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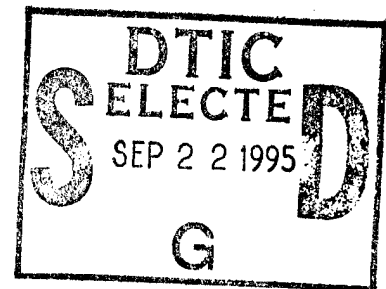


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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA



THESIS

THE MUSLIM SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN
THE PHILIPPINES: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

by

Ruben G. Domingo

June 1995

Principal Advisor : Thomas C. Bruneau

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THE MUSLIM SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES: ISSUES AND
PROSPECTS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of


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ABSTRACT

The Muslim Secessionist Movement in Southern Philippines was for a time the most serious threat to the stability of the country. It had its beginnings in the late 1960s with the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement. In the 1970s, the Moro National Liberation Front emerged as the lead secessionist organization. Through its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army, the MNLF waged a furious war against central authority. The objective of the MNLF is to establish a separate state comprising the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan.

The hostilities reached its peak in the mid 70s when the MNLF received foreign support from Libya and Sabah. The Marcos administration used a combination of military, socioeconomic development and diplomatic means to try to resolve the Muslim problem. Through the intercession of the Organization of Islamic Conference, peace negotiations between the government and the MNLF resulted in the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976. A divergent interpretation of the autonomy issue caused a breakdown in negotiations and a resumption of hostilities. Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency after the February 1986 revolution. Her meeting with Nur Misuari, the MNLF Chairman, resulted in a ceasefire agreement in 1986. The peace negotiations however broke down because of rigid stand on both sides on the autonomy issue.

The secessionist issue continues to be a daunting problem of the government in the 1990s. The government of President Ramos renewed peace negotiations with the MNLF. Spearheading the government reconciliation effort is the National Unification Commission. This thesis will examine the issues and prospects of the Secessionist Movement in Southern Philippines in light of the developments in the country and in the international scene.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	5
A. THE MUSLIM FILIPINOS	5
1. Ethnic Groupings	5
2. Introduction of Islam	6
B. THE SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD (1521-1898)	7
1. The Moro Wars	7
2. Revolution of 1896	11
3. The Spanish American War	12
C. THE AMERICAN COLONIAL PERIOD (1898-1946)	14
1. The Bates Treaty	14
2. Thrust of American Colonial Administration	16
3. The Carpenter Agreement	17
4. Land Policy	18
5. Muslim demand for exclusion from the Philippines	18
D. JAPANESE OCCUPATION PERIOD (1941-1945)	20
E. POST WORLD WAR II PERIOD (1945-1972)	20
1. The Sabah Claim	22
2. The Jabitah Incident	24
3. The Muslim Independence Movement	24
4. Shooting War started in South Cotabato	26
5. Declaration of Martial Law	29
III. THE MUSLIM SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT	33
A. THE RISE OF STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE 1960s	34
B. THE RESURGENCE OF ISLAM	34

C.	BIRTH OF THE MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT	36
D.	FOREIGN SUPPORT TO THE REBELS	37
E.	MNLF LEADERSHIP	40
F.	THE DOMESTIC FRONT	41
1.	The Grand Design to Independence	42
G.	THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT	44
IV.	THE GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER SECESSIONIST EFFORT	47
A.	THE MARCOS REGIME	47
1.	Military Action	47
a.	Campaign to reestablish control in Cotabato	47
b.	The MNLF Diversionary Action in Davao	49
c.	Military Operations Against Datu Guiwan	50
d.	The Tran Operations	50
e.	Other Central Mindanao Operations	51
f.	The Attack on Jolo	52
g.	Balabagan Operation	52
h.	Cotabato Offensive	53
2.	Diplomatic Offensive	53
3.	Socioeconomic development	56
4.	Moves to Discredit the MNLF	57
5.	Policy toward the Muslim's clamor for greater autonomy	58
6.	Initial Peace Negotiations	58
7.	The Tripoli Agreement	59
8.	Government action to Implement the Tripoli Agreement	62
9.	Resumption of Hostilities	66
10.	Organizing the Regional Assemblies	68
11.	Rift in the secessionist movement	69
a.	Moro Reform Liberation Movement (MRLM)	69

b. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front	71
c. Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO)	72
d. MNLF-Reformist Group	73
B. THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT CORAZON AQUINO (1986-	
1992)	74
1. The Aquino-Misuari Meeting	75
2. The Jeddah Accord	76
3. The 1987 Peace Talks	77
4. Developments After the 1987 Peace Talks	78
5. Dismissal of Dimasangcay Pundato as head of MNLF-RG	79
6. The Organic Act of 1989	80
C. THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT FIDEL RAMOS (1992-TO	
DATE)	81
1. Peace Negotiations	82
2. The Muslim Extremist Movement	83
V. HOW OTHER COUNTRIES RESOLVE PROBLEMS OF SEPARATISM	89
A. THE SEPARATIST PROBLEM IN SRI LANKA	91
1. Independence and the Emergence of Political Parties	91
2. Protest Actions Against the Government.	93
3. Government Policies Detrimental to Tamil Interests	94
4. Formation of Tamil Secessionist Movements	95
5. Communal Riots	96
6. Start of Peace Negotiations	96
7. Events that led to Indian Intervention	97
8. The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord	98
B. BANGLADESH CASE	101
1. The People of East Pakistan	101
2. The People of West Pakistan	102

3. Imbalance in East-West Pakistan Relations	102
4. The Awami League	104
5. The 1970 Elections	105
6. Rise of a Secessionist Movement	105
C. THE BURMA CASE	107
1. British Colonial Period	107
2. The Karen National Association	108
3. The Second World War	110
4. Bid for a Separate Karen State	111
5. Outbreak of Hostilities	111
6. Ne Win's Rise to Power	113
7. Support for the Rebellion	114
D. ASSESSMENT	115
VI. CONCLUSION	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY	123
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	129

I. INTRODUCTION

The Muslim Secessionist Movement in Southern Philippines in the mid 1970's was the most serious threat to the stability of the country. In the 1990's, it continues to be a daunting problem for the Philippine government. The main objective of the movement is to create a separate Muslim state, while at the very least, it aims for the formation of a Muslim autonomous government for the region comprising the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan.

Muslim unrest traces its roots far back to the coming of the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century. When the Spaniards established themselves in the Philippines, they converted the inhabitants to Christianity. This effectively rolled back the spread of Islam in the east. Catholic missionaries were successful in converting the people of Luzon and Visayas, however they failed to convert the inhabitants of Mindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, where the Islamic faith was firmly established. The Moros (as the Spaniards called them) resisted all attempts at conversion to Catholicism. They stick to their own culture, social customs, and political organizations under the rule of Datus and Sultans. Their whole orientation was toward their Muslim communities and their relatives and neighbors to the south and west, not northwards toward the center of the country. The Spaniards tried to subjugate the Moros for almost 300 years and it was not until 1878 that the Sultan of Sulu recognized the suzerainty of Spain. When the United States took over as colonizer in 1898, the Moros never formally accepted American rule. They staged several uprisings and ended up being separately administered.

Moros came into the same orbit as the rest of the country with the adoption of the 1935 Philippine Commonwealth Constitution. The Constitution provided for a single regime for the whole country. The Muslim leaders vainly petitioned Washington for separate treatment for they foresaw the dangers of a unified structure.

From 1936 onwards the pressure of penetration from the Christian north was upon the Muslims. As land-hungry Christian settlers poured into Mindanao in the 1950s and 1960s, communal tensions began to build up. Grievances so accumulated during the

1960's that Muslim leaders began thinking of ways to hold back Christian penetration. The Christian migration meant more than just the loss of land. Muslims feared more the threat of political subjugation and the possible extinction of their religion and way of life.

Following the rise of Muslim-Christian land disputes, Christian settlers formed militia's called Ilagas (Rats) to protect and expand their political influence in the south. Muslims answered in kind with the formation of Muslim armed groups, the Barracudas in Cotabato and the Blackshirts in the Lanao provinces. Soon after, armed clashes between the armed groups forced Christian and Muslim communities to flee from their homes. The Philippine armed forces tried to intervene between the warring groups but the Muslims misinterpreted their action as sympathetic to the Christians.

What followed was the formation of a separatist movement that seriously challenged the might of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in the 1970's. The secessionist and independence aspirations of the Filipino Muslims in Mindanao began to be strongly manifested in 1968. The resultant action was the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement, later named Mindanao Independence Movement. The Movement was a coalition of the traditional leaders and politicians and Marxist-inspired students and ideologues. Eventually the young Turks of the movement broke away from the old guards and formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the late 1960s. An MNLF led armed struggle in Southern Philippines began shortly after President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972 and peaked in the mid-1970s. After intense fighting, with no end in sight, both sides tried several approaches to end the fighting and find a way to resolve the problem.

The problem assumed international dimension when Libya began supplying arms to the Moro National Liberation Front. Sabah state in neighboring Malaysia, under Tun Mustapha, served as conduit for funds and arms from the Middle East. It also served as training ground and sanctuary for rebels and refugees. Fear of an oil boycott that might be imposed by the oil producing members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), forced the Philippine government to hold back on the use of military force and seek other means to find a lasting solution to the problem in the south.

Pressure from the OIC led the Philippine government and the MNLF to the negotiating table. In December 1976, the two sides reached an uneasy compromise in Tripoli, Libya. The Tripoli Agreement promised autonomy to thirteen southern provinces in Mindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. A cease-fire resulting from the agreement held for a while but volatile disagreements over the carrying out of terms under the agreement caused a resumption of hostilities.

There was a divergent interpretation of the Tripoli Agreement by the two parties. Nur Misuari, the MNLF chairman, interpreted the agreement as giving the Muslims a homeland free of Manila's control. It wanted prerogatives ranging from the symbolic (its own flag and official seal) to the highly substantive aspect of having its own military, judiciary and monetary system.

The Philippine government rejected Nur Misuari's interpretation of the intent of the agreement since it comprises a de facto secession. It also rejected Misuari's position that the government recognizes outright the MNLF as the governing body of the new Muslim homeland. The President maintained that any changes in the political structure in the Muslim region should be subject to ratification from the people.

After the Tripoli negotiations, President Marcos issued a decree requiring the holding of a referendum in the area. The MNLF boycotted the referendum, stressing that the Tripoli agreement did not include a provision for the holding of a referendum. Nonetheless the referendum passed and the voters rejected the formation of a single autonomous region and the right of the MNLF to approve the choice of Chief Minister for the proposed regional assembly. What emerged was a political structure that was to Manila's liking, two regional autonomous governments with little real authority.

Several developments in the 1980s resulted in a decline in violence in the south. Misuari chose to remain outside the Philippines and was virtually cut off from the main stream of the local rebel leadership. War weariness set in on the MNLF organization and coupled with factional infighting, resulted in the splintering of the organization. There was also a marked reduction in foreign assistance to the rebels.

