’s politico-military capability. But this could only be achieved if the AFP focused on the enemy’s true center of gravity: the MILF forces themselves.¹

Since BALANGAI had a five-year horizon, the impact of the capture of Abubakar can only be appreciated in hindsight. The capture of the MILF camps, including Abubakar might be considered a great military and psychological victory for the government. But, given Hashim Salamat’s subsequent call for a jihad, along with the continued disruptive incursions of the MILF in subsequent years, it is evident that the MILF’s capability and resolve to wage a protracted guerrilla-style struggle and a war of attrition had not been permanently impaired.

Notwithstanding the understandable lapses in strategic clarity at the top levels of command and in on-ground preparations, following the Commander-in-chief’s unexpected “all-out war” directive, by and large the AFP acquitted itself well in the 2000 Central Mindanao Campaign. The brunt of leadership pressure fell on the shoulders of the Division, Brigade, and Battalion Commanders, down to the field officers and NCOs. And they delivered. The government forces overcame major gaps in planning, materiel and intelligence with superior tactical leadership and battlefield skills (born of excellent training), resourcefulness, and flexibility, coupled with the disciplined application of principles of mass, combined arms, and air superiority. The cost in terms of soldiers’ lives could have been minimized, but there is no discounting the fact that the consolidated forces of the Army, the Marines and the Air Force vanquished an entrenched and well-prepared adversary in the battlefield.
In terms of the In depth of leadership skills, it can be said that the lack of appreciation for concepts like Full Spectrum Operations and Combined Arms got in the way of the field commanders’ steering the troops toward a more comprehensive victory. With no doctrine explicitly governing joint operations among units from various AFP branches of service—and no time for wargaming—the combined troops virtually learned to fight together on the fly.

Tendencies for one-upmanship (e.g., between Army troops and the Marines) had to be tempered. Fortunately, the Division Commanders found ways to effectively distribute the combat burden. For example, BGen. Roy Cimatu, as 4ID Commander, decided to deploy the 1MBde to take on the Main Effort in OPLAN FREEWAY. As an Army officer, he could easily have tapped Task Force Diamond for the ME, thus giving Army troops a greater shot at “glory”, but he opted for the Marines, whose training, materiel and operations style was better suited for a frontal assault on enemy entrenchments along Narciso Ramos Highway.

**INFORMATION**

At the time of the Central Mindanao Campaign, the importance of information as a critical factor in the operational environment was not as pronounced as it has become today, rivaling lethal action as a key determinant of operational success.

Back then, the information environment was much simpler, as key publics could be reached through intensive grassroots communications and/or through “tri-media”—television, radio and newspapers. (A decade and a half later, digital and social media would change the information landscape drastically with their power to heavily influence attitudes, opinions and behavior of discrete audience segments.) What the AFP officers and troops had scant appreciation of at the time was the reality that certain imperceptible factors—such as the demeanor of soldiers, the posturing of the enemy, and residual distrust of the military dating back to the martial law years—can swing public sympathy and support for or against a military effort, with potentially decisive impact on the outcome of the battle.

**Battle of perception.** By positioning itself as the steward of the interests and aspirations of the Bangsamoro people, the MILF secured its place in the peace negotiations with the government. While the guns were still largely silent, the battle raged in the realm of public opinion.

At the domestic level, the MILF pursued peace talks with the government while quietly building up its forces and putting up camps in strategic locations
especially in Central Mindanao. This allowed the MILF to expand its operational areas and consolidate its armed force, much to the chagrin of the government.

Outside the country, the Philippine government and the MILF tried to outmaneuver each other by articulating their respective positions on the issue of statehood for the Bangsamoro people before the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). The MILF attempted to internationalize its secessionist aspirations—a political maneuver aimed at achieving international recognition of their cause.

Borrowing a page from the communist playbook, the MILF projected a view of their struggle as one that was scaling stages of violent conflict: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate, strategic offensive.¹

Before the “all-out war” got underway, the MILF perceived its struggle to have reached the advanced phase of the strategic stalemate stage, as was illustrated by the capability of the rebels to attack several military detachments and municipal halls.

The MILF hierarchy was well aware of the vital importance of propaganda to project their strength and legitimacy as a belligerent force. This was why they insisted on the recognition of 46 camps, spread across Mindanao and other islands. An October 1998 J2-AFP workshop revealed that several of these “camps” —particularly in Palawan, Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi—did not exist or might have been sites for potential expansion. AFP intelligence placed significant MILF troop presence in only 26 of the 46 camps.⁴

The sheer audacity of the MILF in challenging the government troops in semi-conventional warfare was the secessionists’ way of telling the AFP and the public that their fighting strength and capability were at par with those of the military. Their staunch defense of the Narciso Ramos Highway against virtually two-thirds the AFP strength lent credence to this claim. Even as the MILF fighters eventually lost that battle and retreated to Camp Abubakar, they managed to inflict heavy casualties on the government troops.

Before the military assault on Camp Abubakar, the MILF hierarchy frequently declared that they would defend their main bastion “to their last mujahidin”. (Indeed, their fighters offered little resistance in Busrah, the second largest camp, ostensibly to reinforce the defense of Abubakar.) Such propaganda fell flat in the actual battlefield. Faced with wave upon wave of bombing, artillery fire, and pursuing government troops, the defenders of Abubakar withdrew in haste, leaving behind much of their war materiel.⁴
The MILF propaganda backfired on them. The AFP’s timely and decisive campaign that culminated in the fall of Camp Abubakar forced the MILF back to square one—strategic defensive—and it would take some time before the MILF could move up to the next stage of its struggle.  

The raising of the Philippine flag at Abubakar on 17 July 2000 in the presence of the President, the Secretary of National Defense and the Chief of Staff of the AFP constituted a powerful symbolic gesture that national sovereignty had been restored in Central Mindanao.  

On top of the military victory, the government troops gained the psychological advantage at the enemy’s expense. The defeat also opened the eyes of the MILF to the reality that Hashim Salamat’s call for jihad did not resonate among the general Muslim community. It became clear that the MILF did not really embody the sentiments and hopes of the Bangsamoro people.  

Most of the communities in Abubakar and the other MILF camps appeared to side with the secessionists more out of fear or out of the belief that the MILF was the lesser evil. However, these Muslim non-combatants did not believe deeply enough in the secessionist cause to actively join the rebellion. (It is not clear whether the “child soldiers” in the MILF bunkers had volunteered to fight or had merely been coerced to take up arms.)
In any case, these communities were caught in the crossfire during and after the hostilities. The MILF used civilians as human shields during the fighting. After the rebels abandoned the camp, the civilians found themselves at the mercy of the government troops. Unfortunately, many soldiers at the time did not possess the moral strength and discipline to refrain from claiming “the spoils of war” by looting the homes and farms of suspected MILF collaborators. In the long term, this unacceptable behavior on the part of some battle-weary and vengeful soldiers only fed into the MILF narrative that the government that the soldiers represented was the enemy of the Bangsamoro.

The residual image of the soldier from the martial law years was so bad that it was typical to hear civilians in battle zones remark: “Dumaan na ang bagyo, huwag lang ang sundalo.”

Looking back, the government troops in those days were not equipped to win over the communities in their AORs. Many of them were “war freaks” with an utak pulbura mentality that made it hard for them to appreciate the value of non-lethal interventions to establish legitimacy of military action and to parlay a military victory into a moral triumph.

Branding the Central Mindanao campaign as an “all-out war” in itself was a strategic mistake, born of the same narrow military mindset. Since the MILF enjoyed community support in their camps, the subliminal message to the non-combatants was that the Philippine government was at war against them, too. This left little room for the AFP to maneuver toward winning hearts and minds of non-hardline Muslims in the abandoned camps—which would have shrunk the pool of potential MILF recruits down the road.

By contrast, Christian communities in the periphery of the war zone tended to be supportive of the troops because they felt first-hand the negative impact of the war on their families and their livelihood. Furthermore, the troops treated them with sympathy and respect, for instance, escorting them safely to evacuation centers. It was therefore not uncommon to encounter such civilians offering cooked rice or “ice tubig” to the troops in the middle of an operation. By and large, it can be said that the capture of Camp Abubakar was well received by the majority of the local populace, including local government officials and non-government organizations. This affirmed the government’s moral and legal authority to conduct the military operation.4

The aftermath of the final battle of the campaign also allayed fears expressed by various quarters that the assault on Abubakar, projected to symbolize Muslim pride and authority, would draw the ire of conservative Muslims and potentially spark a religious war. Neither did the Abubakar
offensive damage the Philippine relations with the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) nor did it adversely affect trade relations with Middle East and other Islamic countries, as had been predicted.

The MILF’s shift to guerrilla warfare—a tacit admission of their strategic blunder of engaging the AFP in semi-conventional war—elicited little cause for concern in the AFP due to its institutional experience in dealing with this mode of warfare. The downside of this changed operational scenario is that the AFP because could be tied down to containing a protracted insurgency—further delaying its external capability build-up, unless an enduring peaceful response to the underlying Bangsamoro grievances can be found.

The credibility of the MILF as a belligerent force is crucial to sustain its proven ability to solicit the support of Islamic countries, organizations and individuals. In fact, even with tight security measures, the MILF has the ability to rebuild its armed force with foreign assistance. It would be a strategic error if the MILF would be allowed to take the initiative to consolidate its forces and rebuild its equipment capability vis-à-vis the AFP’s uncertain modernization plan.¹
CHAPTER 9
CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS: *LETHAL WARFIGHTING FUNCTIONS*

MOVEMENT AND MANEUVER

Pertaining to tasks and systems that move forces to achieve a position of advantage in relation to the enemy, this warfighting function came to fore during the Central Mindanao Campaign.

**Overcoming MILF defense preparations.** The MILF employed a forward-defense strategy, with a view to keeping the fighting as far as possible from their camps. Applying sound defense principles, they set up mutually supporting battle positions that were fortified and well-designed as to provide even overhead protection. These consisted of defensive bunkers, running trenches, and tunnels on the fields of approach leading to their camps.4

The Narciso Ramos Highway was protected by zigzag running trenches, converted out of irrigation canals, which allowed interlocking and overlapping observation and fields of fire. The Matanog side, in particular,

---

4 Analytical insights have been drawn mainly from the following sources:
1 AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001
2 GHQ Augmentation Cell Report (SOUTHCOM) to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 10 July 2000 (LO#496)
3 GHQ Augmentation Cell 3 – 4ID, PA, The Fall of Abubakar, the 4th Infantry Division Story: A Documentary and an Analysis, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 26 July 2000
4 Study Group Delta, Philippine Army, The Fall of Abubakar, September 2000
6 Interview with Secretary Roy Cimatu, NAMRIA, 16 Nov 2018
7 Interview with Philip Fortuno, PhD, ORC, 14 Nov 2018
8 Mario F Chan, GRP-MILF Peace Process, MPA paper, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 27 May 2005
was heavily fortified because it is the gateway to Abubakar and the road from Langkong was the fastest way for government armor assets to enter the camp.⁵

Each running trench was one hundred meters long, five meters wide and six feet deep—enough room for 500 fighters. Its concrete walls and ceilings were all two feet thick. Well concealed along slopes, the trenches had air ducts made of PVC pipes. Immediately outside Camp Abubakar, one bunker, lined with coconut lumber, was around 30 meters long, five meters wide and six feet deep and could accommodate 200 MILF fighters.⁵

The MILF also maximized the use of snipers on high ground as the first line of defense. Snipers atop coconut trees and other elevated positions, targeted lead scouts to disrupt the movement of attacking government forces. MILF snipers were even adept at using moonlight to pick out targets in troop concentrations.⁴

Its formidable field preparations showed that the MILF got sophisticated training in field fortification and in employing effective defensive patterns and techniques. As one analyst put it: “To know the exact thickness of concrete to withstand a close hit from 105mm howitzers or to know where to place battle positions so that they will be mutually supporting is technical expertise and not native talent...”⁵

The government troops clearly had their work cut out for them, given the challenge of seeking to outmaneuver a well-entrenched adversary that had a far deeper familiarity with the terrain.
**Leveraging mass.** It is considered crucial to “concentrate combat power at a decisive time and place”. At the strategic level, this principle suggests that the nation should commit—or be ready to throw in—a preponderance of power to objectives of decisive importance. By way of response to the secessionist threat, the government committed a preponderance of military power against the MILF bases, particularly Camp Abubakar, to break the camel’s back.

In early January 2000, the AFP had a standing force of 58,081 deployed in Mindanao. As the campaign progressed, the AFP massed its forces peaking at a friendly-enemy force ratio of 5:1 in time for the Abubakar offensive. The AFP employed mass to compensate for uncertainty, given the shortage of technological sophistication of its fielded troops and inadequate—and, at times, unreliable—information on enemy strength, location, disposition and movements.

When forces are in mass, combined arms warfare is employed more effectively, and predominance of force carries with it more lethal repower. Based on the After Operations Report for OPLAN DOMINANCE, the massing of combat support assets to optimize the efficacy of close air support, artillery and mortar fire greatly reduced battle casualties. Along with massed armored vehicles, these inflicted shock action against the enemy, to say nothing of the incalculable contribution to the hitting power of the assaulting troops.

Moreover, maneuvering toward a preponderance of force proved lethal for the semi-conventional war that the MILF chose to wage. As the MILF massed its own fighters in semi-conventional battle positions, the advantaged government troops had the opportunity to inflict much greater damage to the MILF’s men and materiel.

**Relentless attack.** Offensive action or maintaining the initiative is the most effective and most decisive way of attaining a clearly defined objective.