In 1986, President Marcos was swept from power and replaced by Corazon Aquino, whose message of national reconciliation struck a resonant and hopeful note among the Muslims. The Aquino government, building upon contacts with Misuari forged during Marcos' rule, made overtures toward the MNLF to negotiate the future of the region. On September 1986, President Aquino met with Nur Misuari in Jolo. Subsequent talks stalled over the extent of the autonomous region and the means for creating it. The MNLF insisted on the granting of full autonomy to the islands of Mindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. On the other hand, the government wanted to limit the area to the provinces with Muslim majorities and only after the residents agreed in a plebiscite.

No significant progress on the peace negotiations occurred for the rest of President Aquino's tenure. When the reins of the government passed on to President Fidel V. Ramos in 1992, no clear solution to the Muslim problem was in sight.

The primary concern of the research is to discuss the issues that caused the secessionist movement in Southern Philippines, the rebel's strategy to create a separate state composed of the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan, and the strategy of the Philippine Government to resolve the Muslim Separatist Problem. Comparative analyses will be made with counter secessionist programs carried out in selected countries to assess the effectiveness of the government's approach in resolving the problem in Southern Philippines.

To provide the readers with a thorough understanding of the Muslim problem, Chapter II is a presentation of the historical perspective of events and conditions that led to the formation of the Secessionist Movement. Chapter III is a discussion of the strategy of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which provided the leadership for the Muslim secessionist movement in the Philippines. In Chapter IV, the discussion centers on the government's response to the problem. The counter secessionist efforts of selected countries and the comparative analysis are presented in Chapter V. The conclusion on the future of the secessionist movement in the Philippines is drawn from the counter secessionist scenarios analyzed in Chapters IV and V.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. THE MUSLIM FILIPINOS

The Muslim Filipinos, otherwise known as Moros, are the most significant minority in the otherwise homogeneous Philippine society. They represent roughly about 5 per cent of the total population of the country, numbering approximately five million. Except the ruling classes who have Arabic traces, the Moros are basically Malayan like the rest of the people in the Philippines.

1. Ethnic Groupings

The concentrations of Muslims are in the southern part of the country. Tribal descent and the place of domicile differentiate one group of Muslim from another. Maguindanaos are the Muslims who settled in Cotabato, starting from the Simuay Labangan area to Margosatubig. The Maranaos occupy the area around Lake Lanao, the northern coast of Iligan bay and the southern coasts of Lanao and Malabang. Agriculture is the primary means of livelihood of the Maguindanaos and Maranaos. The former practice wet-rice agriculture along the plains of the Cotabato River while the latter plant upland rice and corn. Iranons live in the region north of the Simuay River in Cotabato. The Yakans live in the Zamboanga area. They are also an upland rice people. Tausugs are the Muslims who live in the island of Sulu. Although they practice some agriculture, they rely mainly on fishing together with trading and piracy. Samals populate the rest of the islands of the Sulu archipelago, the province of Palawan and part of the provinces of Davao and Zamboanga del Sur. They concentrate almost entirely on agriculture. Bajaos are boat people and they rely mostly on the sea for a living, to a point where they seldom come ashore.¹

¹ Gowing, Peter, and McAmis, Robert., *The Muslim Filipinos*, Solidaridad Publishing House, Manila, 1974, p. 185.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, there were several sultanates of Maguindanaons, however only the sultanates of Maguindanao and Buayan were significant. The Tausugs under the Sultanate of Sulu claimed territorial domain over North Borneo, Palawan and the southern coast of Mindanao. In the Lanao area, there was extreme segmentation in the many sultanates of the Maranaos. Other Muslim groups like the Samals, Yakans and Badjaos had no independent political existence and were subject people.²

2. Introduction of Islam

Islam was introduced in the Philippines in 1380 when an Arabian scholar by the name of Mudum began preaching the doctrines of Mohammed in the island of Sulu. In 1390, a petty ruler of Menangkabaw, Sumatra by the name of Raja Baginda, arrived in Sulu and promptly converted some natives to Islam. Sayed Abu Bakr followed the example of Raja Baginda. He left Palembang around 1450, settled in Sulu and later married Baginda's daughter, Paramisuli. After Baginda's death, Abu Bakr established a government patterned after the Sultanate of Arabia. In the exercise of his powers as sultan, Islam spread rapidly to all parts of Sulu.³

The man responsible for introducing Islam in the island of Mindanao was Sherif Muhammad Kabungsuwan. He came from Johore, Malay Peninsula and on his arrival in Mindanao he converted many of the tribes to his religion. He married into an influential family, and made use of the relationship to install himself as the first sultan in Mindanao. It was during this period that the propagation of Islam in the Philippines spread rapidly to the Visayas and Luzon. The archipelago became the farthest expansion of an Islamic network that was partly religious, partly economic and partly political.⁴

² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³ Glang, Alunan, *Muslim Secession or Integration?*, R.P. Publishing Co. Quezon City, 1969, p. 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Islamization of the archipelago caused the introduction of new laws, ethics and a new outlook in the meaning and direction of life. The Muslims in the Philippines gradually became an integral part of an expanding Islamic Malay world. They used the Arabic script for writing local languages, the Arabic language for rituals and theological matters and Malay language for commercial and court language. Muslim Filipinos became aware of their existence as part of a wider community that extends from Morocco to the Malay lands in the South China Sea.⁵

B. THE SPANISH COLONIAL PERIOD (1521-1898)

1. The Moro Wars

The arrival of the Spaniards in the second half of the 16th century and the subsequent conquest of Luzon and the Visayan Islands led the Muslims to retreat to the south. There they defended and maintained their independence from foreign powers almost to the end of the Spanish regime. The conflict between the Muslims and the Spaniards became known as the Moro Wars. It was a series of bitter wars of attrition that spanned more than three centuries. There are six stages of the conflict.

The first stage was the period of struggle between Brunei and Spain over political and commercial supremacy in the Philippines. Spain gained a secure foothold in the Philippines during this period. It was during this time that Rajah Soliman, the first Muslim Gatpuno of Manila lost to Martin de Goiti, the first Spaniard to set eyes on Manila as a Muslim kingdom in 1571. Spain gained full control of Manila with the defeat of Rajah Lakandula, the Muslim king of Tondo in 1578. This stage ended with the Spanish attack on Brunei causing Bornean influence in the Archipelago to wane.⁶

Attempts of the Spaniards to establish a colony in Mindanao characterized the second stage of the 'Moro wars'. The Spaniards also tried to reduce the rulers of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Buayan into vassalage. They tried to prohibit these rulers from

⁵ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

admitting Muslim preachers and persuaded them to accept Christian missionaries. The Spaniards failed to colonize and Christianize the people of Mindanao, instead the designated Governor for Mindanao was killed in 1596.

The early part of the seventeenth century marked the third stage of the 'Moro wars'. The Spaniards tried to gain control over the Visayas from the combined forces of the Maguindanao and Buayan sultanates. The Moros resorted to capturing Christian Filipinos and enslaving them to weaken the resolve of the Filipino to side with the Spaniards. In using the slaves as boat rowers, the Moro war machine became stronger.

In the fourth stage the Spaniards decided to conquer the sultanates in Mindanao and Sulu. Military expeditions launched by the Spaniards relied heavily on the use of the people that they conquered and Christianized. Thus, the Christian Filipinos were made to fight the Moros for the glory of Spain and the Christian faith. The Spaniards resorted more and more to the practice of burning Moro settlements, plantations, fields and orchards. Captured Muslims were forced to work on the Spanish galleys.

In Mindanao, Sultan Kudarat who held sway over the Maguindanaos from Sibuguey Bay to the Gulf of Davao, fought the incursions of the Spaniards into his domain. He consolidated his power by uniting the warring warlords in the Pulangi area, took the title of Sultan and declared a Jihad or Holy war against the colonizers.

In a gathering of Maranao datus and sultans in 1623, Sultan Kudarat, delivered the noblest sentiments of the Muslim people. He urged the Maranaos to continue fighting the Spaniards for encroaching on their ancient liberty and lovely lands. This speech preserved for us by Spanish chronicles reads:

You men of the lake, forgetting your ancient liberty, have submitted to the Castellans. Submission is sheer stupidity. You cannot realize to what your surrender binds you. You are selling yourselves to toil for the benefit of these foreigners.

Look at the regions that have already submitted to them. Note how abject is the misery to which their peoples are now reduced. Behold the condition of the Tagalogs and of the Bisayans whose chiefs are trampled upon by the meanest Castellans. If you are no better spirit than them, then you must expect similar treatment. You, like them, will be obliged to row the galleys. Just as they do, you have to toil at the shipbuilding and labor

without ceasing on the other public works. You can see for yourselves that you will experience the hardest treatment thus employed.

Be men. Let me aid you to resist. All the strength of my sultanate, I promise you shall be in your defense.

What matters if the Castellans at first are successful? That means only the loss of a year's harvest. Do you think that is too dear a prize to pay for liberty?⁷

Incessant operations of the Spaniards led to the fall of Sultan Kudarat's capital in Lamitan, Basilan in 1637. The Sultan and his people retired to the interior and adopted a policy of minimum confrontation with the Spaniards. This policy was adopted to prevent the extermination of the Maguindanaos as a people. The following year the Sultan of Sulu's strong hold in Jolo also fell. The Sulus followed the course of action of the Maguindanaos of retiring to the interior or transferring to other islands to avoid extermination by the Spaniards. Although the Spaniards captured the strongholds of the two sultans, the threat of Muslim retaliation led them to make peace with Maguindanao in 1645 and with Sulu in 1646. The treaty between the Spaniards and Maguindanao recognized the sphere of influence of Sultan Kudarat covering the area from Sibuguey (just off Zamboanga City) to the Davao Gulf and extending to the interior including most of the Maranao territory, and to the inhabitants of the upper reaches and tributary stream of the Pulangi river. The treaty with the Sulus called for the departure of the Spaniards from the island of Jolo.

War between the Maguindanaos and the Spaniards resumed in 1656. It was precipitated by Spanish provocations in territories tributary to Sultan Kudarat and continuous efforts to convert the people to Christianity. The Koxinga threat to Manila forced the Spaniards to abandon the Zamboanga fort in 1663. There was relative peace between the Spaniards and the Moros for the next fifty years.