The AFP campaign against the MILF clearly demonstrated how the military forces employed this principle. Starting off with the retaking of Kauswagan, AFP operating troops maintained the initiative by pursuing a relentless attack on MILF satellite camps culminating in the assault on Camp Abubakar.

Diverging from the standard application of the war principle of mass, the Divisions used familiar tactics—deploying their numerically superior forces along multi-pronged axes with simultaneous objectives assigned to the different operating units. Even as these tended to result in dissipation of forces available for the attack, they proved effective in the campaign. By attacking different sectors of the rebel perimeter at the same time, the government forces kept up
the initiative. Preoccupied with fending off many threats along their defensive perimeter, the rebels could not mount any counterattacks.²

On the other hand, the MILF used initiative to attack and seize the towns of Talayan, Kauswagan and Munai as a decoy. The attack served only to impress on the government and the AFP how strong (or weak) the MILF forces were. It tried to project its armed capability by premature movements and attacks that led to disaster.

**Flexibility and surprise.** In the early stages of the Narciso Ramos Highway clearing operations, AFP troops launched a frontal attack against well-fortified, layered enemy defense positions, consisting of interconnected trenches in strategic areas in Poblacion Matanog. Aerial bombings and artillery fire failed to flush out the rebels from their formidable positions. A wide maneuver on the western side of Narciso Ramos Highway made by the combined forces of the 2SRBn and the MBLT2 proved decisive and turned the tide of battle. This action caught the MILF by surprise since their defenses in the western side were less fortified compared to the Teba-Tarakan complex defenses in the north. To stall AFP ground troops’ maneuvers and advances, the MILF positioned snipers behind their defense lines.

Another example of the correct employment of maneuver was during the Kauswagan and post- Kauswagan fighting. AFP troops, particularly Marine units, were able to repeatedly unhinge MILF defenses through flanking maneuvers, on either of the sides or both of them (double envelopment).

**Innovative Tactics.** In the semi-conventional battlefield, the Army and the Marines effectively deployed armored assets, even in the face of operational issues and an enemy equipped with well-studied anti-armor tactics. Among the armor assets, the 6-wheel drive V-300 proved the most effective because of its capability to support the infantry with its 90mm main gun as the troops assaulted enemy bunkers and fortifications along the highway.

Certain maneuver tactics were developed by units in the course of actual combat operations. For instance, at one point in the protracted effort to clear Narciso Ramos Highway, it became clear that the MILF was well prepared to neutralize the government troops’ armor assets. Their RPG gunners had mastered the vulnerabilities of these vehicles and knew exactly how to penetrate the armor with their rockets, immobilizing the AV and often killing or maiming soldiers inside. To counteract these lethal enemy anti-armor tactics, the 4ID highlighted the principle that just as the armor protects the infantry, so too must the infantry protect the armor. In tactical operation maneuvers, foot soldiers were tasked to provide front and flank security for at least 50-100 meters forward or abreast to support AVs.
Eventually, their lead assault column devised a way of drawing out the MILF RPG gunners by a backward-forward (*atras-abante*) AV motion. The slow advance enticed the enemy gunner to move out of concealment toward the AV to target the small gap between its metal chassis and one of its wheels. At that precise moment, a Task Force Diamond sniper would pick off the enemy gunner from several hundred meters.6

Another creative antidote to enemy anti-armor tactics involved the placement of thick wood blocks (*tabla*) to seal the vulnerable gaps in the AV's wheel area. Enemy rockets bounced off these blocks, preventing serious damage. This inexpensive “low-tech” solution, devised by the 1MBde, inspired similar interventions by United States military units to protect their armor assets in Iraq.6

Retaking Lapayan Bridge.

In the lead-up to open hostilities in the main battle areas in Central Mindanao, the MILF sought to control key access points, such as Kauswagan in Lanao del Norte.

While doing reconnaissance patrols in the early morning of 16 March 2000, 4SRC and 6SRC, both attached to 4ID, received reports that rampaging MILF forces under Commander Bravo had overrun two detachments—one of the Army and the other of the PNP/CAFGU—on opposite sides of the Lapayan Bridge traversing the part of the river in Bgy Napu, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, less than 10 km from Iligan City.

Unable to go back to the brigade as a quick reaction force, because the bridge had been cut off, the Rangers ran back from the vicinity of the captured Army detachment to the highway at around 0500H. Considering the terrain and security assessment, they made a tactical movement across a potential ambush zone and arrived in the highway before 0700H. Reinforced by APC of 2Mech and 58IB troops, they moved from the highway toward Lapayan Bridge, reaching their position by 0800H.

By this time, families in Lapayan were fleeing by sea as this was the only exit to Iligan. Children and old folk were being evacuated on boats and large
water tubs (batya) tied to boats. Iligan residents were frantic, as the MILF forces were just a jeepney ride away.

The two Ranger companies had 35-40 men each, pitted against MILF force of around 300 in a battle area that offered little by way of concealment, except coconut trees. The 4SRC went into position to recover the PA detachment. The 6SRC, tasked to recover the PNP detachment, sought a floating device to maneuver across the river. To buy time for the 6SRC to cross, the 4SRC fixed the enemy on their side of the river, employing base-on-fire tactics.

When the 6SRC was in position, the two companies launched a simultaneous assault. The 4SRC, supported by APC, gradually advanced in an “L” formation from coconut tree to coconut tree. In the afternoon, the APC was badly hit by a B40 rocket, but the assault continued.

Both companies were ordered to contain the MILF forces on both sides to prevent the rebels from escalating violence and moving toward Iligan. Although outnumbered, the Rangers sought to create a semblance that the situation was under control, while waiting for reinforcements. This also allowed more civilians to evacuate. By the evening, they remained in the perimeter of the detachments, while recovery of APC casualties was underway. They also called for 105mm fire on enemy targets.

In the early morning of March 17, the 1MBde docked in Cagayan de Oro. They immediately proceeded toward Lapayan bridge. The detachments were turned over to the Marines at around 1200H, by which time the MILF forces had retreated.7

**COMMAND AND CONTROL**

This warfighting function pertains to tasks and systems that support commanders in exercising authority and direction.
WELCOME
7th Inf (TAPAT) BN CONQUEROR OF CAMP ABUBAKAR
BEDIS MILITARY ACADEMY
By some accounts, the government achieved a semblance of unity of effort at the national level. The decision by President Estrada to deploy military forces against the MILF was said to have been a product of consultations made with the National Security Council, the Secretary of National Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. It would seem that only the timing of the President’s directive hampered better preparation for—and orchestration of—the entire Central Mindanao campaign.

In the Abubakar operation, HSOUTHCOM provided the basic operational guidance for the 6ID and 4ID. As reported by the SOUTHCOM Augmentation Cell, both divisions were allowed to conduct operations in coordination with each other. The entire Abubakar objective was to be attained with the two divisions having their respective areas of operation within the camp. No single commander was designated to direct, control and oversee the entire Abubakar offensive.

Apart from the “humane war” policy and muddled objectives that dwelt on matters beyond the military sphere (such as an inordinate preoccupation with peace negotiations), this might partly explain why the MILF managed to escape from Abubakar.

The findings of the SOUTHCOM Augmentation Cell clearly reveal the shortcomings of AFP plans in the conduct of the campaign against the MILF. Firstly, it was claimed that the SOUTHCOM IMPLAN to AFP Campaign Plan BALANGAI (called SAMBISIG) was still unfinished by the time the Augmentation Cell submitted its report on 27 July 2000. Secondly, there was no SOUTHCOM OPLAN made to operationalize SOVEREIGN SHIELD (SOUTHCOM’s Contingency Plan). This OPLAN should have been the basis for 6ID and 4ID operations, such as DOMINANCE and FREEWAY. Lastly, SOUTHCOM was beset with administrative concerns. OPLAN TERMINAL VELOCITY, which was supposed to be the basis for the homestretch drive to capture Camp Abubakar, remained unsigned by the SOUTHCOM Commander until two days after the fall of the main MILF stronghold. In short, action came ahead of the plan.

In the absence of explicit directions from higher headquarters, operational coordination between 6ID and 4ID was less than cohesive, particularly in terms of the “timing” of maneuvers of the different units under their respective commands.

There was also an apparent lack of clear guidelines in utilizing specialized units such as the Scout Rangers, Special Forces, Marines and Combat Peace and order restored in Camp Abubakar
Engineers. This deprived the operating Divisions of the full benefit of the force mix and, worse, resulted in avoidable casualties among some of these attached units.

The 1ID, the designated SOUTHCOM Reserve Division, had its own AOR, but had no detailed deployment plans in the event that they would need to be mobilized in the Abubakar campaign.\(^2\)

Notwithstanding these aberrations, the 6ID and the 4ID managed to steer the respective units under their wing, including attached or support Marine, Artillery, Armor and Air Force personnel and assets, to a resounding military victory against a formidable foe, albeit with a considerable loss of soldiers’ lives.

This is testament to effective leadership at all operational levels in the heat of battle. The field commanders were able to maintain unit integrity, harness the soldiers’ fighting will and skill, achieve land-air combat synergy, and sustain a grueling campaign for over three months. This is on top of winning popular support in a potentially hostile field of battle.

The more seasoned commanders made use of their familiarity with the adversary, based on years of experience in Mindanao operations, to anticipate the moves of the MILF forces. They knew, for instance, that while the rebels considered its major camps as symbols of power and prestige, Muslim fighters, unlike NPA guerrillas, do not return to a camp once it is captured. It was clear to these commanders as well that government forces had to breach a defensive net—usually in the form of satellite camps—before getting to a major MILF camp. Experience also told them that the MILF fought at an inherent disadvantage in that Maguindanaoans could not count on Maranao or Tausug warriors to fight by their side.\(^6\)

The military commanders during the Central Mindanao campaign could well have been called “hands-on” leaders, as they affirmed the dictum for commanders to “see the battlefield”. This principle calls for commanders to locate themselves (usually with his Main Effort) where they can best guide their unit to dictate the terms of battle—maneuver, fire support, close air support, and combat service support—and attain their battlefield objectives as efficiently possible, adjusting tactics based on how hostilities actually unfold.\(^4\)

In one phase of the assault on Camp Abubakar, for example, the disruption in synchronizing movements of the maneuver elements in seizing their respective objectives was offset by the flexibility of the Main Effort (ME) to shift
its priority of objectives. Due to the delay in the seizure of OBJ DELTA by the SE ALPHA as a result of stiff enemy resistance in OBJ FOXTROT (Mt. Bito), the ME Bde Commander opted to seize OBJ DELTA, instead of OBJ CHARLIE, in order to maintain the momentum of the attack. The shift in maneuver turned out to be a decisive move. Seizing OBJ CHARLIE immediately would have exposed the ME’s rear and left flank to the enemy positioned at OBJ DELTA in the absence of a supporting effort. The capture of OBJ DELTA further eased up enemy pressure on the SE ALPHA, thus facilitating the latter’s advance.4

PROTECTION

This warfighting function relates to tasks and systems that preserve the force so the commander can apply maximum Army power.

Feints and Support Efforts. The two highlights of the 2000 Central Mindanao Campaign consisted of the clearing of Narciso Ramos Highway and the assault on Camp Abubakar. These two offensives, barely one month apart, required the government troops to be in full force against a well-prepared adversary. Protecting units involved in the Main Effort and in key support actions was therefore an overriding imperative.

The most common protective measures were feints in the course of an ongoing offensive to preserve the Main Effort or to sustain a major initiative. The most prominent of these feint maneuvers occurred shortly after troops from the 3MBde and the 603Bde, under the 6ID, were pinned down by MILF defenders on the Matanog side of Narciso Ramos Highway. With the clearing operations stalled, HSOUTHCOM directed the 4ID, originally tasked to clear the northern side so as to block possible enemy reinforcements coming from Lanao del Sur, to extend its clearing operations to Langkong Crossing in Maguindanao. In carrying out the order, the 1MBde under OPCON 4ID first made a feint maneuver toward the western portion of Abubakar to trick the MILF forces into thinking that an assault on their main camp was under way. This served to loosen the pressure on the 3MBde and 603Bde troops, enabling them to extricate casualties and to resume clearing operations in Matanog, while the 1MBde closed the loop on the Langkong side.

Support Efforts (SEs), too, often carried heavy protective intent. For instance, the deployment of 2MBde troops along the Maguindanao stretch from Darapanan, Simuay, Sultan Kudarat, to Parang served to deter MILF forces from initiating attacks that might break up the concentration of government forces engaged in clearing the Narciso Ramos Highway.
Precautionary steps. Protective measures included a unit’s own precautions in anticipation of battlefield contingencies that might hobble its troops.

As part of its preparations for the assault on Camp Abubakar, for example, H6ID anticipated the need for additional medical personnel, preferably surgeons, to address the casualties of the operating units. A surgeon and nurse were subsequently dispatched to join the operating troops of the 301Bde and 603Bde, respectively.

In addition, medical augmentation teams from higher headquarters greatly helped in minimizing loss of lives. In the 4ID AOR, part of the protocol in evacuating wounded soldiers was the issuance of a directive to local hospitals to exert every effort within their means to preserve the lives of battle casualties.6

On another front, H6ID also expected its troops to be vulnerable to landmines and other explosive devices strewn all over hostile territory. Hence, additional EOD teams were placed under 6ID OPCON for the duration of the operations. Each EOD team was equipped with mine detectors and dispatched to join the Command Groups of the 301Bde, 603Bde and 3MBde.4

One outstanding example of effective protection tactics was the adoption by the Marine Battalion Landing Team (MBLT) of a box formation wherein each side was covered by the fire of one company and with the headquarters, as well as other assets, inside the box. This formation not only neutralized any MILF moves but actually became the tactical formation that enabled the MBLT to successfully advance.1

FIRES

The fires warfighting function proved critical in softening enemy positions during critical stretches of the campaign.