The fifth stage of the 'Moro Wars' started with the rearming of Zamboanga in 1718. In an attempt to reduce the Muslims as vassals, the Spaniards tried to convert the sultans of Sulu and Maguindanao. Conversion of the datus and other subjects was the

⁷ Glang, Alunan, *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

next step. The plan did not materialize. The Moros reacted by launching a devastating attack on the northern and central islands of the Philippines. Moro raids caused widespread disruption of the economic life in the areas under the Spanish colonial regime. In response to the Spanish policy of enslaving captured Muslims, the Moros retaliated by taking thousands of captives in the Visayan islands. In time the word "Moro" evoked hatred and terror, especially to people living along the coasts. While the Christian Filipinos relied on Spain for protection from their dreaded enemy, the Moros turned more to each other and to their neighbors in Sumatra and Borneo.⁸

The sixth stage of the 'Moro wars' occurred in the nineteenth century when Sulu became the focus of European rivalry. French interest to establish a naval base in Basilan in the 1850's and renewed trade interest of the British alarmed the Spaniards. An expedition to Sulu in 1851 resulted in the capture of the capital of Jolo and claim over Sulu as a Spanish protectorate. Muslims however interpreted the resultant peace terms to represent merely a declaration of firm friendship between two sovereign powers. In spite of the treaty, the Sulu Sultan acted as independently as before. On the other hand Spain used the Treaty to prevent rival European powers from entering into treaties with Sulu. In the 1870's, the Spaniards made a more serious attempt to conquer Sulu. They established permanent garrisons in the island. Use of their modern navy in the campaign gave the Spaniards the edge to capture Jolo in 1876. The Sultan subsequently retired to the interior of the island. The sultan of Sulu capitulated to the Spaniards in 1878, but Spanish control over the Moros was never complete.⁹

The 'Moro Wars' had a great deal of influence on the course of Philippine history. The conflict caused a deep implantation of hatred and prejudices between the Muslim and Christian Filipinos that divided them for a long time. Although the Muslims were not sympathetic to the national aspirations of the Christian Filipinos in 1896-89, the Moro Wars was instrumental in sapping the strength of the Spanish forces. It also

⁸ Gowing and McAmis., *Op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

prevented the Spaniards from concentrating their forces in Luzon. This created a situation favorable to the formation of the Filipino revolutionary movement. The conflict also contributed to the cause of discontent for Christian Filipinos against Spain. In spite of the heavy taxes and forced labor provided by them to support the campaign against the Muslims, the Spaniards failed to protect Christian settlements from Muslim ravages.

2. Revolution of 1896

On 26 August 1896, in the spirit of nationalism and as a protest against the abuse of the colonizers, Filipinos led by Andres Bonifacio revolted against Spanish colonial rule in Manila. The revolution proved to be the unifying event that brought about the national consciousness among the Filipinos.¹⁰

General Emilio Aguinaldo took over the leadership of the Filipino insurgents on March 1897, when he was elected president in the convention held at Tejeros, Cavite. After suffering heavy losses in the fight against Spanish troops, Aguinaldo was forced to open armistice negotiations with the Spanish governor. An agreement was reached in mid-December in which the governor paid P800,000 to Aguinaldo and in return he and his government voluntarily went into exile. Aguinaldo chose HongKong as his place of exile because of its proximity to the Philippines. In time, Aguinaldo got in touch with Commodore George Dewey, who headed the United States Navy's Asiatic Squadron and tentative negotiations on possible alliances were held.

It is interesting to note that on January 1, 1898, General Aguinaldo tried to solicit the participation of the Muslims of Sulu and Mindanao in the fight against Spain by sending a proposal to them saying that he is empowered to "negotiate with the Muslims of Sulu and Mindanao to establish national solidarity on the basis of a real federation with absolute respect for their beliefs and traditions."¹¹

¹⁰ Agoncillo, Teodoro, and Alfonso, Oscar, *History of the Pilipino People*, Malaya Books, Quezon City, 1967, pp. 240-241.

¹¹ Glang, Alunan, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

The proposal was the first recorded attempt of the Filipino government to deal with the Muslims based on absolute respect for their beliefs and traditional institutions without the usual Spanish undertone of eventually changing their ways of life and converting them to Christianity. There was no recorded reaction of the Muslims to this Aguinaldo proposal.

3. The Spanish American War

The conflict between the United States and Spain that spun off from the U.S. endorsement of Cuban independence broke out into open war with the declaration of war by the US congress on 25 April 1898.¹² The Philippines got entangled in the conflict when Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron attacked and destroyed the Spanish Fleet at Manila bay on 30 April.

General Aguinaldo was in Singapore when war was declared. He was then conferring with Mr. E. Spencer Pratt, the American consul general on possible Filipino-American collaboration against Spain. Aguinaldo rushed to HongKong to join Dewey, but missed the latter who had already departed for Manila Bay. Dewey had to dispatch the revenue cutter 'McCulloch' to fetch Aguinaldo from HongKong, returning to the Philippines on 19 May 1898. Aguinaldo's arrival delighted Dewey and he gave to the former the arms and supplies captured from the Spaniards in Cavite. Aguinaldo immediately reassumed command of the rebel forces and resumed the fight against the Spaniards. The Filipino insurgents overwhelmed the demoralized Spanish garrisons around Manila. Links were established with other movements throughout the islands.¹³

Aguinaldo was led to believe by Consuls Pratt and Wildman and Admiral Dewey that the United States had come to liberate the Filipino people from Spanish oppression and that she would recognize the independence of the Philippines. According to him,

¹² Tindall, George with Shi, David., *America: A Narrative History*, W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1992, p. 911.

¹³ Zaide, Gregorio, *Philippine Political and Cultural History*, Vol. II, Philippine Education Company, Manila, 1957, p. 185.

America's recognition of Philippine Independence was promised in return for Filipino collaboration in the fight against Spain.¹⁴

On June 12, 1898, General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed Philippine independence at his headquarters in Kawit, Cavite.¹⁵ In the fight against Spain, the Filipinos believed their relationship with the United States was that of two allies fighting a common enemy. Aside from providing intelligence information on the enemy's disposition and strength, the Filipino troops numbering 12,000 kept the Spanish force bottled up inside Manila. This gave the Americans time to await the arrival of reinforcements and build up their strength. During this period, Aguinaldo tried to get a written commitment of support for Philippine Independence from the Americans but was ignored.

When sufficient reinforcements arrived, Dewey's forces assaulted Manila on 13 August 1898 to force the surrender of the Spaniards defending the city. Aguinaldo was told that his army could not participate in the operation to capture Manila and would be fired upon if it crossed into the city. The insurgents were infuriated at being denied triumphant entry into their own capital, but Aguinaldo bided his time.

The Treaty of Paris signed on 10 December 1898, transferred sovereignty of the Philippines to the United States. There had been no previous US demand for annexation before the war. However, many Americans afflicted with expansionist fever because of Dewey's small victory in Manila made strong representations to take over control of the Philippines. Pondering over the alternatives, President McKinley later explained to some visiting Methodist how he arrived at his decision to annex the Philippines:

And one night late it came to me this way- I don't know how it was, but it came: (1) that we could not give them back to Spain- that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany- our commercial rivals in the Orient- that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁵ Karnow, Stanley, *In Our Image, America's Empire in the Philippines*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1989, p. 117.

they were unfit for self-government- and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellowmen for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed, and went to sleep and slept soundly.¹⁶

President McKinley issued a proclamation on 21 December 1898, declaring American policy on the Philippines to be one of "benevolent assimilation" in which "the mild sway of justice and right" would be substituted for "arbitrary rule".

C. THE AMERICAN COLONIAL PERIOD (1898-1946)

As the head of the newly proclaimed Philippine Republic, General Emilio Aguinaldo protested the transfer of sovereignty of the Philippines to that of the United States as a result of the Treaty of Paris of 1898. In his counter-proclamation, Aguinaldo denounced the American action. The Americans interpreted Aguinaldo's proclamation as a declaration of war. The Philippine-American War followed and culminated with the capture of Aguinaldo at Palanan, Isabela on 23 March 1901. The Philippines again became a colony of a powerful nation, the United States.¹⁷ Suspicious of both Christian Filipinos and Americans, the Muslims in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago remained neutral for the most part of the Philippine-American war.

1. The Bates Treaty

The Tausugs of the island of Sulu were the first group of Filipino Muslims that the United States authorities met upon assuming control of the Philippines. The task to negotiate with the Sultan of Sulu fell on the shoulders of Brigadier General John C. Bates of the United States Army. Bates reached an agreement with the Sultan of Sulu on 20 August 1899. The agreement signed by Bates, the Sultan of Sulu and four of his principal datus became known as the "Bates Treaty." It provided for recognition of

¹⁶ Tindal and Shin, *Op. cit.*, p. 926.

¹⁷ Agoncillo and Alfonso, *Op. cit.*, pp. 257-259.

United States sovereignty in the Sulu archipelago and cooperation of the sultan and his datus in the suppression of piracy and apprehension of persons charged with crimes against non-Muslims. In return the United States pledged to respect the dignity and authority of the Sultan of Sulu and the other chiefs. The United States also agreed not to interfere with the Muslim religion. It was further agreed upon by both parties that there would be nonalienation of any areas in the Sulu archipelago by the United States without the consent of the sultan and his more important datus. The United States would also guarantee full protection of the sultan and his subjects in case any foreign nation attempted to infringe on their rights. The agreement also called for payment of the salaries of certain Sulu leaders from the Philippine treasury.¹⁸

The Americans gave the first official stamp, in modern terms, to the creed of separatism when they signed the treaty with the Sultan of Sulu as a separate power. A Philippine career diplomat, Leon Maria Guerrero, summed it up without mincing words:

American policy was seen to be one of negotiate, subjugate, separate. The purpose of the American colonialists to separate the two traditional Filipino communities was scarcely concealed.¹⁹

The Bates Agreement however did not work well between the parties. The Americans thought that with the treaty, they had secured an acknowledgement of US sovereignty and would keep the Muslims peaceful. On the other hand, the Muslims believed that the treaty was an instrument that kept the Americans out of their internal affairs and guaranteed their way of life. The Muslims thought that the agreement was no better than what was imposed by the Spaniards. Unhappy over the treaty's policy of non-interference in Moro internal affairs, US Army authorities began to clamor for its abrogation. Major General Leonard Wood saw the Bates Agreement as too lenient and

¹⁸ Grunder, Garel and Livezey, William, *The Philippines and the United States*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1951, p. 139.

¹⁹ George, T. J. S., "A Good Idea At the Time," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 March 1973, p. 14.

urged the civilian governor-general of the Philippines, William Taft, for the abrogation of the agreement.

When Taft assumed the position of Secretary of War on 1 February 1904, he asked Wood to submit a report of violations to the agreement committed by the Datus and the Sultan of Sulu. Using the report as a basis, Taft authorized the new governor-general of the Philippines, Luke E. Wright to notify the Sultan and his datus of the abrogation of the Bates treaty because of their failure "to discharge the duties and fulfill the conditions imposed on them by said agreement." Their annuities would be forfeited also and they would be subject to the laws enacted for the Moro province. On 21 March 1904, Gen. Wood notified the Sultan that the treaty was abrogated as of that date.²⁰

With the abrogation of the treaty, the Americans exercised direct control of Muslim affairs. The resulting American policy toward the Muslims resembled the treatment of the Indians: "treaties" made with the "savages" were not considered binding and could be unilaterally set aside as convenience or changes in policy demanded.²¹

As the first military governor of the Moro Province, General Leonard Wood typified American New England Puritanical Calvinist values and Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism. He found nothing in Muslim Filipino laws and customs worth preserving. His adoption of a hard line policy on the Moros exploded into a series of battles, including a struggle in 1906 where 600 Muslims died.

2. Thrust of American Colonial Administration

From the start, the American colonial mission was aimed at tutelage, a process of preparing the Philippines for eventual independence. The civil government established by the Americans in 1901 started the process of preparing the Filipinos toward self-government. During the year, the Americans entrusted the management of the municipal government to the Filipinos. A year later, Filipinos assumed the management of the government at the provincial level. By 1907, members of the first Philippine Assembly

²⁰ Grunder and Livezey, *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

²¹ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

composed of Filipinos were elected. At the outset, issues of independence and autonomy were the main concerns of the Assembly.

In 1903, a Moro province was established by the American authorities and a more forward policy implemented: the practice of slavery was outlawed, schools that taught a non-Muslim curriculum were established, and local governments were organized. The organization of local governments directly challenged the authority of the traditional community leaders. A new legal system also replaced the *sharia*, or Islamic Law. United States rule, even more than that of the Spaniards, was seen as a challenge to Islam, a religion that prescribes not only personal beliefs but also social and political institutions. Armed resistance grew, and the Moro province remained under military rule until 1913 by which time the major Muslim groups had been subjugated.²²

3. The Carpenter Agreement

Frank W. Carpenter became the first civilian governor of the Moro province in December 1913. Governor Carpenter vigorously carried out the American policy of "Filipinization" of the Insular government in the Muslim area. Under his supervision, Filipino officials mostly Christians assumed increasingly greater responsibilities in the government of the Muslim region. There were efforts to integrate the Muslims into Philippine national life. One program encouraged settlers from the northern provinces to settle in Moroland and serve as example for the Muslim Filipinos. Christian Filipino officials labored to educate, civilize and train the Muslims in self government.

The Muslims were powerless to stem the tide of change and their general attitude was of sullen acquiescence to the situation. This attitude was best exemplified by the "Carpenter Agreement" on 22 March 1915, which called for the Sultan of Sulu, Jamalul Kiram II, to abdicate all his claims to temporal power in Sulu. The abdication was done at the insistence of Governor Carpenter. The sultan however, retained his position as the

²² Bunge, Frederica M., *Philippines: A Country Study*, The U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1983, p. 74.

titular spiritual head of the Islamic faith in the Sulu archipelago.²³

4. Land Policy

The U.S. colonial administrators saw the vast and virtually under populated island of Mindanao as the Philippines frontier. Drawing on the geopolitical experience of the United States, they saw resettlement from the more densely populated northern islands as the pivotal means by which the Philippines could increase agricultural production, ease land pressure, eliminate tenancy, and reform the society. Offering the carrot of religious protection and respect for Muslim traditions and wielding the stick of U.S. military might, they subjugated the five major Muslim groups; the Maguindanaos, the Maranaos, the Yakans, the Samals and the Tausugs. Through legislation, based on U.S. models, they created a homesteading and land policy that was designed to encourage especially the landless peasants of the north to migrate to Mindanao. This policy was not aggressively challenged by the Muslims at that time because there were still excess land available. There was minimal effect on the Muslims because they were then practicing slash and burn agriculture.

5. Muslim demand for exclusion from the Philippines

The inclusion of the Muslim areas into what is today the Republic of the Philippines was the subject of a strong protest by Muslim leaders in 1935. A declaration was drafted and unanimously approved in a mass meeting on 18 March 1935 at Dansalan (now Marawi City). This was forwarded to the US Congress through the President of the United States. Following are excerpts from the historic declaration:

In the agreement that we arrived at (i.e., the Declaration) people gave their unanimous approval.

We would like to inform you (i.e., the U.S. Congress) that because we have learned that the U.S. is going to give the Philippines independence through efforts of Hon. Quezon, Osmena and others, we want to tell you that the Philippines as it is known to the American people (is) populated by two different people with different religions, practices and traditions. The Christian Filipinos occupy the Islands of Luzon and

²³ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

the Visayas. The Moros predominate in the islands of Mindanao and Sulu (Basilan and Palawan were then regarded as part of the latter). With regards the forthcoming Philippine Independence, we foresee what condition we will be and our children when independence is granted these islands. This condition will (be) characterized by unrest, suffering and misery . . .

Our Christian Associates have for . . . many past years shown their desire to be the only ones blessed with leadership and well progressive towns without sharing with us the advantage of having good towns and cities. One proof of this is that, among us who are capable of (participating) in managing and (administering the) government . . . have not been given chances to demonstrate their ability. Another proof is that the Christian Filipinos have taken control of our Insular funds which by right we must have equal share (in). Most of these funds are annually appropriated for Luzon and the Visayas and very little are appropriated for the so-called Moro provinces in the islands of Mindanao and Sulu. As a result their provinces progress by leaps and bounds and ours (lag behind). Another result is that we have been and are still behind in . . . modern civilization and education.

One more very discriminating act of our Christian Filipino Associates is shown in the recent Constitution of the Philippine Commonwealth. In this Constitution no provision whatsoever is made that would operate for the welfare of the Moros . . . The (provision of the) Constitution are all for the welfare of the Christian Filipinos and nothing for the Moros. As a proof (of) this our delegate did not sign the Constitution.

We do not want to be included in the Philippine independence (for) once an independent nation is launched (there will be) troubles between us and the Christian Filipinos because from time immemorial these two people have not lived harmoniously . . . It is not . . . proper to have two antagonizing people live together under one flag, under the Philippine independence. One proof of this (is) that when Lanao had its Filipino Governor many leading Moro datus were killed for no apparent reasons. This trouble has not yet ended up to the present time because our people can't and will never forget the bitterness of this incident.

Should the American people grant the Philippines an independence, the islands of Mindanao and Sulu should not be included in such independence . . . Our public land must not be given to other people other than the Moros. We should be given time to acquire them because most of us have no land. Our people does not yet realize the value of acquiring lands of considerable area. We do not know also how to acquire those lands by the process of law. Where shall we obtain the support of (our) family if our lands are taken from us. It will be safe for

us that a law should be created restricting the (acquisition of) our lands by other people. This will also avoid future trouble.

Our practices, laws and the decisions of our Moro leaders should be respected . . . Our religion should not be curtailed in any way. All practices which are incidents to our religion of Islam should be respected because these things are what a Muslim desires to live for . . . Once our religion is no more, our lives are no more.

(Signed) Hadji Bogabong (Kali Sa Onayan) and over one hundred leading datos, Hadjis, Imams and Kalis.²⁴

D. JAPANESE OCCUPATION PERIOD (1941-1945)

Japanese invasion of the Philippines on 10 December 1941 cut short American rule and for four years the archipelago was under the Japanese occupational government. Anti-Japanese guerrilla activity was widespread and fierce through out the country during the war. A prominent guerrilla group in Central Luzon was the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon or People's Army Against the Japanese (Hukbalahap or Huks for short) whose membership was composed of peasants and workers. The Huks was the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

In the south, prominent Muslim guerrilla leaders were Mohammad Ali Dimaporo and Rasid Lucman of Lanao and Salipada Pendatun from Cotabato. The Japanese were wary of the reputation of the Moros and they maintained a safe distance from them through out the period of occupation. The Allied forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur liberated the Philippines from the Japanese in 1945.

E. POST WORLD WAR II PERIOD (1945-1972)

While nationalist movements all over Asia emerged to liberate their lands from vestiges of European colonial authority, there was a peaceful transfer of sovereign power in the Philippines. The United States kept its promise to emancipate the country. On 4 July 1946, the Philippines was granted its independence. Thereafter, the country faced the challenges of a newly independent state and the difficult task of rehabilitation from

²⁴ Glang, Alunan, *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

the ravages of the last world war.

The country faced its first threat to national existence in 1950 when the Huks/peasants of the Communist Party staged a rebellion in Central Luzon. The Huks took up arms to protest the abuse and repression they suffered at the hands of landlords and government troops. The government found a champion in the then Secretary of National Defense and later President Ramon Magsaysay who envisioned a novel approach to the Huk problem. It was premised on the principle of "all out force, all-out friendship." At the political level, Magsaysay restored the people's faith in democracy by striving to have a clean and honest government. He also concentrated development resources to the rural areas where the roots of social injustice and discontent were found.

A major aspect of the pacification campaign was the relocation of the members of the Huk movement who surrendered to resettlement areas in Mindanao. This was designed to undercut the communist platform of "land to the landless." Besides the former Huks, hundreds of thousands of Ilongos, Ilocanos and Tagalogs began settling in Cotabato and Lanao provinces by the 1950's. Culturally and religiously, the policy of resettling Christians in Mindanao became explosive. It failed to consider the change in the demography of the island that gradually shifted away from Muslim dominance.

The influx of Christian Filipinos began to inflame Muslim hostility. The crux of the problem lay in land disputes: Christian migrants to Cotabato for example, complained that they bought land from one Muslim only to have his relatives refuse to recognize the sale and demand more money. On the other hand, Muslims claimed that Christians would title land through government agencies unknown to Muslim residents, for whom titling was a new institution. Through fraudulent legal claims, the Muslim residents could be evicted from their homes and land by unscrupulous settlers. The Bureau of Forestry also awarded vast forest areas as concession to logging firms. These concessions often included areas under cultivation by Muslim communities. Distrust and resentment spread to the public school system regarded as an agency for the propagation of Christian teaching.

The Muslims were gradually outnumbered because of Christian migration. Economic and social control of the island shifted to the hands of the Christians. The Muslims, an embattled minority, felt that they have lost control of their homeland and, like the American Indians and many other ethnic groups, thought that they have been savagely treated by both colonial and the postindependence national government.