Considering how well fortified the forward-defense systems of the MILF had been, the Central Mindanao campaign could not have been victorious without artillery and close air support.

Well-placed enemy entrenchments on the slopes of Mt. Cabugao were exposed by a two-hour barrage from six 105mm howitzers, followed by bomb runs from two OV-10 Broncos and two 520MG helicopter gunships. This was the kind of firepower that turned the tide in the battle for Narciso Ramos Highway.
Similarly, the start of the drive to capture Abubakar was ushered in by five hours of preparatory fires on perimeter targets within the camp. Thirty minutes after the bombardment started, operating troops of 603Bde crossed their respective LDs and cleared two of their objectives without enemy contact.4 For fear of being destroyed in their stationary defense positions not only by intense air and artillery action but also by the onrushing mass of government troops, the MILF hastily withdrew, leaving behind documents and quite a big cache of rearms and ammunitions. Apparently, the defenders were left ignorant by Hashim Salamat as to the intentions of the AFP to attack and take Abubakar, that is, if he was actually aware of them. Interviews with captured MILF fighters revealed that their top leader made them believe that the AFP did not have any plans of laying siege to Abubakar.4

During the campaign, the limited number of air support aircraft and backup artillery pieces were employed selectively and prudently by focusing their efforts on heavily defended and highly fortified targets preparatory to frontal assaults by ground troops. This scheme helped lessen casualties and firearm losses.1

Pivotal artillery support to overrun defensive positions of the MILF was the 105mm howitzer. The towed, general-purpose light field gun has a range of 11 kms and is capable of firing three rounds per minute.5

Among the air assets, the Bronco—faster and more versatile than the MG520s and more maneuverable than a jet—delivered the most lethal firepower, as its pilot could employ a broad range of air-to-ground support tactics.5

SUSTAINMENT

Sustainment tasks and systems are meant to provide timely and reliable support and services ensures freedom of action, extend operational reach, and prolong endurance of the fighting troops.

After the declaration of “all-out war” vs. the MILF, there was no way for the AFP to ascertain how long the hostilities would last, given the magnitude of preparedness of an enemy that enjoyed the advantage of fighting in familiar terrain. The deployment of two-thirds of the country’s total military strength was double-edged. While the government troops could leverage mass, their numerical superiority could turn into a liability in a protracted war—for this would mean more soldiers to support over an indefinite period.

Logistical constraints. While the AFP may have enjoyed superiority in firepower over the MILF, the government forces were actually short on
weapons, equipment and materiel. This was an acute problem for the AFP forces who were committed to the actual campaign. The AFP resorted to the use of massive force to make up for what it lacked in terms of material resources; this, in a way, limited their operational flexibility. In many instances, ground troops were exposed to great risk due to limited or no support from air, artillery, armor and other assets.

In effect, the AFP fought without many of the advantages brought about by modern technology and methods of warfare. For one thing, the Philippine Air Force could only deploy 33 aircraft—to provide air support, transport, evacuation, interdiction and reconnaissance, among others—for the campaign. For another, there were only four artillery battalions to support the two infantry divisions carrying the brunt of ground operations.\(^4\)

Furthermore, engineer combat support units were yet to be established to facilitate the destruction of MILF fortifications and bunker systems and to clear obstacles to the mobility of troops and AVs. Some units compensated for this gap with foresight and resourcefulness. The 1MBde, for example, was equipped with a chain saw with which to clear abatis strewn by the enemy en route to the Narciso Ramos Highway.\(^5\)

Due to budgetary constraints, the AFP did not have enough of the newer and more combat-effective equipment and weapons, such as night vision goggles, precision-guided weapons, modern artillery and better small arms. The forces in Central Mindanao had to make do with the kind of equipment that had already been out of use among the military establishments of many countries.\(^5\)

By and large, what transpired in the Central Mindanao campaign placed once more in bold relief the inadequacy of the AFP’s defense capability due to
the serious lack of modern weapons, equipment and logistical support. The lack of financial resources, which has hampered the AFP modernization effort in the first place, served to bedevil the military operations.5

**Challenges in fighting far afield.** Initially, the AFP found it difficult to mass sufficient air, armor, artillery, combat engineer and other assets to support the infantry formations. This was due to limited AFP assets and the equally limited access routes in the operational environment. Moreover, the AFP’s preoccupation with fighting a purely guerrilla-type war seems to have conspired against its efforts at upgrading assets and capabilities that are more useful for semi-conventional or conventional conflicts. Had the AFP possessed more and better air, armor, fire and engineering support, perhaps the campaign might have been shorter, with less casualties for the government troops.2

Due to limited resources, the AFP is obliged to engage in the business of fighting in an economical way. This is consistent with what military art dictates: proper allocation of combat power to priority objectives, leaving other goals less supported.2

To the individual soldiers, this entailed a fair degree of foresight and self-sufficiency in the field. Among others, this required fire discipline—the efficient use of weapons and ammunition to sustain the fight. In tandem with this, soldiers had to maneuver constantly so as not to be fixed by the enemy in a defensive position. It also meant having sufficient reserves of food, such that troops setting out for a three-day mission, for example, should have rations that would last seven days. Instinctively, they learned to study the terrain in terms of virtual grid squares, such that, every 2-3 kilometers, they would figure out the water point and the landing zone for food or supply drops and medical evacuation.7

For the most part, soldiers subsisted on sardines (sometimes cooked with misua soup) and crackers or rice. During one stretch of the campaign, the 601Bde from General Santos offered tubs (bañera) of fresh tuna, which immensely raised the soldiers’ morale for an entire week.6
There was nothing like a hot meal to keep the troops’ spirit up. With this in mind, HPA, under Lt. Gen. Voltaire Gazmin, introduced the mobile kitchen, a priceless field innovation.6

The HPA looked after sustenance not just for the stomach but to the spirit as well. Wives of Army officers looked after wounded and shell-shocked soldiers and helped nurse them back to health.6

In addition, special financial assistance was extended to wounded soldiers to ease the burden on hospitalized soldiers and their families.2

The troops also learned to make it a practice to recite Psalm 91, the Prayer for Protection, before jump off to reinforce spiritual strength.6

At the start of the campaign, the AFP redeployed troops from Samar and Panay to Mindanao, from Palawan to Lanao del Norte, from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi to Maguindanao. This was how the AFP made fullest use of all available forces; it redeployed troops from less critical areas elsewhere in the country to Central Mindanao, the main theater of the conflict.2

Due to the country’s archipelagic configuration, the dispersal of forces restricts the AFP’s ability to quickly concentrate combat power. This, despite the fact that, from an operational perspective, forces in Luzon and the Visayas had to be harnessed to fight in Mindanao. This constraint could have been overcome through strategic sea and air lifts to deploy and redeploy forces in and out of an area of conflict as rapidly as possible.2

The inadequacy of PAF airlift platforms, however, limited the rapid deployment of troops during contingencies. Hence, at the start of the campaign the AFP could only redeploy its forces via the much slower Navy transport ships. Tactical troop insertions are likewise expedited by field airlift assets such as helicopters, which the AFP grossly found wanting when the conflict in Mindanao erupted. As reported by the operating troops, there were many instances during the campaign when the air assets used to insert troops and deliver close air support to AFP ground troops were the same aircraft used in medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) missions. In most cases, the operating troops were themselves forced to evacuate the wounded in action (WIA) all the way to the EVAC point. This not only hampered the mobility and maneuverability of the assaulting forces but adversely affected their fighting efficacy as well.

Special Operations units played a key role in reinforcing the main AFP divisions deployed in Mindanao.
Prior to final ground assault on Camp Abubakar, in addition to artillery and aircraft fire, the AFP buildup of forward logistics through the Military Supply Points (MSPs) enhanced its sustained offensive actions.

The sheer magnitude of the Central Mindanao campaign—and the number of troops and units mobilized—called for an efficient combat service support (CSS) system. In OPLAN ARIES, 6ID applied the concept of Forward Service Support Teams by deploying personnel from the Supply Company of Service Support Battalion (SSB) and Camp Siongco Station Hospital in the ACP to look after the supply, maintenance and medical needs of the operating units.4

For its part, the 4ID organized the Division Support Command to provide an efficient and effective CSS in the operation. Through this unit, the Division effectively forwarded supply and logistics to the front echelon. The DCS orchestrated a steady flow of supply line to the front units and the evacuation of casualties. This concept was effective as it employed Brigade combat trains—convoys carrying the bulk of supplies together with the maneuvering troops—to deliver adequate ammunition, tires, POL (food, petroleum, oil and lubricants), and medicines to the battle zone. The ACP took on the responsibility of determining the troops’ basic supply requirements.3

Placing the Brigade Support Area (BSA) closely behind the operating troops facilitated the resupply of ammunition, especially for small arms and mortars, and POL for armor vehicles. This also enabled the immediate hauling of stalled armor vehicles, so as not to hamper the movement of the attacking force.

In addition, using tankers to refuel armored vehicles and troop carriers at designated refueling stations as per CSS plan proved very effective in preserving the troops’ momentum of attack.4

**INTELLIGENCE**

Pertaining to tasks and systems that facilitate understanding of the operational environment, enemy, terrain, and civil considerations, intelligence proved to be a crucial battleground in what was to much of the government troops remote and largely unfamiliar terrain.

Due to the involvement of units from all the major armed services, the government troops had access to a broad range of intelligence assets.

*Ground Intelligence.*7 The Intelligence Service Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) and the intelligence units of the Philippine Army were harnessed for the campaign. Their mission was to provide as much information
as possible on the disposition of MILF forces in the theater of operations, the
location and physical layout of the MILF camps, enemy plans and activities, and
probable source/drop-off points of the rebels’ ammunition.

The SIGINT operations of ISAFP, Implan Sagip-Timog, identified the radio
frequencies being used by the enemy, located their positions and monitored
their status and planned activities. Additional SIGINT facilities were set up,
and various electronic equipment in Zamboanga and Cotabato areas were
rehabilitated for better signal interception. This enabled ISAFP to collect
information on enemy plans and activities, which it simultaneously flashed to
higher headquarters and the military troops in the battlefront.

Military intelligence units in the field had initiated long-term and short-
term intelligence projects targeting the MILF long before the launching of the
AFP counteroffensive against the MILF. Information gathered through these
projects helped shape the AFP strategy used against the MILF. The ISAFP also
reproduced maps for use by the combat troops.

All intelligence units of the Area Commands and Major Services, as well
as ISAFP, participated in the quarterly Order of Battle (OB) workshop and
validation. Updated OB reports were disseminated to the advancing troops
during the drive. The regular reporting of these field units enabled them to
generate intelligence for use by higher headquarters.

ISAFP obtained the following pieces of intelligence during the AFP drive
against the MILF:

On the MILF defense posture

- Deployment of MILF brigades in Kapatagan II, Lanao del Sur securing
  the areas of Bgy Lusain and Tukamatimus point
- Implementation of Oplan “Zero Hour” once the MILF camps were
  attacked by the government troops
- Call to prepare for an all-out defensive action in response to the AFP
  plan to clear the Narciso Ramos Highway
- Establishment of Bgy Sapad, Matanog, Maguindanao, as an MILF
  stronghold where three strategic hills in the area were connected by
  fortified trenches approximately three meters deep
- Two 30-meter long fortified trenches (L-shaped) facing Ambal River in
  Bgy Pedtad, Barira, Maguindanao considered as strong position
- Running trenches in Bgys Kapilao, Paliko, Basak, Kurosuyan, Kendis
  and Pialongca, all located near Ambal River. Some of the MILF’s 81mm
  Mortar tubes were mounted at Sitio Saday, Bgy Lipawan, Barira
• Four 30-meter long fortified running trenches at Bgy Ganeyan, Buldon, Maguindanao, manned by about 400 fully armed MILF mujahideen
• Deployment of a blocking force manned by about 50 MILF rebels in Bgy Kurosoyan, Barira and establishment of a communication network in Bgy Ruminimbang to monitor the activities of the AFP troops

On the location/disposition of armed MILF rebels
• Deployment of 40 fully armed rebels near the bridge at Bgy Pedtad, Barira, Maguindanao and another 200 rebels in Bgy Sapad, Matanog.
• Presence of 100 fully armed MILF in Poblacion, Matanog, 40 rebels in KM 41, 50 fully armed MILF in Campo II, 70 fully armed MILF in Bgy Bayanga, 50 fully armed MILF in Bgy Langkong, 80 fully armed MILF in Bgy Sarakan and Marantao, Matanog, and 80 and 25 fully armed MILF in Bgy Macasandang and Campo I, Parang, respectively
• Deployment of additional forces to strengthen the MILF position along the Narciso Ramos Highway
• Weakening of the Pacalundo Bridge at Baloi, Lanao del Norte by some 50 armed rebels who removed the bridge’s nuts and bolts purposely to steal any armored vehicle of the government troops that would cross the bridge
• Deployment of about 800 fully armed MILF under Abdulaziz Mimbantas to secure Camp Bilal

On MILF tactics
• MILF five-point action plan which included attack on military camps; blowing up of bridges to pre-empt reinforcement by the AFP troops; conduct of bombing activities in the metropolis; putting up of road blocks on strategic points along the national highways; and cutting of power lines
• Conduct of actions in other provinces to divert the military attention and to extend support to the mujahidin
• The plan of Abdullah Macapaar, alias Commander Bravo, with his 350 fully armed followers, to take over the municipalities of Kauswagan and Linamon, both in Lanao del Norte.

Air Intelligence.1 The PAF harnessed multiple systems and protocols by which to gather mission-relevant data for the troops deployed in Central Mindanao:

• Imagery Intelligence (IMINT) – The PAF intelligence community was responsible for producing aerial photographic maps and mosaics of all areas of interest in Mindanao. These were extensively used in the planning and execution of military operations against the MILF. The
PAF’s lone aerial photo aircraft flew 23 sorties, equivalent to 50 flying hours, solely for the conduct of aerial photography in Mindanao.

• **Signal Intelligence (SIGINT)** – Although lacking in modern and sophisticated equipment for signal intelligence, the PAF intelligence community was able to intercept enemy communications, on the basis of which the AFP was able to take preemptive measures against some enemy plans. During the operations in the Camp Abubakar complex, the enemy communication control site was put out of commission by air and artillery actions after it was pinpointed by the PA’s rapid deployment forces (RDFs).

• **Human Intelligence (HUMINT)** – The presence of PAF intelligence units in all regions in Mindanao facilitated air intelligence collection. It also equipped the PAF with a network of human sources such as informers, captured enemies and refugees, among others.

Based on the information derived from these sources, the PAF was able to accomplish the following:

a. Gathered a plan of the MILF 3rd Field Division, BIAF to liquidate military personnel frequenting Lumbia Airport, Cagayan de Oro City. The same information was disseminated to all units in the area to prevent the execution of the plan;


c. Initiated the capture on 26 August 2000 of MILF member Ruel Escano y Garcia, alias Datu Toto, who was observed to be conspicuously monitoring military movements at Cotabato Airport.

• **Pre-flight Briefings** – Intelligence briefings were conducted routinely for aircrew assigned to conduct air strikes. The briefings included the description of the targets, threats in the area, location of both enemy and friendly troops, combat zones and escape routes.

• **Flight Debriefings** – The target intelligence specialist conducted these briefings primarily to determine if the desired objectives were met. If not, these served as basis to recommend a re-attack. It was also the time for the aircrew to brief the intelligence specialist on any new developments in the area, particularly on enemy movements.

• **Threat Assessment Reports and Updates** – The Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, A2, through its Directorate for Production, continuously provided all PAF units operating in
Mindanao with all the relevant information needed for planning and executing air offensives. Special briefings were conducted by A2 personnel on areas of operations, the threats obtaining in the area and assessments of the prevailing situation. Additionally, A2 provided each major PAF unit with a copy of the Daily Information Briefs and the Commander’s Weekly Information Brief.

**Naval Intelligence.** Surveillance and off-shore patrol operations by field intelligence personnel of the Philippine Navy resulted in the interception of a number of motorboats suspected to be ferrying MILF elements. At least eight MILF members were apprehended on different occasions aboard such motorboats.

Naval intelligence operations on land, in coordination with other friendly AFP/PNP intelligence units in the field, led to the capture of several MILF rebels, the timely recovery of an unclaimed box containing an explosive device near a docked vessel, the MV Princess of the World, and the surrender of three MILF commanders, together with their followers and firearms.

**Blindsided at Narciso Ramos Highway.** In spite of all these intelligence resources and input—which indicated a keen appreciation of the MILF’s forward-defense strategy and knowledge of a network of fortified trenches and of enemy concentrations—the troops assigned to clear the Narciso Ramos Highway did not seem to realize their mission’s degree of difficulty.

Of all the battles the AFP fought against the MILF, the clearing of the Narciso Ramos Highway (codenamed Operation DOMINANCE) taught the AFP the most bitter—and valuable—lessons. It was here where the military suffered more casualties than its opponents. This particular battle strongly emphasized the need for adequate intelligence preparatory to the conduct of operations.

Although the Highway was assessed as not merely a stretch of road network linking Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur but a likely area of MILF entrenchments, the AFP did not have a good idea as to how the MILF made use of it. Government troops did not know just exactly where the enemy had constructed trenches along the highway, much less the fact that their positions were layered with connecting dug-outs which could withstand intense artillery and air bombardment. A Korean consortium had originally constructed these trenches as irrigation canals, but the MILF in the area were allowed to alter their construction to suit their defense purposes. Hence, it turned out that the MILF was able to cleverly make a very formidable defense position out of the project, thereby enabling them to tilt the odds in their favor from the very start.

Considering the time required by the MILF to build those fortifications, it is truly remarkable that government intelligence operatives utterly failed to monitor
whatever enemy preparations there were on the areas straddled by the Narciso Ramos Highway. This failure of intelligence can be attributed to the absence of community rapport on the part of the AFP in the main battle zones, where local government units could only function at the behest of the MILF. Essentially looking at the communities around the critical segments of the highway as hostile elements, apparently no attempts were made to cultivate relationships with locals and to possibly develop HUMINT assets. Consequently, the operating troops had to rely on less granular sources of intelligence that, in the end, fell short of forewarning them of the grave danger they would face if they attempted a frontal assault on the Matanog section of the highway.

Another major development that escaped intelligence detection was the coming and going of foreign *jihadist* warriors who trained and/or conducted commando training inside Camp Abubakar, coupled with the inflow of funds and materiel support from non-state extremist organizations beyond the purview of the OIC. Getting hold of vital information pertaining to external support to the MILF would have helped the AFP calibrate and beef up its preparations for the campaign.

These gaps in intelligence information could also have been filled had the Scout Rangers, Special Forces and Recon units been used for surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance in line with their highly-refined expertise in these areas. Functioning virtually as elite infantrymen, these specialized units were underutilized and, worse, suffered heavy casualties.

**Intelligence gains.** Balancing these costly intelligence shortcomings were a number of AFP intelligence successes.

In support of OPLAN ARIES, for instance, the 6ID Division Analysis Center (6DAC), 29MICO, 12ISU, and intelligence sections of the operating units exerted massive SIGINT and HUMINT efforts that were instrumental in the successful accomplishment of the mission. For example:

01 June – Based on SIGINT reports, the enemy closely monitored troop movements along the peripheries of Buldon and Camp Abubakar. The MILF forces were deployed in different strategic areas especially along the route going to Buldon proper, indicating a possible plan to ambush military convoys in order to disrupt troop movements.

06 June – Information gathered indicated that the MILF was bent on defending their main camp. Reports of massive withdrawal of field units toward Abubakar to reinforce camp defense conveyed that they intended to engage government troops in a decisive battle within its inner defense perimeter, hoping to preserve its forces from expected artillery fire and air strikes through a secret
underground shelter.

07 June – Large MILF formations consolidated within Abubakar complex. Their forces blocking the axis of advance of government troops from the south moved towards the path of the Marine elements in Sarmiento area and established a strong firebase at Mt. Bito. Likewise, MILF forces within Abubakar proper, plus reinforcements, were tracked to be moving up north and out of residential areas, signifying their intention to put up final defense line at vicinity of “Camp Vietnam”. With the 301Bde, PA making a breakthrough, the MILF was expected to shift large forces along its route.

An intercepted order coming from MILF Vice Chief for Military Affairs, Al Hadj Murad, to intensify the conduct of ambushes along the Parang-Buldon Military Supply Route presaged bolder attacks and use of large forces, prompting the need for tighter route security among government troops.¹

During the actual maneuver of the troops, the SIGINT, specifically Radio Direction Finder (RDF) operations, proved to be effective in identifying the location of the enemy’s C3 that were immediately subjected to artillery and aerial bombardment, eventually causing the collapse of the enemy’s command and control. SIGINT greatly compensated for shortcomings in HUMINT.

The use of mobile SIGINT/RDF (radio direction finding) emplaced in AVs likewise proved effective in OPLAN ARIES. 2MIB had one Simba with SIGINT/RDF capability.

**Home field advantage.** Admittedly, the MILF had the advantage in intelligence collection and its timely dissemination to the end-users. This can be attributed to the dominance of Muslim inhabitants in the area of operations; they were sympathetic to and very cooperative with the MILF. The AFP’s poor intelligence network and insufficient, if unreliable, information on enemy location and disposition proved tragic. The annihilation of a section of Scout Rangers and a section of Marines who ran straight into the MILF stronghold at the
vicinity of Barangay Teba, Matanog, Maguindanao could have been avoided if they were provided with timely and accurate information on the disposition of enemy troops and crew-served weapons emplacements.

The MILF's familiarity with the terrain particularly the areas over which they had control enabled them to locate the strategic places where they set up and secured their defensive positions, as shown by the fortified trenches constructed along the Narciso Ramos Highway leading to Crossing, Langkong, the gateway to Camp Abubakar. Most of the trenches were concrete and camouflaged, making them difficult to detect and locate from the air or the ground.

On the other hand, MILF intelligence work was found wanting, too. Apparently, in formulating their strategy and tactics, the enemy underestimated the AFP strength and capabilities. The MILF belittled the AFP’s intentions and probable courses of action despite strong and repeated government warnings that the rebels’ terrorist activities and unabated violations of the ceasefire agreement had reached intolerable levels. Obviously, too, the enemy did not pay much attention to the highly visible signs that the AFP, which had started military buildup activities in the area, was up to something big. And when the AFP drive was in progress, the MILF failed to exploit their intimate familiarity with the home terrain to block or turn back the attacking forces.

The MILF did not resort to guerrilla warfare until after the fall of Camp Abubakar in July, even as Salamat called for a jihad. By that time, the AFP had taken all the MILF camps in Central Mindanao, forcing the remaining rebel forces to the hinterlands in small groups.

In sum, the AFP scored a comprehensive military victory over a well-armed, well-funded, and well-entrenched enemy on their home terrain. This underscored yet again the Philippine military’s capability to thwart formidable threats to national security and sovereignty.
CIVIL MILITARY OPERATIONS

Civil Military Operations are planned activities undertaken independently or in coordination with civilian entities to gain popular support and weaken the will of the enemy to fight.

**Multi-Dimensional Drive.** The AFP’s campaign against the MILF had three dimensions. First, the AFP waged a military effort to seriously degrade the MILF military capability. Second, the effort was part of an overall political strategy to frustrate the MILF’s struggle for a separate Islamic state in Mindanao. And third, it had a social aspect designed to win the hearts and minds of the civilian populace in the area—effectively weaning them away from the MILF and enlisting their support for the AFP.

While the political impact of the campaign would take a while to surface, its social impact, particularly on the lives of the people residing in the theater of the conflict, could already be examined.

**Cost of the Campaign.** According to the Department of National Defense, the total cost of the AFP’s campaign against the MILF from January to July 2000 was around PHP1.337 billion, which had been taken from 1999 appropriations. Consistent with the nature of a military campaign, around 95% of this amount went to maintenance and operating expenditures, with only PHP5.7 million going to capital outlay.

---

* Analytical insights have been drawn mainly from the following sources:
1. AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), *Assertion of Sovereignty*, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001. [AoS]
2. GHQ Augmentation Cell Report (SOUTHCOM) to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 10 July 2000. (LOA-496)
6. Interview with Secretary Roy Cimatu, NAMRIA, 16 Nov 2018 [Cim]
7. Interview with Philip Fortuno, PhD, ORC, 14 Nov 2018 [For]
8. Mario F Chan, GRP-MILF Peace Process, MPA paper, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 27 May 2005. [Chan]
Independent estimates, however, placed the cost of the campaign at a much higher level—as much as PHP10 to PHP20 million each day. Such estimates were based on certain assumptions on the cost of materiel and munitions, for example:

- PHP14, fired meant foregoing the consumption of one kilo of rice.
- PHP7.3 million.
- PHP45,000 each. A fully loaded sortie therefore costs around PHP315,000, and once-a-day running sorties of one aircraft in a week would cost around PHP2.2 million. The MG520 also carries a 50-caliber machinegun, which can fire around 250 rounds at an estimated cost of PHP50 per bullet.
- PHP100,000 each. Thus, ten bombs dropped in a day cost a million pesos. Also, the OV-10 aircraft carries a 50-caliber machinegun, which can fire 500 rounds per flight at a cost of PHP25,000.

There were enormous costs, too, outside battle areas, especially to look after those seeking shelter in government evacuation centers.

- Feeding 100,000 evacuees requires around 2,000 bags of rice—PHP1.4 million a day or PHP9.8 million a week.

The amount spent for the campaign strained not only the AFP’s resources, but also that of the entire government. Critics pointed out that the AFP could have used these resources to further improve its capability to face possible external security challenges. In employing a relatively large military force to address the MILF threat, the Republic in effect downgraded its external defense posture. From another perspective, the government could have channeled those funds into the delivery of goods and services to the people.

What was at stake, however, was the territorial integrity of the Republic—which means the very survival of the state. Considering the growing strength and audacity of the MILF, the Philippine Government had no alternative to a decisive military course of action. The cost of the campaign had to be weighed against the price of losing possibly the entire Mindanao in the long run.

**Impact on the Civilian Populace.** In any conflict of a relatively large scale, defenseless and the innocent civilians suffer the most—physically, mentally and psychologically.
The conflict in Central Mindanao affected 14 provinces, four cities, 89 municipalities and around 489 villages (barangay). Its effects on the daily lives of the inhabitants in these areas simply have been severe.

Thousands of families were displaced. People had to abandon their homes, livelihood and daily routines in order to avoid getting hurt or killed by flying shrapnel or stray bullets either from government troops or MILF fighters. According to estimates, the armed confrontation between the AFP and the MILF displaced around 140,000 families or 755,761 individuals. The provinces of Lanao Del Norte, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and the city of Iligan had the most number of affected families— around 76,846. Of this figure, a great majority (43,210) came from Lanao Del Norte.