A study made in 1971 quoted 1960 figures to show that, as a direct result of Christian immigration, there were only two provinces left with Muslim majorities; Lanao del Sur and Sulu. In Cotabato and Zamboanga del Sur, Muslims had been pushed on to the defensive. In Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan, which used to be their traditional region, the Muslims accounted for 23.7 % of the population. In national terms they represented a mere 4.8 % in a population of 39 million.²⁵

1. The Sabah Claim

The formation of Malaysia in 1966 to include Sabah as one of its thirteen states led to a territorial dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines. The dispute was over the sultan of Sulu's claim over Sabah. The Sultan of Brunei who originally ruled over Sabah ceded it to the Sultan of Sulu in 1704 as a reward for helping suppress an uprising in his domain. In 1878, the Sultan's successor, Jamalul Azam leased the territory to William Cowie and Baron von Overbeck for 5,000 Malaysian dollars. Overbeck was then the Austrian consul at HongKong and former local manager of the British opium firm of Dent and Company. Whether the terms of the deal were, that Sabah was leased or ceded, would later become a bone of contention between Malaysia and the Philippines. Soon after the agreement, the British North Borneo Company was formed and awarded a royal charter. A treaty signed in 1930 by the United States and the British Crown circumscribed the future territorial jurisdiction of the soon to be established Philippine Republic. This treaty did not include Sabah within the boundaries of Spanish, American or Philippine jurisdiction. Then six days after the Philippines was granted independence, the British North Borneo Company turned over all its rights and obligations to the British

²⁵ George, T. J. S., *Op. Cit*, p. 15.

government, which in turn asserted full sovereign rights over Sabah through the North Borneo Cession Order.²⁶

The first official Philippine act on the Sabah issue was the adoption of House Resolution No. 42 on April 28, 1950. It stated explicitly that North Borneo belonged to the heirs of the Sultan of Sulu. It also authorized the President to conduct negotiations for the restoration of sovereign jurisdiction over the territory. The Philippine government formally notified the United Kingdom of its claim on Sabah on June 1962. Talks on the issue were scheduled the following December. In the negotiations, the British rejected the Philippine position in view of the overriding need to form the Federal Republic of Malaysia, ostensibly to contain communism in Southeast Asia.²⁷

The claim was relegated to the sidelines when it became entangled within the wider context of the Republic of Indonesia's "confrontation" with Malaysia and the Sukarno regime's threats to resort to military means to crush the fledgling nation. While the Philippines refrained from making any open moves against Sabah, it was prepared to assert its claim in case the Indonesian confrontation became successful.²⁸ Upon termination of the confrontation, the dispute over Sabah was brought to Bangkok, where bilateral negotiations aimed at its resolution were abruptly aborted. In the United Nation's General Assembly, the disputants exchanged contentious charges and countercharges.²⁹

When the Philippines institutionalized its claim through the enactment of Republic Act 5546 incorporating Sabah as part of the territory of the Philippines, the Malaysians suspended diplomatic ties. Diplomatic relations were only restored on 16 December

²⁶ Samad, Paridah Abd., and Abu Bakar, Darusalam, "Malaysia-Philippine Relations," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXII, No. 6, June 1992, p. 556.

²⁷ *Ibid.* , pp. 556-557.

²⁸ Guoxing, Ji, "Current Security Issues in Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVI, No. 9, September 1986, p. 978.

²⁹ Samad, and Abu Bakar, *Op. cit.*, p. 554.

1969 in time for the third ministerial conference of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

2. The Jabidah Incident

In an ill-conceived military plan in 1968, President Ferdinand E. Marcos organized a Filipino Muslim military group with the codename of "Jabidah," and trained it on Corregidor Island before infiltrating it into Sabah. When the troops learned of their destination and mutinied against the project, they were massacred. One soldier who survived the massacre, sought protection from a politician from the opposition, who later leaked the incident to the press. This acutely embarrassing incident prompted the Malaysian government to summon home its ambassador. The incident exposed Marcos to much criticism and ridicule in what was then still a free press.³⁰

3. The Muslim Independence Movement

On 1 May 1968, former Cotabato Governor Hadji Datu Udtog Matalam announced the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement at Pagalungan, Cotabato. The pronouncement marked the beginning of a radical change in Muslim-Christian relations in Mindanao. The "Manifesto" signed by Matalam called for the establishment of an Islamic state. The proposed state includes all Muslim areas of the Southern Philippines and would be known as the "Republic of Mindanao and Sulu."³¹

Probable causes for Matalam's agitation for the Muslim to secede from the Republic were the apparent disregard of the government over Muslim lives in the 'Jabidah incident' and his belief that the parochial outlook of the nation did not allow the development of the Muslims along Islamic orientation, meaning the practice of the laws ordained by the Holy Koran. Matalam believed that it was not enough that the Muslims be allowed to practice their religious beliefs but should also be allowed to live in accordance with the laws laid down by Islam. He saw no possibility for this except

³⁰ Noble, Lela G., "The Moro National Liberation Front in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1976, pp. 408-409.

³¹ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

through secession. He recognized that the development of the Muslims at par with the rest of the nation could be accelerated with the Muslims constituting themselves into one nation, an Islamic state, and drawing their strength from their membership to an international brotherhood in Islam that transcends the boundaries of national states.³²

The "Declaration of Policy" of the Muslim Independence Movement revealed plainly the yearnings of the Muslims for their identity in Islam. The declaration reads:

That the STATE shall adhere to the Islamic ideological principle of social justice that those who are better off in life shall share a portion of his property to be determined by law to the lowly and less fortunate through the institution of Zakat-legal alms;

That it shall endeavour to create a well-balanced economy, trade and commerce, following the Islamic ideological principle on the socialization of the economy in order to bring about a wider distribution of wealth;

That it shall institute reforms on relations between labor and management in recognition of the Islamic principle that the employer has the obligation to share with his employees a proportionate part of his profits; and

That the STATE shall recognize the generally accepted principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations as part of its laws, in order to achieve world peace and regional cooperation.³³

Reflecting the sentiments of the Muslims, the MIM in one of its documents pointed out the fact that "the destiny of all Muslims in Southeast Asia is to stand together and fight side by side for the defense of their common religion, cultural identity, social institutions and national respect and honor against the forces of oppression, subversion, intolerance and reactionary elements which creep into the Muslim community."³⁴

The manifesto was given a wide distribution in the national and international press. At first most of Muslim Filipinos showed disinterest in the movement. The Christians in Cotabato, however, reacted in fear and apprehension. By June 1968 there

³² Glang, Alunan, *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

were reports of Christians fleeing from North Cotabato for fear of Muslim uprising. Other Christians who had firmly established themselves in productive farms and businesses opted to stay and prepared to defend themselves against Muslim attempts to drive them out. Sporadic, small scale raids and retaliation began to happen and toward the end of 1969, the tension and fear on opposite sides heightened.

Young Turks of the Independence Movement dissatisfied with the political chicanery and corruption of the old guards began distancing themselves and rallied behind Nur Misuari in forming the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the late 1960s. Misuari was a faculty member of the Asian Center at the University of the Philippines in Manila before he organized the MNLF.

4. Shooting War started in South Cotabato

The "shooting war" between Christians and Muslims began on 22 March 1970, when six people were reported killed and two others wounded at Upi, South Cotabato. The incident was attributed to a band of tribal Tirurays under the leadership of "Toothpick" who was reported to be fighting against alleged Muslim terrorism and exploitation. The conflict spread from Upi to the province of North Cotabato where 18 of the 34 municipalities were in various stages of conflict.³⁵

Following these incidents a terrorist organization of Christians called Ilagas (Rats) began operating in Cotabato. In response, Muslim armed bands called Blackshirts were formed to counter the Christian armed groups. The Ilagas started as self-defense units to protect Christian communities, especially settlers coming from Iloilo province. As the conflict dragged, the Ilagas degenerated into lawless groups. On the other hand the Blackshirts formed the military arm of the Muslim Independence Movement.³⁶

On 4 July 1971, the conflict spread to the town of Wao in Lanao del Sur. A grenade exploded inside a mosque and over 60 Muslim homes were alleged to have been burned by Ilagas. The Muslim inhabitants of Wao evacuated to the Lake Lanao area and

³⁵ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the Maranaos of Lanao del Sur vowed revenge. What followed were incidents of Christian houses burned and Christians ambushed. Muslim armed groups calling themselves "Barracudas" began fighting the Christian Ilagas. The Barracudas were linked with Ali Dimaporo, a Muslim congressman from the Nationalista Party. Outbreaks of violence appeared to have no definite pattern, rather they occurred spontaneously where there are large concentrations of Muslim and Christian populations in the same area. This resulted in the closing of schools in the areas where armed confrontation occur. Mass evacuations of innocent victims became a common sight. The sad thing about the situation was Philippine army troops sent in to restore law and order were accused by the Muslims of siding with the Christians.³⁷

In August, 1971, armed confrontation occurred in the town of Buldon in the province of North Cotabato. This time the battle was between Muslim Blackshirts and Philippine Constabulary troopers. Local and foreign leaders began to accuse the government forces of trying to annihilate the Muslims. To diffuse the explosive situation, the President sent in a team of negotiators to arrange a cease-fire and forge a peace pact between opposing parties. The team included a Muslim senator and the Secretary of National Defense. The resultant peace arrangement led to the surrender of a few unlicensed weapons and the town receiving P 75,000 for rehabilitation projects. This settled the problem of Buldon.³⁸

On 26 October, trouble erupted in Lanao del Norte with the ambush of a 22-man Philippine Constabulary patrol in the town of Magsaysay. Only five government troopers survived the ambush. The following day, newspapers reported that 66 Muslims were killed in battle in Magsaysay. The President stopped the military from continuing "search and destroy" operations in Lanao del Norte and del Sur while he consulted with political, military, civic and religious leaders of the two Lanao provinces. After the meeting, he ordered the conduct of military operations against all lawless elements

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

whether they were Ilagas or Barracudas. He also appointed a liaison committee composed of respected local leaders to work with the military in seeking a lasting peace in Lanao.

The election day tragedy of November 1971 in Barrio Tacub, Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte shocked the entire nation and won sympathy for the Muslims. Government troops manning a checkpoint fired upon a group of apparently unarmed Muslims, returning in several trucks from the special election in Magsaysay town. The incident which resulted in the death of at least 40 Muslims with no fatality on the government side was dubbed the "Tacub Massacre." Twenty one army soldiers including three officers were brought to trial as a result of investigations conducted by the National Bureau of Investigations. Later, the 21 soldiers plus three civilians, one of them a Christian mayor, were named respondents in a case of multiple homicide filed with the Provincial Fiscal of Lanao del Norte.

Muslim Senator Mamintal Tamano earlier warned that a bloodbath in Mindanao was inevitable unless the national government paid more attention to the needs of the cultural minorities. He said that for as long as political "warlords" existed and the neglect of cultural minorities continues, the situation in Lanao and Cotabato will deteriorate.³⁹ The arrival in mid-January 1972 of eight Muslim ambassadors to see for themselves the situation in the south manifested the growing international concern over the conflict in Mindanao. The ambassadors came from Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. They were later convinced, after visiting various Muslim areas, that there was no genocide against Filipino Muslims.⁴⁰

Reports of renewed fighting occurred in May 1972. A feud between local politicians and a logging company in Balabagan in the southeastern corner of Lanao del Sur broke down into armed conflict. The new fighting occurred in an area of mixed

³⁹ Ronquillo, Bernardino, "Broken Promise," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 December 1971, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁰ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 50 .

Muslim and Christian population. Zamboanga del Sur and Sulu also came into the picture as the scenes of new conflict. Reports began to circulate on the existence of Muslim "training camps" using "Malay speaking" foreign instructors in Sulu. Further, a "feud" between Iligan City and Marawi City in Lanao del Norte contributed to the escalation of fears and tensions in both areas. In all these hot spots, evacuations of both Muslims and Christians continued, resulting in economic dislocation, heightened resentment between Muslims and Christians, and widened the rift between them.