By the end of August 2000, around 420 evacuation centers had been established. These were serviced by various local disaster coordinating councils, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), local government units, and non-government organizations (NGOs). Even as the intensity of fighting had subsided by then, around 42,089 families or 219,932 individuals continued to stay in around 180 evacuation sites. Those who managed to go back to their homes still had to deal with the problem of reconstituting their normal lives.

The conflict also caused the destruction of property, including houses, buildings, mosques, churches and other establishments. Figures show that towards the end of August 2000, around 5,840 houses had either been totally or partially destroyed, three municipal halls damaged, 24 mosques destroyed, and some 42 school buildings severely damaged and rendered unfit for occupancy. Around PHP50 million worth of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, were either destroyed or rendered unusable. Mindanao also lost around PHP20 million worth of water and electric power utilities. Worse, some PHP48 million worth of livestock and agricultural products were lost in the wake of the violent conflict.

Damage to property had an even greater cost in terms of psychological, particularly emotional, after-effects. For example, the destruction of a mosque in Camp Busrah, Lanao Del Sur could only infuriate and possibly alienate the Muslims, as has been reflected by remarks from Ustadz Sukarno Mangarab, Bishop Felixberto Calang of the Philippine Independent Church, and Evelyn Carias of the Khadidja Moro Women Alliance. All three are convenors of the Muslim Christian People’s Solidarity (MCPS). Mangarab considered it a grave sin committed to intimidate the Muslim populace. Bishop Calang observed that it was a revolting sight to see soldiers jubilantly posing for photographs at a bombed place of worship.
The displacement of families and individuals led to increased prevalence of diseases. Records for the period of July to September alone indicate that around 8,438 individuals in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and Region XII were reported to have been treated for various ailments. More than 4,000 were afflicted with upper respiratory tract infections; 1,824 with diarrhea; 691 with measles; and 58 with pneumonia. Another 1,727 were afflicted with other diseases.

Consequently, around 50 evacuation camps had to be put up to stem the spread of disease. The ARMM had 37 such camps, serving around 38,526 evacuees; Region XII had 13, accommodating as many as 13,976 individuals. Around 257 evacuees died, with the ARMM accounting for 80% of these deaths. Diarrhea, mainly due to lack of potable water, exacted the highest toll (43% of deaths), followed by pneumonia (25%) and measles (14%).

In addition, some 203 individuals were killed due to untreated shrapnel wounds and the like.

While the MILF claims that it adheres to international law, which bans the use of land mines, AFP troops found and detonated more than a dozen mines the rebels placed along the trails leading to Camp Raja Muda in Pikit. One man met a horrible death after he accidentally stepped on a MILF land mine in a forest near Camp Omar along the boundary of Talayan, Datu Piang, and Shari Aguak towns. An army truck driver on his way to Camp Raja Muda collected the bodies of rebels killed in an encounter with government troops for proper burial but got killed when his truck hit a land mine along the way.

A great number of civilians were casualties in the fighting. Some 425 were injured as a result of either firefights between government troops and MILF guerrillas or the explosion of bombs planted by the MILF. PNP records reveal that from January to May 2000, Mindanao experienced around 58 bomb blasts. Six bomb blasts in General Santos City in June killed one (1) woman and wounded forty one (41) others.

**Evacuation and Relief Operations.** At the height of the conflict, various AFP units in Mindanao supported the relief and rehabilitation efforts of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). They constructed temporary shelters for displaced people in Pikit, Carmen, Aleosan, and Kabacan in the province of Cotabato; Kauswagan, Baloi, and Munai in Lanao Del Norte; and Sultan Kudarat, Columbio, Bagumbayan, Palimbang, and Lutayan. In Maguindanao, the AFP constructed shelters in Matanog, Pagalungan, Pagagawan, and Buluan. In Lanao Del Sur, it put up shelters in Kapatagan/Bumbaran, Butig, and Balabagan.
The AFP also assisted various government agencies and civilian organizations in the conduct of relief operations. Figures from the Civil Relations Service of the AFP (CRSAFP) show that relief and rehabilitation operations the AFP conducted in the months of April and May benefited around 2,800 families.

In addition to constructing shelters and camps for displaced people, the AFP conducted numerous medical and dental missions. The table below summarizes the various civic action activities the AFP undertook in the different evacuation centers from March to July 2000.

Rehabilitation Operations. The completion of the military campaign against the MILF did not mean an end to AFP operations in Mindanao. The AFP is still heavily involved in the Government’s effort to rehabilitate Mindanao.

During the third week of June, the President approved a Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan for Central Mindanao as proposed by the National Disaster Coordinating Council. The plan was designed with provisions for recovery and rehabilitation of the people in areas affected by the armed conflict, facilitate a return to normalcy, and contribute to the Government’s development program and quest for a just, lasting, and comprehensive solution to the conflict in Central Mindanao. The amount of PHP105.6 million was approved for immediate release chargeable against the CY 2000 Calamity Fund.

The plan, undertaken through an operation called “Operation Tulong Kapatid”, had two phases, with the recovery phase lasting for six months and the rehabilitation phase lasting for one year. During the recovery phase, basic needs and services were provided to evacuees. These included food, with the Department of Education Culture and Sports (DECS) regarding the repair and rehabilitation of school houses damaged by the conflict. The AFP rehabilitated one school building in Buldon, Ma clothing, shelter, medicines, places of worship, and education in order to help alleviate their plight. The rehabilitation phase would involve the reconstruction or repair of various infrastructure, installations, and establishments damaged or destroyed by the conflict and accelerate the development of Central Mindanao.
The AFP was one of the support agencies in the implementation of this recovery and rehabilitation plan. It provided security to line agencies implementing the plan especially in hostile places. Reconstruction and rehabilitation jobs in high-risk areas were assigned to the AFP Corps of Engineers. The AFP also coordinated guindanao and two schoolhouses in Kapatagan, Lanao del Sur. It also repaired nine school facilities in Matanog, Maguindanao.

Beyond repairing school buildings, military personnel took on teaching jobs with respect to displaced children through what it called the Army Literacy Patrol System (ALPS).

In addition to assisting the DECS, the AFP also assisted the Department of Agriculture in the construction of farm-to-market roads. In fact, the AFP is primarily responsible for constructing these roads under the Agriculture Department’s Farm- to-Market Roads Development Program. This is another vital contribution of the AFP in the rehabilitation of Central Mindanao.

Furthermore, the AFP undertook engineering tasks in support of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). As part of these, the AFP repaired and rehabilitated three mosques in Barangay Tacupan and Manacapan in Carmen, Cotabato two months after the fall of Camp Abubakar, and another in Barangay Sarmiento in Matanog, Maguindanao. The AFP completed back lling damaged road sections along the Narciso Ramos Highway, making the road passable to all types of vehicles and restoring a vital facility for transportation in the area.

By September 2000, the AFP was still heavily engaged in several engineering activities, including the repair of mosques—one in Busrah, Lanao Del Sur and eight in Matanog, Maguindanao and the improvement and widening of the Sarmiento-Abubakar Road and the Narciso Ramos Highway. The AFP also had a hand in the repair of the municipal hall of Matanog. In Jolo, it concreted the airport’s runway pavement and constructed its perimeter fence. Similarly, in Sulu, the development of the Kamahardikaan Village Housing Project Phase 1-A and the construction of 120 housing units in the area under the sponsorship of the National Housing Authority were undertaken by a contingent from an engineering battalion. The AFP has also been taking care of the continuing inspection and repair of damaged school buildings in Central Mindanao.

The DPWH requested the AFP, particularly its Corps of Engineers, to rehabilitate the 27-kilometer Parang-Buldon Road and the 23-kilometer Mercedes-Barira-Abubakar Road, two heavily damaged roads in the area covered by Camp Abubakar. The Corps of Engineers was also tasked to
undertake the rehabilitation of another DPWH road project—the 26-kilometer Gulling-Barangiran Section of the Barisalan-Alamada-Libungan Road in North Cotabato.

In a related vein, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) asked the AFP to continue paving the Langkong-Sarmiento-Abubakar Road. The construction of this road was previously under NIA’s responsibility as part of its Ambal River Pump Irrigation Project (PIP). However, the project was suspended due to the armed conflict in the area.

The NIA transferred PHP30 Million worth of irrigation projects to the DPWH for the AFP Engineers to undertake. These projects are expected to provide irrigation benefits to around 4,221 farmers in Region XII.

In the same way, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) asked the AFP, through its Corps of Engineers, to construct what it called Community-Based Convertible Structure (CBCS) projects in Region 12.

To undertake these numerous engineering activities, the AFP deployed the bulk of its engineering units in Central Mindanao.

The AFP’s role in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Mindanao manifested its reliability as a partner in the peace and development efforts of the government. Hopefully, this would go a long way in transforming Mindanao from a “Land of Promise” to a “Land of Fulfillment.”

**AFP Evacuation and Relief Operations.** The CRSAFP conducted a series of medical, dental and other civic action projects. It also played a major role in the distribution of relief goods in the different evacuation centers affected by the campaign against the MILF. If these activities projected the AFP as a protector of the people they also signified it as a provider of basic needs and services. If for no other thing, these activities brought the military closer to the people and enabled them to win the latter’s hearts and minds.

Relief goods coming from different NGOs and cause-oriented groups were channeled through the CRSAFP for sure and timely delivery to the different evacuation centers. From April to July, the CRS, AFP, employing TG Kandili with the support and cooperation of other government agencies, NGOs, and civic organizations, conducted medical and dental missions benefiting 8,641 patients in Lanao del Sur, Marawi City, Iligan City, Cotabato and Maguindanao.

Distribution of relief goods and rehabilitation operations were also conducted from April to May in various schools that served as evacuation centers in Iligan, Lanao del Norte and in Cotabato, benefiting 2,800 families.
The following table shows the various community relations and civic action projects undertaken by the CRS, AFP from April to July 2000:

**Number of Medical/Dental Patients Treated in Evacuation Centers, April-July 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Evacuation Center</th>
<th>Number of Patients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02 April</td>
<td>Maria Cristina Evacuation Center, Baloi, Lanao de Norte</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People’s Park Evacuation Center, Marawi City</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National High School Evacuation Center, Iligan City</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buru-an Evacuation Center, Buru-an, Lanao del Norte</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Aleosan, Cotabato</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>Parang National High School and Macarimbang Alegado Elementary School (all in Parang, Maguindanao)</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May</td>
<td>Cotabato Central Pilot Schil, Cotabato City</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 May</td>
<td>Notre Dame High School, Pikit, Cotabato</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May</td>
<td>Buldon, Maguindanao</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June</td>
<td>Aleosan, Cotabato</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 June</td>
<td>Parang, Maguindanao</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 June</td>
<td>Pikit, Cotabato</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 June</td>
<td>Pagalungan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 June</td>
<td>Parang, Maguindanao</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 July</td>
<td>Pikit, Cotabato</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 July</td>
<td>Pagalungan, Maguindanao</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 July</td>
<td>Aleosan, Cotabato</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table also shows the relief and rehabilitation operations undertaken by CRS, AFP from April to May 2000 in relation to the Mindanao conflict:

**Number of Families Reached by Relief and Rehabilitation Operations in Evacuation Centers, April-May 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Evacuation Center</th>
<th>Number of Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05 April</td>
<td>Iligan National High School</td>
<td>750 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 April</td>
<td>Buru-an, Elementary School, Buru-an, Lanao del Norte</td>
<td>750 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Mayor Inam Resident, Parang, Cotabato</td>
<td>380 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Malakimbang Elementary School, Cotabato</td>
<td>250 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Parang Central School, Cotabato</td>
<td>200 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Making Elementary School, Cotabato</td>
<td>100 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Miramar Elementary School, Cotabato</td>
<td>100 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Mahad Alisona School, Cotabato</td>
<td>130 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Mahal Kappa School, Cotabato</td>
<td>140 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,800 families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following table shows the CRSAFP’s coordination activities, in relation to looking after families affected by the conflict:

**Number of Families Reached by CRSAFP Activities, April-June 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03 April</td>
<td>Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte</td>
<td>1,330 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12 May</td>
<td>Cotabato Primero</td>
<td>2,050 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 June</td>
<td>Cotabato City</td>
<td>380 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 June</td>
<td>Cotabato City</td>
<td>500 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 June</td>
<td>Cotabato</td>
<td>850 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June</td>
<td>Cotabato</td>
<td>750 families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>****</td>
<td><strong>4,510 families</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Division-level CMO.** The medical and dental teams of 6ID, augmented by medical personnel from SOUTHCOM and TF Kandili, together with other government and non-government organizations were able to attend to the medical and dental needs of 13,621 evacuees in different evacuation centers.

Aside from these, the 6ID assisted Manila-based LGUs and NGOs in the distribution of relief goods in different evacuation centers in the provinces at Maguindanao and Cotabato in the form of manpower, transportation and security assistance.

Beyond vital information initiatives, the 4ID carried out Plan Unlad Lanao in the two Lanao provinces to spearhead in rehabilitation and development efforts in the area and to further marginalize the MILF among local communities. At the same time, they monitored the status of civilian evacuees and looked after their welfare through medical and civic action programs in collaboration with local government agencies and non-government organizations.

**Fragmented view of CMO.** At the time of the Central Mindanao campaign, CMO was viewed almost as “penance” for the myriad displacements caused by war or by major military operations. It was basically clean-up and rehabilitation work that had to be done to restore structures, livelihoods and communities. To cope with the sheer magnitude of the challenge, it almost becomes mandatory to simplify the task into a matter of establishing and tracking numbers—how many displaced people, how many beneficiaries, how many structures, etc.—and monitoring delivery of services and completion of projects.