5. Declaration of Martial Law

In 1972, the country continued to suffer from a severe law and order problem that saw the proliferation of private armies and unlicensed firearms, frequent staging of rallies by left wing students, rise in crime rate and a spreading conflict in the southern islands. President Ferdinand Marcos proclaimed Martial Law on 21 September 1972 to check these problems. The proclamation practically abrogated the 1935 Constitution and provided full powers to Marcos. Besides centralizing power, Martial law consolidated it in the hands of Christians namely: Marcos, his family, his cronies, technocrats and the military. Martial law also restricted the range of legitimate political activity, giving the people only two options: either to accept the Marcos regime or conduct revolutionary activities against the regime. For a short period, Martial Law resulted in an improvement in the law and order situation in the country, including the hot spots in Mindanao.⁴¹

Apparently the Martial Law policy of collecting loose firearms ran into stiff resistance from the Muslims who equated arms possession with their distinct culture. They were concerned that the confiscation of their weapons would leave them dangerously exposed to their Christian and military enemies. They felt that the political developments in Manila were threatening their existence and the fear of vulnerability and resumption of violence left them with few choices. Full scale war broke out one

⁴¹ Karnow, Stanley, *Op. cit.*, pp. 357-388.

month after the declaration of martial law.⁴²

Violence started in Marawi City in Lanao on October 21, 1972. Fanatical Muslim rebel forces numbering from 500 to 1,000 made simultaneous attacks on the Mindanao State University, the provincial headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary at Camp Amai Pakpak and the Pantar bridge at the boundary of the two Lanao provinces. This was the first time that the rebels fought under the banner of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The rebels gained control of the PBS radio station in the University campus and broadcast inflammatory propaganda urging the Muslim Maranaos to support their cause. The people of Marawi did not heed their call. Failing to get the people's support, the rebels easily crumbled to the operation of the government troops to reestablish control over the city. However, before they left, the rebels looted the homes of Christians and took several as hostage whom they later killed.⁴³ The attack on a Philippine Constabulary outpost in the town of Parang, Cotabato followed the Marawi incident. Flare up all over Western Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago followed.

In November 1972, Muslim rebels landed considerable quantities of arms in Jolo and the Tawi-Tawi group to the south. In late December, a full scale attack was launched in those islands. By January 1973, the rebels were in control of about 80% of the island of Basilan. There were also incidents of violence in some smaller islands of the Sulu archipelago. When the Armed Forces had almost contained the situation in the islands, another front opened in the province of Cotabato. For two weeks the security forces were hit by a series of concerted guerilla attacks. The attack abated only when enough troops were mustered to rush in and storm the towns and strongholds occupied

⁴² George, T. J. S., "For Marcos, the lesser danger," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 January 1973, p. 24.

⁴³ Gowing and McAmis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

by the rebels.⁴⁴ In April 1973, violence erupted in Davao province where there had been no trouble before. Rebel forces stormed the city of Jolo in February 1974 and held it for two days before government forces could regain control. The rebels left a large part of Jolo destroyed by fire, which brought economic misery to the Muslim population.

Although the conflict in the south in the 1960s started from land disputes between the Muslims and Christian settlers, animosity between the two groups had its origins during the Spanish colonial period when people from Luzon and Visayas were subjugated and converted to Christianity and later made to fight the Moros who resisted Spanish rule. Relations between the two groups did not improve during the American colonial period. The Muslims were separately administered because of continued Muslim resistance to American rule. This effectively cut them off from the mainstream of Philippine society. A land policy encouraging people from Luzon and Visayas to migrate to Mindanao started the influx of Christians into the Muslim areas. This policy continued to be implemented even after the attainment of independence in 1946. A major aspect of the government's solution to the communist rebellion in the 1950s was the awarding of land to rebel surrenderees in resettlement areas in Mindanao. The Muslims were alarmed by the unfavorable demographic change. They tried to regain political and economic control in the traditional Muslim areas, however the Christian settlers who had already established themselves resisted. After both groups started arming themselves, armed confrontation became inevitable. What started out as isolated armed confrontations between Muslims and Christians transformed into a full blown war as the Muslims tried to secede from the country. How the Moro National Liberation Front became the lead Muslim secessionist organization is the subject of discussion in the following chapter.

⁴⁴ Stowe, Judy , " Three-dimensional Muslims," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 June 1973, p. 25.

III. THE MUSLIM SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT

Mass outrage over the 1968 Jabidah massacre in Corregidor where several Muslim military recruits were supposedly executed by their Christian military superiors, had a galvanizing effect on the various grievances of the Muslims. The indignation over the perceived low regard for the life of Muslims by the government fueled the frustrations of people from the whole spectrum of the Filipino Muslim community, giving birth to the idea of separatism.

Incensed over the Jabidah massacre and disgusted over government's neglect of the welfare of Muslim Filipinos, Hadji Datu Udtog Matalam, the former governor of Cotabato province, organized the Muslim Independence Movement and formally launched it on 1 May 1968. The MIM became the first Muslim organization that publicly broached the idea of a separate Filipino Muslim nation.

People from various Muslim sectors joined the Movement. Farmers displaced by Christian settlers saw in the movement an opportunity to get back their lands. Victims of army and police abuses saw it as an instrument of exacting revenge. To religious leaders, the movement was a means of building a theocratic Islamic state. Disgruntled politicians and people who aimed for public office found the movement an excellent vehicle to launch successful careers. Students and intellectuals were moved by their social duty while adventurous and impatient youngsters wanted to test their fighting prowess. Others simply joined because their friends and relatives were in the movement. Although Matalam was a well-respected leader, he was already an old man when he organized the MIM. He and the other traditional leaders of the Movement were too infirm and conservative to fire and energize the Muslims. Failure of the traditional leaders to exploit the spirit of the movement moved the younger Muslims to take the cudgel and rally the Muslims into a united and more aggressive force.

A. THE RISE OF STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE 1960s

The worldwide phenomenon of student activism and the influence of the cultural revolution in China reached and made considerable influence on the Philippines in the mid 1960s. Marxist inspired students and workers conducted radical protest activities that became a frequent occurrence in the streets of Manila. Muslim students studying there were caught up in them, raising their political, economic and social awareness. Worldwide resurgence of Islam also occurred during this period and contacts made by the Filipino Muslim students with the international Islamic community added to their political maturity. The student protest activities in Manila against the Marcos regime gradually influenced the thinking of Muslim students. Their focus of discontent shifted from the Christian sector of the Filipino society to that of the administration of President Marcos itself. The perception that the government was siding with the Christians in the simmering Muslim-Christian conflict, and the failure to resolve the growing social, economic and political problems that caused earlier clashes between rival armed gangs of Christian and Muslim communities, further reinforced the discontent against the Marcos government. Moving a step down the political structure, the Muslim students and intellectuals were also disenchanted with the political dishonesty and corruption of the traditional Muslim leaders, the *datus* and the traditional politicians. Many of these young Muslim students and intellectuals became Marxist-inspired and formed their own clandestine group to initiate change. Nur Misuari provided the leadership for the young Muslims. Misuari is a Muslim idealist who until June 1972 was a faculty member of the Asian Center at the University of the Philippines in Manila.⁴⁵

B. THE RESURGENCE OF ISLAM

The resurgence of Islam flows from a regained self-confidence by countries in the Middle East. This was a result of the material wealth derived from oil resources that these countries have been blessed with. The main thrust of the Muslim revival centered

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

on Islam as a focus of identity, a universal faith-culture that encompasses two continents and brought together 600 million followers. The mounting tide of Islam coincided with the Third World state of mind of admiration/hatred of the West and of disillusionment with modernization. Revival of an international Islamic identity as an alternative to other blocs and groupings throughout the world and a domestic Muslim revival to influence national policies are two developments that can be identified with the rise of Islam.

The international gathering of Muslim leaders in Rabat in 1969, initiated by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia gave impetus to the revival of Islam. The meeting of the leaders caused the formation of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The summit conference in 1969 had a widespread impact on the Islamic world at large. The media carried news and pictures of Muslim leaders embracing each other in disregard of their traditional rifts and jealousies, giving the impression of a truly universal Muslim brotherhood.⁴⁶

Following the Rabat conference, Muammar Qaddafi, the young, visionary, fanatic and imaginative leader of a military coup succeeded in his bid for power in Libya. Catapulted to international prominence, Qaddafi emphasized the trend towards the predominance of Islam in domestic and international policies of Islamic nations. Qaddafi's Islamic neo-puritanism at home, coupled with his aggressive religious zeal abroad, made him a very important political figure, especially as his power was backed with large oil resources. Moreover, he saw himself as the arbiter of all the Islamic countries. He encouraged believers to return to the strict standards of early Islam.⁴⁷

Qaddafi's anti-colonial stance led him to support dissident or revolutionary movements, particularly Muslim movements, that were fighting established reactionary regimes. Support comes in the form of weapons, funds and training. He was also believed to have supported the training and equipment requirements of terrorist groups

⁴⁶ Israeli, Raphael, "The New Wave of Islam." *International Journal*, Volume 34, No. 3, Summer 1979, pp. 369-377.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

like the Palestinians and the Irish Republican Army.

In the Philippines, Islamic resurgence has taken strongest root in the proliferation of Islamic schools known as madrasah. In the past there were few sources of instruction in Islamic traditions. With the resurgence of Islam, mosques were built in every barangay, and every mosque had its madrasah. Most of the madrasah supplemented rather than replaced conventional Western education, with students attending on the weekends to study Arabic, Islamic history and law, the Koran and ethics. The madrasahs contributed to the Filipino Muslims awareness towards the Islamic faith. Muslim elites emerged seeking autonomy and the right to apply Islamic values to the traditional Muslim areas in the south. There was also a growing desire to identify themselves with the wider Muslim umma or worldwide Islamic community.

C. BIRTH OF THE MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT

It was initially under the auspices of the Mindanao Independence Movement that Muslim rebels were sent to Malaysia to undergo military training starting in 1969. The rebels received training in guerilla warfare, intelligence and counterintelligence, demolition, automatic firing and jungle survival from Malaysian officers. Most of the early trainees were Marxists inspired Muslim students who became disillusioned with the traditional Muslim leadership and organization. They saw the need to form a more aggressive organization to effect change.

It was in one of the training sites in Pulau Pangkor, an island off the coast of West Malaysia's Perak state, that the Moro National Liberation Front was formed in 1969. Its avowed objective is to form a separate state called the Bangsa Moro Republik (BMR), comprising the islands of Mindanao, Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan.⁴⁸

The MNLF is an expression of Muslim opposition to the government land policy in the south perceived as an enforced Christianization of Moroland. It was also a response to the steady erosion of Muslim political power and to the economic

⁴⁸ "Who's backing the Muslim rebels?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1974, p. 12.

discrimination suffered in the hands of the local Christian sector.

The core of MNLF leaders came from five principal batches of Pulau Pangkor trainees between 1969 and 1970. The lower ranking members of the organization received training in camps in Sabah. The rebels came from basically three groups: Maguindanaos in Cotabato, Maranaos in the two Lanao provinces, and the Tausogs in Sulu, Basilan and the coastal areas of Zamboanga del Sur. Recruits are given six months of military training and political education before they join the regular field units.⁴⁹

The MNLF has parallel political and military structures. The political arm consists of a central committee of twenty members, a political bureau, a propaganda and intelligence bureau, and provincial and barrio committees. The political organization was a coalition of traditional and conservative Muslim elite and the Marxist inspired young radicals. Through the organization, the traditional elites got a vehicle to maintain political power, while the young radicals gained legitimation from the credentials of the former.⁵⁰ The Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) provided the military arm of the organization. It is headed by a field-marshal who is under the central committee but not directly supervised by it. There are also field-marshals at the provincial level and zone commanders at the municipality level.⁵¹

D. FOREIGN SUPPORT TO THE REBELS

The rebels started receiving foreign monetary aid as early as 1969. Funds were initial given to the MIM through the older Muslim leaders like former Congressman Rascid Lucman. While openly under the MIM, Nur Misuari covertly built up his own organization. He used the money he received to finance the formation of the Bangsa

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Malloy, Ivan, "Revolution in the Philippines, The Question of An Alliance Between Islam and Communism," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 8, August 1985, p. 856.

⁵¹ Noble, Lela, *Op. Cit.*, p. 412.

Moro Army that later became the military arm of the MNLF. When the MIM leadership found that he was operating not under the auspices of the MIM but as MNLF Chairman, a split in the relationship followed and monetary support to the latter was cut off.⁵²

Misuari sent representatives to Malaysia to convince the Malaysians of the legitimacy of the objectives of the MNLF and to resume monetary support directly to his organization. Two sets of delegations sent to Malaysia produced negative results. The Malaysians wanted Misuari to patch up his differences with Lucman and the older Muslim leaders. They also wanted him to go to Sabah and explain what happened. After two trips, Misuari convinced the Malaysians that his organization represented a united front against the government. Aid to the rebels resumed after that.

Lucman at first tried to reestablish control over the secessionist movement, calling for an independent Islamic state and denigrating the communist character of Misuari's MNLF, the Bangsa Moro Army (Moro People's Army) and the goal of establishing a Moro People's Republik. Failing to wrest back the rebel movement from Misuari, Lucman laid down his arms and got an amnesty from President Marcos.⁵³

The man responsible for Malaysian support to the Filipino Muslim rebels was Tun Datu Haji Mustapha, the Chief Minister of Sabah. He was born in Sulu and had several relatives in elective positions there. He was also a guerilla fighter in Jolo during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in World War Two.⁵⁴ Mustapha earned the friendship of most of the Muslim rulers in the Middle East, most especially King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi by his demonstrated religious zeal in converting the natives and the Chinese in Sabah to Islam. As Secretary General of the OIC he endorsed the Moro case submitted to him in 1972 and asked King Faisal and

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 410.

⁵³ See, "Who's backing the rebels," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1974, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Stockwin, H., "Marcos' Vietnam?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 March 1973, pp. 15-16.

President Qaddafi to help persuade other OIC member states to support it.⁵⁵

Mustapha provided aid to the rebels and allowed the use of Sabah as training camp, supply depot, communication center and sanctuary. He let the rebels acquire motor boats in Sabah for smuggling of arms and ammunition to their forces in Mindanao and for bringing back rebel casualties for treatment in Sabah. He supplied the rebels with arms and money, either on his own or as a conduit for Colonel Qaddafi. Mustapha believed that by helping the Muslims in the Southern Philippines, he was helping his people. Many Muslims however believed that he decided to support the rebels only after the Philippines laid formal claim to Sabah in the early 1960s, an act that led the two countries to break diplomatic relations twice.⁵⁶

The Malaysian Government in Kuala Lumpur strenuously denied that it was supporting the Muslim rebels. Not wanting to alienate Malaysia, the Philippine government accepted the assurance of the Malaysian Government. However, Kuala Lumpur may not have the full control over the activities of Tun Mustapha at that time. Evidence has subsequently been quoted to suggest that he had ambitions for a state of his own whose nucleus would be Sabah, Sulu and Mindanao. There may be some truth to this because Sabah's relationship with Malaysia was up for review in 1973.⁵⁷

Libya supplied money and arms to the rebels in the belief that the Philippine Government had embarked on a programme of genocide. The Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi was said to have decided to intervene in the south after hearing a radio program on Muslim problems there. He ordered arms and money to be supplied after asking his aides: "Where exactly is Cotabato?" In 1972, Misuari and several established Muslim politicians of the south visited Libya to arrange the flow of support to the rebels. Representations made to channel arms and funds through Sulawesi or Kalimantan were rejected by the Indonesian government. This left Sabah as the only conduit for foreign

⁵⁵ Samad, and Abu Bakar, *Op. cit.*, p. 560.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 558-559.

⁵⁷ Turpin, Alex, "New Society's Challenge in the Philippines," p. 9.

aid from the Middle East.⁵⁸

The first shipment of firearms from Sabah landed in December 1972 at the town of Lebak in Cotabato province. Boats, each powered with three Volvo-Penta 170 engines, brought in Belgian made Cal 7.62 rifles, anti-personnel mines, grenades of the cylindrical unserrated type, plastic explosives, Cal 30 LMG, Browning carbines, Cal 30 M1s and several thousand rounds of ammunition to Cotabato and other landing sites regularly for the next fourteen months.⁵⁹

In contrast to the Libyan zeal, Southeast Asian governments maintained a low profile with regards to the Mindanao crisis. There were deep concerns in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur that, just when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was making some headway in different but important areas, it seems to have fallen into the old destructive rut. Both governments maintained that the crisis was an internal affair of the Philippines.

E. MNLF LEADERSHIP

According to one account, the original five members of the MNLF were Nur Misuari, Abul Khayr Alonto, Indar Tampi, Amelil Malaquiok (Commander Ronnie), and another Muslim from Zamboanga- two Tausug/Samal, two Maranao, and one Maguindanaoan. On the other hand Jamil Lucman claimed that there were ten founders of the MNLF. He identified the founders as: Nur Misuari, Jamail Lucman, Abul Khayr Alonto, Amelil Malaquiok, Al Bandaing, Sali Wali, Utu Salajuddin, Ali Boon, Abdul Manan, and Akman Inampala. The last four had already been killed.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Stowe, Judy, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ See "Who's backing the Muslim rebels," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 March 1973, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Noble, Lela G., "Muslim Separatism in the Philippines, 1972-1981: The Making of a Stalemate," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXI, No. 11, November 1981, p. 1113.

The recognized leader and chairman of the central committee is Nur Misuari. He is a Tausug from the Sulu archipelago. He was a prominent member of the Kabataan Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) founded by Jose Maria Sison in 1964. The Kabataan Makabayan was a Marxist-inspired organization that draw membership from students and ideologues. Sison went on to form the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) on 26 December 1968, and this served as a model for Misuari in organizing the MNLF. Misuari and his wife, Desdemona Tan, who was from a prominent Chinese family in Sulu, were based in the Middle East.

The vice-chairman, who remained in Mindanao, was Abul Khayr Alonto. He is a member of a prominent Lanao Maranao family. He was a former law student at San Beda College in Manila and won the vice-mayorship of Marawi City in the 1971 elections. Abhoud Syed Lingga served as the Front's spokesman to journalists when he chaired the political secretariat in northern Mindanao. He was later removed from office. Hashim Salamat, a Maguindanao, chaired the foreign affair's committee and served as the Front's spokesman abroad. Abdulhamid Lukman, a former municipal judge at Maimbung, Sulu, served as Salamat's deputy until he defected in August 1975. Abdul Baki, a Tausug living in the Middle East, also served as spokesman of the Front.⁶¹

The MNLF leadership tried to develop an ideology that gave emphasis to "Moro" nationalism and social reform to obtain both foreign Islamic support and the support of the local Muslim community. It is this objective expressed in Marxist phraseology that led to the early falling out between the young intellectual leadership of the MNLF and traditional Muslim leaders.

F. THE DOMESTIC FRONT

At the outset, the MNLF had to form its own fighting units in the provinces of Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, and Sulu,

⁶¹ Noble, Lela G., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 412-413.

independent of the other rebel groups. They had to show that their units were better organized, disciplined and dedicated than the other groups. These attributes did not pass unnoticed so when the MNLF sounded off a call for unity, many decided to join. Other rebel groups joined the MNLF but retained their own independent identity. The rebel movement grew in size under the leadership of the MNLF. It turned out to be a more disciplined successor to the Mindanao Independence Movement. Through its military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army, rebellion began within a month after the declaration of 'martial law'. The rebels waged a furious war against central authority and during the next year the Armed Forces of the Philippines had to struggle desperately to restore control.

The uprising was not connected with the imposition of Martial law in September 1972. However, rebel propaganda tried to portray Martial law as a government tool to forcibly integrate and Christianize the Muslims. Their own propaganda aroused their fighting spirit. The rebels rallied the Muslims to their cause by declaring "jihad."

The rebels used classic guerilla tactics of encircling the urban centers and isolating them from the other areas by cutting and controlling the roads. They made good use of ambush and withdrawal and of surprise and mobility. Unlike the army, their intelligence is good. Their targets are visible while they are not. They have a vital underground supplementary force in their sympathizers, whom the Armed Forces cannot isolate. They knew the terrain and exploited it to their strategic advantage. What distinguishes the war from previous small scale encounters between dissidents and the constabulary was that for the first time it seemed relatively organized. The rebels had communication equipment and there was a unified command, at least in each area.⁶²

1. The Grand Design to Independence

The Cotabato operation of the MNLF was the pivotal point for the rebellion. The rebel planned to use Cotabato as the main logistical base for foreign support. This

⁶² Brian, Phelan., "Spectre of Jihad," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 May 1993, p. 29.

initially required clearing the province of government forces. The Cotabato Command would later link up with the Davao Command and drive through the Agusan corridor to the Surigao provinces in the east. Meanwhile, a task force from the Cotabato Command would push toward Bukidnon while the Lanao Command will push toward Misamis Oriental. Zamboanga MNLF command would take over Misamis Occidental, while Basilan/Jolo MNLF would take over the whole of the Sulu archipelago to include the province of Palawan.⁶³

Datu Ali Sansaluna was the leader of 5000-6000 men that composed the MNLF Cotabato Command. Two thousand of his men were armed with powerful weapons of European make. The rebels selected Lebak as their logistical base because of the advantages of terrain. The coastline and the Tran and Tran Peidu rivers provided excellent entry points for the landing of arms and ammunition and other war material coming from abroad. Tran river provided the natural obstacle to any planned enemy incursion into the fortified area. The sea provided an easy avenue of withdrawal. From Lebak, the MNLF distributed war material that arrived from abroad, to units in the central plains of Cotabato.⁶⁴

The encounter between the MNLF Cotabato Command and a Philippine Constabulary patrol on 27 February 1973, signaled the offensive against AFP detachments all over Cotabato. The Cotabato Command easily neutralized government forces in the central plains of Cotabato. Land traffic from Cotabato City to Davao City, General Santos City and to Parang where the command center of the Fourth Philippine Constabulary Zone headquarters was located, was cut off by the rebels. This severely affected the security and economic situation in the area. The rebels aimed to capture the Cotabato City-Awang Airport complex as the last phase of the Cotabato operations before moving on to the next stage of their plan.