Responding to post-battle needs of the affected communities also tended to be done in pockets, such that GHQ and Division-level CMO activities were mapped out and executed separately for lack of a masterplan outlined even before the start of hostilities.
CMO, still largely perfunctory, had yet to be appreciated as a non-lethal war-fighting function that is vital to the overall strategy for winning a major battle or campaign. As such, it would need to be integrated in terms of doctrine, training and operations, employing the tools of psychological operations (PSYOPS) and public information. Ultimately, everything is tied in to the fundamental philosophy of cultivating long-term relationships within communities and creating a lasting impression of soldiers as allies who are earnestly looking after the security and well-being of the people they are sworn to serve.

As a strategic imperative, CMO would have to be carried out with a sense of purpose and urgency. The “battle for hearts and minds” is as real as the blood-and-guts battle on the ground. If the military fails to win over a key community or public, the enemy could very well do so.

In the particular case of the post-Abubakar scenario, it should be noted that the AFP was operating with a handicap. For instance, evacuating and looking after internally displaced persons became particularly arduous because the local government units had been under the imposed jurisdiction of the MILF. This resulted in weak mechanisms by which to organize and facilitate the conduct of humanitarian activities.

**INFORMATION OPERATIONS**

Information Operations makes use of selected military and non-military capabilities to influence desired audiences.

**GHQ IO initiatives.** The intensive conduct of PSYOPS and public information was spearheaded by BGen. Romeo Dominguez, the Deputy Chief of Staff for CMO, AFP, through numerous press conferences and talk shows, TV/radio interviews and speaking engagements in addition to reams and reams of letters to newspaper editors and press releases for various papers and news correspondents. These activities were aimed at projecting the success of the AFP campaign while stressing that the peace process is the better option for the MILF.

To bring home this message, the CRS, AFP disseminated leaflets encouraging MILF members to lay down their arms and support the peace talks. It caused the publication of articles, editorials, newspaper and radio commentaries, etc. stressing the futility of the MILF’s cause. Through its subordinate units, emphasis was laid on the willingness of the government to talk peace with the MILF despite the violent activities perpetrated by the rebel group. This effort was reinforced by press releases, TV and radio interviews,
pointing out the government's sincerity and determination in working out a peaceful solution to the problems of Mindanao.

Through the tri-media, the CRS, AFP exposed the various MILF atrocities such as the bombings, kidnappings, extortions, massacres, murders, and rapes, among others that they committed. This was primarily to show that indeed MILF is not just a secessionist movement but a terrorist and bandit-like organization, as well.

The heroism of the soldiers who had died or been wounded, was also highlighted through the tri-media for public awareness and recognition. The heroism of MNLF integrees in support of the government was also played up. A documentary film, featuring the Medal of Valor awardees during the campaign had been produced as well.

Gen. Jaime Canatoy, CO of the CRSAFP, personally took part in numerous talk shows and as guest speaker in various engagements.¹

**IO missteps.** Unfortunately, during the entire period of the AFP campaign, media coverage of the operations and public pronouncements by key political leaders on government intentions relative to the military campaigns tended to undermine the element of surprise. Hints of military plans, movements and actions aired by radio-TV networks gave the MILF time to prepare and strengthen its defenses.

In Camp Bilal, a failure of operations security nearly cost the life of BGen. Cimatu. Traveling by land on his way to visit wounded Marines in Munai, Lanao del Norte, he narrowly escaped an ambush attempt.⁶ The incident was supposed to be kept under wraps in keeping with standard procedure to maintain a positive projection of the commander and to sustain the morale and war-fighting ethos of the troops under his wing. But somehow a story on the attempted ambush of the 4ID Commander managed to come out in the press.

Such missteps in information operations were due to the lack of understanding and appreciation among senior and junior AFP officers of the dynamics of dealing with the media, which at the time was confined to newspapers, television and radio. It was not uncommon then for such officers to view news reporters and radio/TV commentators as irritants who offered little value to the military cause and could in fact jeopardize operations with inadvertent leaks of, or premature reportage on, classified information. Protocols had yet to be designed and refined to professionalize media relations management and to rope in message delivery through the media with the overall strategic goal of dismantling the narrative of the enemy.
**Division-level information operations.** During the implementation of OPLAN ARIES, the 6ID in coordination with the Civil Affairs Groups, PA and Public Affairs Service, AFP conducted various PSYOPS and propaganda actions to counteract the MILF’s hostile actions and win the people’s support for government’s moves. These psychological operations and propaganda actions were translated in the form of 65,000 propaganda leaflets that were distributed and air dropped in different targeted areas.

Likewise, press releases were coordinated with the local and national radio, print and TV media outlets. Radio interviews were also entertained, emphasizing the AFP’s accomplishments and at the same time, exposing the MILF’s defeats and atrocities. Through the media outlets, actual and ocular visits of media personalities in war-torn areas cleared by government forces were facilitated to underscore the MILF’s violations.²

For its part, the 4ID gave due importance to keeping the public in its AOR informed on the progress of operations inside and outside the battlefield. The Division’s information operatives maintained four radio programs in Cagayan de Oro, iligan City and Malaybalay City. Their PSYOPS and public information responsibilities included participating in interviews in local TV and radio programs. Toward the homestretch of the campaign, The Division Commander and other key officers provided daily media updates on ongoing combat operations in Camp Abubakar.³

Much like CMO, information operations still needed to be more tightly harmonized between/among the operating Divisions/units and with those of GHQ for consistency of messaging and economy of effort at all levels. Moving forward, IO would have to be governed by an overarching strategy to be carried out by AFP/PA personnel with the requisite expertise and training. This would make it easy to frame messaging within a narrative that projects the soldier as defender of the Filipino people, guardian of national sovereignty, and champion of the democratic way of life.
## AFP vs. BIAF: Head-to-Head in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Protagonists</th>
<th>Government Forces</th>
<th>Moro Islamic Liberation Front</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)</td>
<td>Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Approximately 65,000</td>
<td>15,690 (1999 estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Leadership</td>
<td>Gen. Angelo Reyes, Chief of Staff, AFP</td>
<td>Al Haj Murad, Chief of Staff Hashim Salamat, Commander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lt. Gen. Diomedio Villanueva, SOUTHCOM Commander</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Fighting Units</td>
<td>6th Infantry (Kampilan) Division (6ID), Philippine Army</td>
<td>1st Field Division, BIAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commander: Maj. Gen. Gregorio Camiling Jr.</td>
<td>– 9 brigades in the Davao Provinces, Cotabato, and portions of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peak troop strength: 29,444 (July 2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Infantry (Diamond) Division (4ID), Philippine Army</td>
<td>2nd Field Division, BIAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commander: BGen. Roy Cimatu</td>
<td>– 10 brigades in South Cotabato, Sarangani and portions of Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao and Cotabato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peak troop strength: 20,497 (July 2000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 PA Brigades (including 2 Engineer Bdes)</td>
<td>3rd Field Division, BIAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 PMC (Marine) Brigades</td>
<td>– 8 brigades in the Lanao provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 PA Battalions:</td>
<td>4th Field Division, BIAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 38 Infantry</td>
<td>– 3 brigades in Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte and Basilan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 Special Forces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 Scout Ranger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 Light Armor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 5 Artillery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 PMC (Marine) Battalions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Composite Tactical Groups (under 530CTW, Philippine Air Force)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>387 Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) companies, with 24,618 civilian volunteer fighters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>105 mm howitzers</td>
<td>60 mm mortar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106 mm recoiless rifles</td>
<td>81 mm mortar, AK47,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>155 mm howitzers</td>
<td>Cal 30 light machine gun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 mm light mortar</td>
<td>Cal 30 M1 Carbine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81 mm medium mortar</td>
<td>Cal 30 M1 Garand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90 mm recoiless rifles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Weapons | Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifles and night-vision goggles  
M-1 Carbines (CAFGU)  
M-14 (some converted to sniper rifles)  
M-16 carbine version (Colt Commando)  
M-16A1 assault rifles  
M-16A2 assault rifles (PMC)  
M-60 7.62 mm machine guns  
M-60E3 (SF)  
M1 Garand rifles (CAFGU) | Cal 38 revolver  
Cal 45, BAR  
Cal 50 HMG, FN FAL assault rifle  
M14 Cal 7.62 rifle  
M16 Cal 5.56 rifle  
M203 GL  
M60 LMG, RPG launcher  
M79 grenade launcher |
| Mobility & Armor Assets | M-113 tracked armored personnel carrier  
Simba APCs  
V-150 Commando armored personnel carriers (APCs)  
V-300 APCs  
PN transport vessels: sealift of troops and materiel |
| Air Assets | 6 OV-10A Light Attack Aircraft  
4 F-5A Jet Fighters  
1 Nomad Light Utility Transport  
3 C-130 Medium Lift Transports  
10 MG-520 Light Attack Helicopters  
9 UH-1H General Purpose Helicopters |
| Military facilities | 6ID Headquarters – Camp Gonzalo Siongco, Maguindanao  
4ID Headquarters – Camp Edilberto Evangelista, Cagayan de Oro City |

Encampments:  
- 16 in Maguindanao  
- 9 in Lanao del Sur  
- 6 in Sarangani  
- 4 in Davao del Norte  
- 2 in Davao Oriental  
- 2 in Lanao del Norte  
- 2 in North Cotabato  
- 2 in South Cotabato  
- 1 in Zamboanga del Sur  
- 1 in Sultan Kudarat  

[The AFP had estimates of BIAF troop strength in 26 of 45 camps claimed.]  

Munitions manufacturing and repair facility in Camp Abubakar  
Abdulrahman Bedis Memorial Military Academy and Training Center  
Network of trenches astride Narciso Ramos Highway
Moving forward from the lessons learned during and after the cessation of hostilities in the Central Mindanao campaign, the Philippine Army and the other major services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines made fundamental changes in the manner by which the various aspects of military operations should be conducted. Specifically, potential/actual interventions are laid out and assessed in the areas of Doctrine, Organization, Training, Leadership, Personnel, Materiel, Facilities and Policy (DOTLPMFP).

**DOCTRINE**

The Central Mindanao campaign forced government troops to confront an enemy that dared to challenge their competency in semi-conventional warfare. Since much of AFP/PA doctrine has been shaped by the demands of guerrilla warfare in counter-insurgency operations, it is to be expected that the aftermath of the Central Mindanao campaign would yield fresh insights on doctrinal gaps that need to be addressed. The following courses of action were recommended immediately after the campaign:

- Prior to any major operation, the Area Command concerned should prepare adequately detailed operational and tactical guidance to the operating Divisions.
- Provide clear guidelines governing the utilization of specialized units like Scout Rangers, Special Forces, and Recon units to maximize their expertise in reconnaissance, security operations, and non-conventional warfare. In major offensive operations that calls for

---

* Analytical insights have been drawn mainly from the following sources:

1. AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001. [AoS]
2. GHQ Augmentation Cell Report (SOUTHCOM) to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 10 July 2000. (LO#496)
3. GHQ Augmentation Cell 3 – 4ID, PA, The Fall of Abubakar, the 4th Infantry Division Story: A Documentary and an Analysis, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 26 July 2000 [FoA-4]
6. Interview with Secretary Roy Cimatu, NAMRIA, 16 Nov 2018 [Cim]
7. Interview with Philip Fortuno, PhD, ORC, 14 Nov 2018 [For]
8. Mario F Chan, GRP-MILF Peace Process, MPA paper, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 27 May 2005. [Chan]
a conventional mode, such units should only be tasked to locate
the enemy, test their capability and draw them into the open to be
decisively engaged by the regular or mechanized infantry.\(^5\)

- Require the designated Operation Reserve to prepare submit
deployment plans in the event of activation in the campaign.\(^2\)

- Modify doctrines relating to operational collaboration between
Mechanized Army units and Infantry, such that “Infantry protects the
armor, the armor protects the infantry.” \(^6\)
  - This has been formalized with the creation of Mechanized
    Infantry Battalions.
  - In tactical operation maneuvers, foot troops should provide front
    and flank security for at least 50-100 meters forward or abreast
    to support armored vehicles.

- Develop doctrine governing employment of snipers in major combat
operations.\(^5\)

- Direct the mandatory conduct of “wargaming” among operating
units from the Area Command down to Company level in order for
these units to arrive at a reasonably accurate outcome of planned
operations.\(^5\)

- Doctrines governing rear operations need to be revised to conform
with present realities. (For example, in many instances, the same
air assets used to deliver CAS to operating troops were also used
in MEDEVAC missions. Likewise, the operating troops are the ones
evacuating the WIA all the way to the EVAC POINT.) \(^4\)

- There is need for a more detailed and practicable system of rotating
units in and out of the more critical zones. The practice of simply
designating a unit as an operation reserve is not sufficient.\(^2\)

- TSG should look into the possibility of classifying wounded personnel
into Minor A (wounded personnel who could be returned to combat
duty in 15 days or less), Minor B (personnel who suffered wounds that
are not major in nature but will require more that 15 days before they
could be returned to combat duty) and Major Wounds.\(^4\)

- Initiate plans, programs, projects and studies to improve the inter-
operability of communication facilities of all AFP units\(^3\)
ORGANIZATION

Much like doctrine, the AFP/PA organization also had to be revisited to assess whether or not structural adjustments needed to be made to enhance combat effectiveness of operating troops in a semi-conventional battlefield. A few such potential adjustments came to fore:

- Move towards the Brigade as the basic foundation for operations in semi-conventional warfare.4
- Combat Service Support (CSS) in operations of this type should be strengthened and receive emphasis during the planning phase of an operation.4
- Institutionalize concept of “combat trains” 3 or Forward Service Support Teams4, positioned just behind the operating units and closely coordinating with the ACP, to cater to the supply, maintenance and medical needs of the fighting troops.
- Deploy combat engineers to provide the necessary support—e.g., in terms of obstacle and mine clearing—to maximize troop mobility and freedom of action with which to sustain the momentum of the attack.5
- Infuse organic combat engineer teams in mechanized infantry companies (MICs), especially if the troops are assaulting enemy defensive positions.4
- Formalize PAF structural readiness and protocol in relation to calls for fire support during live operations.7
- Organize augmentation teams of military doctors to include ambulances from other AFP Station Hospitals to complement military doctors in the area of operations.3
- CRSAFP should establish field offices in the area and help orchestrate the rehabilitation phase of the conflict.3

TRAINING

There is general consensus that training is a key area of intervention to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency of the troops. If there is one thing that the Central Mindanao campaign highlighted, it is the fact that Filipino soldiers are very well-trained and this confirmed the truism that excellent training can compensate for inadequate or substandard materiel7 and, in a related vein, that teamwork is paramount in expansive battle arenas demanding synchronized combined arms operations.6

- With snipers surfacing as a key component in offensive deployments,
there is need to emphasize and upgrade marksmanship training to include 200-meter targets.4

- Vigorous conduct of basic and advanced Air to Ground Operations seminars, to include briefings on the precise capabilities and limitations of air assets7

- Landmine warfare training, with emphasis on disarming explosives4

- Intensive Balikatan-type, battalion-level combined arms training, with emphasis on mechanized infantry operations6

- Training modules on communications security – During the Central Mindanao campaign, HSOUTHCOM issued a directive for stricter observance of communications security protocols, as certain concerned civilians reported that almost all tactical communications were monitored by civilian radio operators and could easily have been intercepted by the enemy.2

- Administrative and basic skills training for Area Command staff/personnel2

- Advanced skills training for NCOs, e.g., map-reading, debriefing7

- Fundamental orientations and formation sessions on human rights and the importance of respecting the culture and basic humanity of communities, particularly those suspected of being sympathetic to the enemy cause.7

**LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION**

While the field commanders displayed exemplary leadership throughout the campaign, there were operational areas that required deeper appreciation on their part. Most of these had to do with non-lethal aspects of warfighting, which at the time, had not yet been fully integrated in AFP/PA strategic thinking.

- Since semi-conventional warfare often required putting together task groups, consisting of operating units from other branches of service, it is imperative that top-level commanders be honed more purposively in the theory and practice of Combined Arms operations. This would include sensitivity sessions on the dynamics of multi-service interaction on and off the battlefield, such that the soldiers’ internal propensity to compete with those from another branch of service would be supplanted by a culture of genuine camaraderie and a sense of common purpose.

- High-level leadership sessions and advanced schooling modules that would inculcate the appreciation and integration of civil-military operations, information operations, and other non-lethal warfighting
functions in overall strategy formulation and implementation.

PERSONNEL

Based on the analysis, the most glaring concern in terms of personnel surfaced in SOUTHCOM, which turned out to be severely understaffed to carry out their functions efficiently. For lack of proper processing and transmittal of specific strategic Area Command guidance, many operational decisions had to be made and carried out at the Division level straightaway.

- Need for qualified staff to handle administrative work in Area Commands
- In carrying out the personnel rotation and personnel leveling policies, the replacement aspect of these policies should be given equal attention and emphasis as the reassignment of overstaying personnel so as to avoid being understaffed, especially Area Commands.
- Need for SIGINT operatives or interpreters with a working knowledge of Muslim dialects.
- Give requisite attention/weight to character of soldier recruits as a way of raising the quality of the overall culture of the AFP/PA in the service of the Filipino people.
- Recruit technical staff with the expertise to track the flow of funds and communications from foreign and local entities in support of local insurgent or terrorist groups.
- Designate an Air Liaison Officer to oversee and coordinate air support to combat operations.

MATERIEL

As always, gaps in materiel surfaced among the most urgent concerns that needed to be addressed. Some of the materiel issues encountered during the campaign could have seriously jeopardized the performance of certain aspects of the mission.

- PAF air support was seriously limited during the entire Central Mindanao campaign period. Only four jets— all of them outdated F-5s—were actually used to support the troops. The problem was compounded the obsolescence of most 530CTW air assets. Except for the MG-520s, the airframes of the assets used were more than 20 years old; no upgrading and improvements were done to these units in terms of systems and structures. Clearly, the PAF deserved its fair share of new materiel acquisitions as part of the AFP Modernization
• The AFP/PAF should also prioritize the acquisition of helicopters with night evacuation capabilities. Quite a number of government casualties expired because MEDEVAC teams had to wait for the following morning to pick them up near the battle site.  
• In the acquisition of armor assets, priority should be given to assets like the V-300 and the Scorpion tank which can provide direct fire support to attacking troops.
• The AFP/PA should also acquire additional flatbeds and prime movers to transport AVs and 155mm howitzers. During the Central Mindanao campaign, the 6ID could pool only three flatbeds at any one time, which proved insufficient to cater to the operational needs of its six OPCON brigades. It is also vital to have reserves in the event that some of these flatbeds become unserviceable and their spare parts become scarce.
• Address mission-threatening materiel defects that should not be difficult to address. For example:
  o Almost 50% of the 12 Simba Fighting Vehicles directly involved in OPLAN ARIES had defective radios, hampering communication between infantry and armor elements. was greatly affected.
  o Most of the M203 grenade launchers and M16 rifle barrels issued to the operating troops were old and defective.
  o Incompatibility in the use of GPS vis-à-vis the map and compass of the operating troops created some degree of error in the delivery of artillery fire.
  o Recharging lithium batteries that came with the issued radios to the operating troops were problematic for lack of AC outlets.
  o The perennial problem in communication equipment affected the Bde TCPs in monitoring their maneuvering troops. At least one radio should have been dedicated per battalion in the TCP to fully monitor the troop’s movements.
  o The lack of issuance of collapsible/squad tents to the firing batteries of the FABs hampered deployment of firebases.
• The AFP should consider shifting to light anti-tank weapons (LAWs) or equivalent rocket launchers in Army/Marine modernization plans. The AFP’s heavy and bulky 90mm and 57mm RRs put government troops at a disadvantage in maneuvering against an enemy that used and manufactured less cumbersome B40 rocket launchers.
• Since regular MOE received by armor units is not sufficient to support
maintenance, a commercial support program can be considered to immediately address the procurement of spare parts available in the local market and the repair of AVs in local repair shops.\textsuperscript{3}

- Standardize or align procurement of armored vehicles of the AFP, such that they would have common spare parts for economical and efficient maintenance.\textsuperscript{3}

- Equip the troops with light, portable and reliable radios to facilitate battlefield communications. Equipment such as the GP-88, a commercial handheld radio that modulates via UHF and transmits pre-programmed channels and has a low susceptibility rate to enemy interception, should have been considered at the time.\textsuperscript{4}

- The use of Kevlar helmets and vests should be mandatory in light of the growing danger of exposure to enemy sniper fire and RPG shrapnel in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{4}

- Research and Development Center to study the proposal of providing a “curtain-like chain curtain” or metallic frame to be employed to protect AVs from enemy anti-armor weapons.\textsuperscript{3}

**FACILITIES**

Semi-conventional warfare obviously requires more permanent facilities of a scale that can accommodate regular joint training among units from different branches of the AFP, as well as the massive materiel, such as armor assets and aircraft, that may be required.

- The development of expansive facilities in Fort Magsaysay, for example, for wargaming with focus on combined arms operations, should be considered.

**POLICY**

The realm of policy is outside the purview of the AFP/PA, even as the latter can and should definitely provide vital input to the shaping of national policy with respect to the peace process and to addressing the root causes of insurgency and secessionism. It should be noted that President Estrada was impeached and deposed barely six months after declaring victory at Camp Abubakar, raising questions about continuity of national security policy. In addition, the emergence of high-profile international Islamist extremism and terrorism, starting with the horrific 11 September 2001 attack in New York City and the Pentagon added a layer of complexity to the manner by which secessionist
groups with links to these Islamist extremists should be dealt with.

- When President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (PGMA) assumed the presidency in January 2001, she issued Executive Order No. 3, which reiterated the peace agenda of the Ramos Administration. The EO also integrated the different peace mechanisms under the Office of the President, specifically the Office of the Executive Secretary, under the supervision of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).8

- The first part of PGMA’s policies relating to the GRP-MILF Peace Process covered the period 2001-2004 during her completion of President Estrada’s term after he was impeached and deposed for irregularities. The main policy is focused on national unity and foreign policy which is harnessing good governance through international collective action. The 2001-2004 Policy Framework embodied the following:8
  
o  Peace and development cannot be achieved independently. The government is committed to pursue both with equal vigor in order to attain political and socioeconomic stability as well as cultural harmony in Mindanao, in conformity with the rule of law and in accordance with constitutional processes. Thus, as government pursues the development of Mindanao, it will also forge peace with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) without compromising the country’s national integrity. The government shall also pursue a military response to the banditry and criminal acts of the Abu Sayyaf although socioeconomic development shall also proceed in the areas affected by hostilities with this group.

o  The Philippines would enhance strategic RP-US relations in a way that is responsive to the new realities of globalization and the conjunction of democracy and the market. Despite the domestic problems that it sometimes causes, military alliance and security cooperation with the US is a strategic asset for the Philippines.

o  The Islamic community of nations is extremely important in the search for lasting peace and broad-based development in the Southern Philippines. The government hopes to form stronger bilateral relationships with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, Libya, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Turkey, as well as the OIC Secretariat. In this endeavor, relations must be broadened beyond overseas worker-related issues.
• The second part of PGMA’s policies relating to the GRP-MILF Peace Process is articulated in the 2004-2010 Policy Framework which states, among others: 
  o Peacemaking and peacekeeping component aims to end all insurgency-related conflicts through peaceful negotiations and to immediately reduce the level of violence in conflict affected areas through local and civil society-led peace initiatives.
  o Peace building and Conflict Prevention component aims to eliminate sources of grievance, transform conflict affected communities into peace and development areas, and heal the social wounds that was brought about by the long drawn internal armed conflict. This shall constitute the streamlined and enhanced Mindanao National Initiatives (MINDANAO NATIN).
  o To sustain the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), observance of the ceasefire by both parties will be ensured. The DND and the AFP will assist the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in the formulation of provisions that will safeguard the cessation of hostilities. However, to achieve complete and lasting peace, support by the DND and the AFP to the social development initiatives of government designed to address the root causes of insurgency must be coupled with enhanced capability of the AFP to fulfill its basic mission.

• Following the 9/11 attack on the United States and the uptick in terrorist activities in many parts of the world, the policy framework encompassed the emergence of terrorism as a threat to national security. 
  o Events in the Southern Philippines and throughout the region have highlighted that the threat of terrorism is a real and serious concern for the country and that it should be effectively addressed. In this regard, the AFP is committed to continue its surveillance of - and operations against - terrorist groups and deny them sanctuaries, training grounds or bases of operation. Support for the upgrade in the capability of the AFP is a key in the success of its missions in this respect.
  o The AFP has since participated in the global fight against terrorism. Additional counter-terrorist units have been created and trained.
  o Improving intelligence fusion among the DND, AFP and other government agencies which form part of the intelligence community as well as establishing linkages and stronger ties with our neighbors in the region will facilitate the exchange of
information and technology, and contribute to the capability of the AFP to deal with the terrorist threat.

- The passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law and the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) 18 years after the fall of Abubakar, rekindles hope that a peaceful solution to the age-old conflict region is finally at hand and that the aspiration of Filipino Muslims for self-determination would finally find fulfillment. A successful BARMM, paving the way for a prosperous Mindanao, is the only way to ensure a lasting peace.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abatis</td>
<td>Defensive Obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>Advance Command Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEW</td>
<td>Aviation Engineering Wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFP</td>
<td>Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPETC</td>
<td>AFP Engineer Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO</td>
<td>Area of Operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOR</td>
<td>Area of Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arty</td>
<td>Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASBN</td>
<td>Army Signal Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVAAV</td>
<td>Armor Vehicle/Amphibious Armor Vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (or Bn)</td>
<td>Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bde</td>
<td>(Infantry) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Btry</td>
<td>Battery (used by FA units, equivalent to Infantry Company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSA</td>
<td>Brigade Support Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2/C3</td>
<td>Command-Control/-Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAA</td>
<td>CAFGU Armed Auxiliary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFGU</td>
<td>Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Close Air Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>Commanding General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGPA</td>
<td>Commanding General, Philippine Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>Civil Military Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Commanding Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co</td>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSAFP</td>
<td>Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRSAFP</td>
<td>Civil Relations Service, Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPP/NPA</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Philippines/New People’s Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS</td>
<td>Combat Service Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTG/CTW</td>
<td>Composite Tactical Group/Wing, Philippine Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DND</td>
<td>Department of National Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBde</td>
<td>Engineering Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOD</td>
<td>Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EODT = EOD Team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Enlisted Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAB</td>
<td>Field Artillery Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDC</td>
<td>Fire Direction Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Forward Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAG-O</td>
<td>Fragmentary Order, which carries timely changes to an existing order that are sent to subordinate and supporting commanders with due notification to higher and adjacent commands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>Grid Coordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>General Headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRP</td>
<td>Government of the Republic of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>Grid Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HGL</td>
<td>Horizontal Grid Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HQ/H</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMINT</td>
<td>Human Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Infantry Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Infantry Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMINT</td>
<td>Image Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLAN</td>
<td>Implementing Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO</td>
<td>Information Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAFP</td>
<td>Intelligence Service, Armed Forces of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>Killed in Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAB/LABde</td>
<td>Light Armor Battalion/Light Armor Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Light Armor Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Line of Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCM</td>
<td>Local Communist Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Line of Departure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBde</td>
<td>Marine Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBLT</td>
<td>Marine Battalion Landing Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDEVAC</td>
<td>Medical Evacuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIB</td>
<td>Military Intelligence Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC</td>
<td>Mechanized Infantry Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Main Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICO</td>
<td>Military Intelligence Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID/MIBn</td>
<td>Mechanized Infantry Division/Mechanized Infantry Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSR</td>
<td>Main Supply Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAVFORSOUTH</td>
<td>Naval Forces South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-commissioned Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBde</td>
<td>Naval Construction Brigade (also known as Seabees)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOLCOM  Northern Luzon Command
NVG   Night-vision Goggles
OBJ   Objective
OPCON  Operational Control
OPLAN  Operations Plan
OTCE   Office of the Chief of Engineers
PA    Philippine Army
PAF   Philippine Air Force
PL    Phase Line
Pltn  Platoon
PMC   Philippine Marine Corps
PN    Philippine Navy
PPMG  Provincial Police Mobile Groups
PPO/PRO Police Provincial/Regional Office
PSYOPS Psychological Operations
R     Regiment
SE    Support Effort
SFC/SFB Special Forces Company/ Special Forces Battalion
SIGINT Signal Intelligence
SSB   Service Support Battalion
SND   Secretary of National Defense
SOCOM Special Operation Command
SOLCOM Southern Luzon Command
SOUTHCOM Southern Command
(SOUTHCOM = Headquarters, Southern Command)
SPSG  Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups
Sqd   Squad
SRC/SRB Scout Ranger Company/Scout Ranger Battalion
TCP   Tactical Command Post
TF    Task Force
Tm    Team
VGL   Vertical Grid Line
VISCOM Visayas Command
WIA   Wounded in Action
ZAMBAST Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi
(+    Reinforced
(-    Reduced

Note on numerical abbreviations: 1st Infantry Battalion = 1IB;
603rd Infantry Brigade = 603Bde, etc.

208
MILITARY RANKS

Gen.       General
Lt. Gen.     Lieutenant General
Maj. Gen.    Major General
BGen.       Brigadier General
Col.        Colonel
Lt. Col.     Lieutenant Colonel
Maj.        Major
Cpt.        (Army) Captain
            [Note: Navy Captain = Capt.]
Lt.         Lieutenant
1Lt.        First Lieutenant
2Lt.        Second Lieutenant
Sgt.        Sergeant
Cpl.        Corporal

MILITARY PHONETIC ALPHABET

A     Alfa (or Alpha)   M     Mama
B     Bravo              N     November
      e.g., “B” Co = Bravo Company
C     Charlie            O     Oscar
      e.g., TF “C” = Task Force Charlie
D     Delta              P     Papa
      e.g., Obj. “D” = Objective Delta
E     Echo
F     Foxtrot
G     Golf
H     Hotel
I     India
J     Juliet
K     Kilo
L     Lima
M     Mama
N     November
O     Oscar
P     Papa
Q     Quebec
R     Romeo
S     Sierra
T     Tango
U     Uniform
V     Victor
W     Whiskey
X     X-ray
Y     Yankee
Z     Zulu
## MILITARY TIME FORMATT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12:00am</th>
<th>0000H</th>
<th>12:00pm</th>
<th>1200H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01:00am</td>
<td>0100H</td>
<td>01:00pm</td>
<td>1300H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02:00am</td>
<td>0200H</td>
<td>02:00pm</td>
<td>1400H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03:00am</td>
<td>0300H</td>
<td>03:00pm</td>
<td>1500H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04:00am</td>
<td>0400H</td>
<td>04:00pm</td>
<td>1600H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05:00am</td>
<td>0500H</td>
<td>05:00pm</td>
<td>1700H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06:00am</td>
<td>0600H</td>
<td>06:00pm</td>
<td>1800H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07:00am</td>
<td>0700H</td>
<td>07:00pm</td>
<td>1900H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08:00am</td>
<td>0800H</td>
<td>08:00pm</td>
<td>2000H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09:00am</td>
<td>0900H</td>
<td>09:00pm</td>
<td>2100H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00am</td>
<td>1000H</td>
<td>10:00pm</td>
<td>2200H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>1100H</td>
<td>11:00pm</td>
<td>2300H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### COMMANDERS OF THE CAMPAIGN

#### UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GHQ</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Staff, AFP</td>
<td>Gen. Angelo T. Reyes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Chief of Staff, AFP</td>
<td>Lt. Gen. Jose M. Calimlim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDCS, AFP</td>
<td>RAdm. Napoleon C. Baylon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOUTHCOM</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>Maj. Gen. Diomedia P. Villanueva</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Comdr</td>
<td>BGen. Alberto F. Braganza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1ID</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4ID</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td>BGen. Roy A. Cimatu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>402Bde</td>
<td>Col. Samuel B. Bagasin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9IB</td>
<td>Lt. Col. Augusto L. Tolentino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26IB</td>
<td>Lt. Col. Eduardo L. Precioso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28IB</td>
<td>Lt. Col. Gregorio T. Catapang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30IB</td>
<td>Lt. Col. Salvador P. Pegalan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF DIAMOND III</td>
<td>Col. Felipe A. Berroya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78IB</td>
<td>Maj. Roberto D. Domines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36IB</td>
<td>Col. Raynard Ronnie Y. Javier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58IB</td>
<td>Lt. Col. Benito Antonio T. De Leon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6ID</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>BGen. Proceso T. Torrelavega</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BGen. Roy V. Kyamko</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGB</td>
<td>Maj. Timoteo D. Tumlos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIVARTY</td>
<td>Maj. Manuel Luis M. Ochotorena</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maj. Hector D. Samante</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

211
601Bde     Col. Delfin N. Lorenzana
            25IB   Maj. Lauro I. Rivera
                   Maj. Glorioso V. Miranda
            27IB   Lt. Col. Demetrio M. Dispo
            37IB   Lt. Col. Ernesto V. Tobias
            38IB   Maj. Avelino G. Herrera
            39IB   Maj. Martin M. Jubas
            47IB   Lt. Col. Jose S. Cruz
            57IB   Maj. Medardo P. Geslani
            64IB   Maj. Jaime P. Alindayo
                   Maj. Manuel Luis M. Ochotorena
            75IB   Lt. Col. Loreto G. Rirao
602Bde     Col. Ernesto F. Lumang
503Bde     Col. Raul D. Relano

7ID
      56IB   Maj. Francisco M. Patrimonio
      77IB   Lt. Col. Francisco N. Occena

8ID
     802Bde     BGen. Nagamora P. Lomodag
            52IB   Maj. Rex R. Cinco
            63IB   Lt. Col. Felix Y. Espera

     4SRB   Maj. Norman Oliver E. Febiar
    2LAB, LABDe  Maj. Allan F. Martin
    2SRB, FSRR  Lt. Col. Noel A. Coballes
    2SFB, SOCOM Maj. Agapito G. Nagrampa

     1MBDe
          BGen. Emmanuel R. Teodosio
                   Col. Teofilo V. Delos Santos, Jr.
             MBLT1  Lt. Col. Ariel O. Querubin
             MBLT4  Maj. Benjamin B. Asidao
             NBLT10  Maj. Bajunaib T. Abid

2MBDe
       Commander   Col. Renato P. Miranda
          MBLT3  Maj. Luisito B. Marcelino
          MBLT5  Lt. Col. Johnny C. Mangubat
3MBDe

Commander BGen. Orlando G. Buenaventura
MBLT2 Maj. Rustico O. Guerrero
     Maj. Adelo B. Andayan
MBLT6 Maj. Romeo C. Dumaquita
MBLT7 Lt. Col. Rodito S. Garupa
MBLT9 Maj. Rogelio L. Genoring

PAF Units

Tactical Opns Comd
CG Maj. Gen. Benjamin P. Defensor, Jr
Deputy Comdr Col. Arcadio L. Seron

530CTW

Commander BGen. Nemesio Sigaya
Deputy Comdr Col. Celso G. Castro
     Col. Segundo F. Dimapilis

10CTG Lt. Col. Esteban A. Castro
11CTG Col. Norberto Panganiban
12CTG Col. Raymundo S. Ortezo

560CTW

CO Col. Lauro Ello
Deputy Col. Emmanuel M. Jimenez

PN Units

NAVFORSOUTH

Commander Commo. Eionor Padre
Deputy Capt. Antonieto Ferrer

TF51 Capt. Arthur O. Alviar
TF61 Capt. Gerardo Defensor
TF71 Capt. Salvador Esguerra
Books

“An Anatomy of Philippine Muslim Affairs,” (Study in depth on Muslim affairs in the Philippines conducted under the auspices of Filipinas Foundation, Inc., February 1971).


Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms


Obaniana, Rodolfo S. Philippine Army: the First 100 Years. (1997).


Monographs
Islam in the Philippines (Mindanao Studies Reports, No 3). Quezon City: Center for Investigative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1995.


Samuel Tan, The Socioeconomic Dimension of Moro Secessionism (Mindanao Studies Reports No 1). Quezon City: Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, 1995.

Yoshihara, Toshi. “Philippines” in Derek S. Reveron and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer (eds), Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism, Arlington: Routlege, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.

Journals and Newspapers


Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 11, 2000
The Philippine Star, June 1, 2000.

**Internet Materials**

http: www.philippine.org


Muslim, Macapado. “Sustaining the Constituency for Moro Autonomy” Accord: An International Review for Peace Initiatives found at http:www.c-r.org/acc_min.

**Government Documents**

“A poverty-free Philippines” (State of the Nation Address of President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, 26 July 1999).

“Towards New Beginnings” (State of the Nation Address of President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, July 24, 2000).

AFP Campaign Plan 01-2000 Balangai General Headquarters, AFP Camp Aguinaldo. 28 January 2000

Letter of Instruction 15/97 (Pisces-Alpha), A Contingency Plan Against the Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups, March 1, 1997.

National Peace and Development Plan

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2, “Causes and Dynamics of the Mindanao Conflict” (July 2000).

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2, “Threat Estimate on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front” (June 8, 1997).

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J2, “Chronology of Agreement of General Cessation of Hostilities Violations”, (June 2000).

OPLAN Balangai

Records of the Department of Social Welfare and Development of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.


Report of the 530th Composite Tactical Wing’s Role in the AFP Drive Against the MILF (Edwin Andrews Air Base, Zamboanga City Headquarters, 530th Composite Tactical Wing, October 3, 2000).

Reports from the Civil Relations Service, Armed Forces of the Philippines.

SOUTHCOM Augmentation Cell findings

Speech of the Secretary of National Defense During the Budget Hearing at the House of Representatives, August 14, 2000.

Other Unpublished Documents

AFP Research and Writing Groups (Team 1 and Team 2), Assertion of Sovereignty, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2001

Chan, Mario F. GRP-MILF Peace Process, MPA paper, Notre Dame University, Cotabato City, 27 May 2005.

GHQ Augmentation Cell Report (SOUTHCOM) to the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, J3, 10 July 2000.

Lingga, Abhoud Syed Mansur “The Political Thoughts of Hashim Salamat” (Unpublished thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, 1995).

“Primer on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front” (Printed by Committee on Information, Central Committee, Moro Islamic Liberation Front, 10 Nov 1996).


Interviews

Gen. Diomedio P. Villanueva, AFP GHQ, 2000
Secretary Roy A. Cimatu, NAMRIA, November 16, 2018
Maj. Gen. Mario F. Chan, NAMRIA, November 16, 2018
Lt. Col. Amadeo Azul, Chief, War Plans Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, J5, November 930-5508, 2000
Lt. Col. Nestor P. Deona, Assistant Chief, Office of Strategic & Special Studies, GHQ AFP, October 20, 2000
Maj. Milner F. Dela Cruz, Chief Policy Research Division, Office of Strategic and Special Studies, October 20, 2000
Cpt. Silvestre U. Glinoga, PAF OV-10A pilot, October 27, 2000
Philip R. Fortuno, PhD, ORCPA, November 14, 2018
Selected officers and men of the 1MBde and 3MBde conducted at the PMC Headquarters, Fort Bonifacio, October 26, 2000
Due acknowledgement is given to the writers and researchers, as well as their respective superiors and advisers, from the Department of the National Defense, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine Army, The Philippine Marine Corps/Philippine Navy, and the Philippine Air Force for their rigorous efforts to document the planning and conduct of operations for the 2000 Central Mindanao campaign vs. the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, as well as the pertinent historical and contextual background and the lessons learned from the milestone event. Their unpublished works are cited in the References section of this book.

Additional credit is given to Secretary Cimatu, along with Brig. Gen Gavin D. Edjawan for generously lending photographs that enhanced the visual quality of the book.
he meat of this “retrospective” study dwells on the conduct of the “All-out War” vs. the MILF in 2000, with a sharper focus on Army operations. Nevertheless, military strategists, reading between the lines, have much to infer by way of appreciating nuances in the fluid dynamics between political and military decision-making.

In the end, we go back to the reality that military strategy is but part of a broader political and national strategy. In the case of the campaign to reclaim Central Mindanao in 2000 (and other internal conflicts like it), the value of victory in war tends to diminish if it does not significantly advance the prospects of winning the peace over the long term.

Lt Gen. Macairog S. Alberto
Commanding General, Philippine Army