⁶³ Abat, Fortunato., *The Day We Nearly Lost Mindanao*, SBA Printers Inc, Quezon City, p. xx.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

Facing the rebel onslaught were the 27th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army, the 54th Philippine Constabulary Battalion and the PC Provincial Commands. After the blitz-like operations of the MNLF in the province of Cotabato, the rebels occupied/controlled/ influenced the towns of Tumbao, Datu Piang, Buluan, Sultan sa Barongis, Ampatuan, a part of Columbio, Maganoy except its poblacion, Dinaig, a large part of Nuling, Upi and Lebak except for a foothold in the shoreline compound of the Magsaysay Logging Company. Cotabato City and the Awang airport complex were practically surrounded by MNLF occupied/controlled/influenced areas.⁶⁵

The rebels intensified the ambush of military convoys and attacks on isolated communities and inadequately defended government outposts and bridge defenses. They are by this time able to mount attacks up to battalion in size. The MNLF leadership assumed that the Marcos government can only be forced to make significant concessions by a combination of a war of attrition and diplomatic pressure.

The Bangsa Moro Army however, committed the mistake of trying to hold-territory against the government forces who had superior fire power and logistics back-up. As a result of a flawed strategy, the rebels suffered major losses. Thereafter, the rebels changed their strategy in favor of guerilla warfare and 'mass work'. Rebel activity fell into a pattern where escalation of the armed conflict normally precedes the meetings of the Organization of Islamic Conference. In between conferences of the OIC, rebel initiated armed conflict tend to subside.

G. THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT

By the first quarter of 1974, the MNLF succeeded in getting the attention of the Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers. As a result, MNLF representatives were invited to attend the Kuala Lumpur summit in June 1974. Two documents presented by the rebel delegation to the Conference, asked for recognition and support in their struggle

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

for an independent Muslim state in Southern Philippines.⁶⁶

The rebels were not able to get what they wanted for the foreign ministers' in their communique called for "a political and peaceful solution . . . within the framework of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines." What the rebels gained in the conference was the specific recognition of the MNLF as the representative of Muslim Filipinos. It also got an explicit description of the socioeconomic plan of the Philippine government to address the problem in the south which it found inadequate.⁶⁷

The MNLF embarked on an aggressive diplomatic campaign to gain international recognition to its cause. In particular, it targeted the influential Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for its campaign for recognition. It made a bid for full membership in the body. When the MNLF first submitted its application, the OIC turned it down. In succeeding conferences of the OIC, the MNLF continued to apply for permanent membership, and every time, the conferees failed to consider the application. Apparently the OIC is wary that this would set a precedent for other Muslim secessionist movements in other countries. Although the MNLF has not achieved membership in the OIC, it has gained the support of the Organization into mediating into the conflict. The involvement of the OIC has prevented the Philippine Government from using an all out military solution to solve the problem in the south.

⁶⁶ Noble, Lela G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 1099.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1099.

IV. THE GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER SECESSIONIST EFFORT

A. THE MARCOS REGIME

1. Military Action

The Government's initial response to the escalating conflict during the first quarter of 1973 was to put more troops into the troubled area. By the first week of March 1973, the situation became very serious to require Presidential action. President Marcos designated Brigadier General Fortunato Abat as head of the newly formed Central Mindanao Command (CEMCOM). Abat was then the Commanding General of the Third Infantry Brigade (Separate) in Camp Lapu-lapu, Cebu City. Marcos' orders to General Abat were:

I am sending a plane right now to bring you to Cotabato. You shall take command of all units and military personnel (there) . . . I have directed the Chief of Staff to send you reinforcements . . . Study the situation carefully, plan well. Any thing that you need, don't hesitate to call me up. . . . I want you to report to me directly and as often as you can. . . .

⁶⁸

a. Campaign to reestablish control in Cotabato

General Abat assumed operational control of all military and paramilitary forces in the provinces of Cotabato, South Cotabato and Davao del Sur effective 6 March 1973. The initial phase of the CEMCOM Campaign plan was to consolidate existing forces and buildup troops and resources. An essential part of this phase was the clearing of the Parang-Cotabato City road, and sanitizing the Cotabato-Awang complex and using it as the main base of operations. The second phase was the offensive phase aimed at the destruction of rebel forces. This called for securing the foothold in Lebak and the air-head in beleaguered Maganoy as future bases of operations. It also called for the consolidation of other areas not under rebel control. An essential part of the plan was

⁶⁸ Abat, Fortunato., *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

to strengthen the Civilian Home Defense Forces. This was to enable the people to secure their respective communities and free AFP units for operations against the main rebel forces. The third phase was the reestablishment of civil authority. This called for the appointment of local officials, reintroduction of government agencies, reopening of schools, and strengthening of police forces. A fourth phase of the campaign plan was the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase. The fifth and final phase was the reconciliation phase. An intensive psychological operations directed towards the people to forget the hatred, animosity and bitterness caused by the conflict will be conducted by the government.⁶⁹

CEMCOM first secured the Cotabato City-Awang airport complex from rebel attack, then it sanitized the surrounding areas in preparation for the launching of the offensive. The 6th Infantry Brigade was formed out of the reinforcement units that arrived in Cotabato City and designated the major tactical command of CEMCOM. The offensive started with the reopening of the 20-kilometer line of communications between Cotabato City and Parang. Operations started on 10 March 1973 and ended on 21 March 1973 when the road was secured and opened to traffic. The Dinaig operations followed on 27 March and ended with the capture of the town on the 29th. The next objective was Datu Piang. It was the seat of control of the rebel held and influenced areas of the central plain of Cotabato. Datu Piang was where the MNLF Cotabato Command planned to launch the final assault on the Cotabato City-Awang Complex. Prior to the offensive, the government airdropped thousands of psychological leaflets over the town of Datu Piang calling for the residents to convince the rebels to leave the town within 24 hours and save it from death and destruction. The leaflets also warned the residents to evacuate the town proper or stay under strong structures and protect themselves from the bombardment that would take place after the 24-hour deadline. They were instructed to come out with white flags when they saw the advancing CEMCOM troops. Other psy-war leaflets urged the rebels to surrender with assurances

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

of safe conduct passage, humanitarian treatment and government assistance. The leaflets created the desired result. The rebels departed the town before the 24-hour deadline. The 12th Infantry Battalion occupied Datu Piang on 5 April 1973 without firing a shot. The Central plain offensive ended with the occupation of Pagalungan on 8 May 1973.⁷⁰

In its operations, CEMCOM tried to seek the help of traditional leaders in regaining peace in the area. An example was when military operations were about to start to regain control of the town of Pagalungan. Datu Udtog Matalam, the moving spirit of the Mindanao Independence Movement was from this place and General Abat thought it wise to enlist his help in bringing peace to the area. CEMCOM lifted its orders on resources and population control on Pagalungan when Datu Matalam agreed to talk with General Abat. The President also went out of his way to convince Matalam to help the government by talking to him over the telephone. After the dialogue a massive civic action program was conducted in Pagalungan. The following government agencies participated in the civic action: the Philippine National Red Cross, SPARE (Special Programme of Assistance for the Rehabilitation of Evacuees), Social Welfare, Health, Agriculture departments and the National Grains Authority. Government effort to get the support of Matalam paid off. Pagalungan returned to government control with minimal military effort on 8 May 1973.

b. The MNLF Diversionary Action in Davao

MNLF rebels attacked and occupied the coastal town of Tarragona in Davao Oriental on 22 April 1973, to relieve pressure on Cotabato. The rebels later moved toward the town of Mati and threatened the provincial capital. Constabulary provincial command, police elements and Civilian Home Defense Forces put up a courageous defense against the rebels. The 6th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army was tasked to retake Tarragona on 1 May. The town was recaptured on 7 May 1973. Mopping up operations by the Army followed and ended on 25 August when Davao

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-67.

Oriental Philippine Constabulary reassumed responsibility for law and order.⁷¹

c. Military Operations Against Datu Guiwan

Datu Guiwan Mastura held sway over the Muslim population in the three towns of Lebak, Kalamansig and Palimbang. Guiwan is a direct descendant of Sultan Kudarat of the Sultanate of Maguindanao. His rebel group was deployed to the east and south of the town of Lebak. Military operation against Guiwan was launched on 21 March 1973 with the opening of the road between Lebak and Kalamansig. This forced Guiwan to withdraw to the eastern hills of Lebak and Kalamansig and southward to the Muslim town of Palimbang. Military units pursued Datu Guiwan and his force to Palimbang where they caught up with him on 17 April 1973. He was forced to surrender with nearly a thousand people composed of able-bodied fighters, their wives and children.

d. The Tran Operations

Tran was the hardest fought piece of real estate in Central Mindanao. This was the main logistics base of the MNLF's Cotabato Command. The deep waters of Linao Bay and the wide mouths of its rivers made possible the use of Volvo Penta speed boats and Kumpits to bring in arms, ammunition and other war material to the rebels. Tran was heavily fortified with bunkers, trenches, air-raid shelters and land mines. It was guarded by 600 rebels under Datu Sangki Karon, a former councilman of Lebak.⁷²

Military operations against the rebels started on 6 June 1973. Government forces included the 21st, the 22nd and the 4th Infantry Battalions PA, the 1st Composite Infantry Battalion, GHQ, the 554th and 531st Philippine Constabulary Companies and four ships of the Naval task Group 71.1. The well-entrenched rebels put up heavy resistance forcing CEMCOM to deploy more troops in the Tran area. As the government forces kept tightening the noose, pushing the rebels to the octopus head of the Tran river in Turogan, the density of anti personnel mines increased, causing many

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

casualties. Surrender leaflets addressed to the combatants and non-combatants were dropped into the area. When military commanders learned of the presence of women and children in the area, they suspended offensive operations. There were rebel attempts to break out from the government cordon and most of these were pushed back into the cordon. A few attempts succeeded by taking advantage of the dark hours and using the Tran River as escape route to Linao Bay.⁷³

After almost two months of fighting, the rebels could no longer withstand the pressure of the government onslaught. On 3 August 1973, a thousand rebels and their families surrendered to the government forces. After gathering them at the mouth of the Tran River, Navy boats sealifted them to Cotabato City for processing. The Red Cross, Social Welfare and Health agencies of the government together with civic organizations were organized to assist the surrenderees.

There were some hold outs among the rebels so mopping up operations were conducted until the 6th of August. The operation resulted in 46 military and 6 Civilian Home Defence Forces (CHDF) killed in action, and 167 military and 13 CHDF wounded. On the rebel side, 137 were killed and 981 surrendered.⁷⁴

e. Other Central Mindanao Operations

Rebel concentration in Reina Regente mountain threatened the Christian communities of Sultan Kudarat Province and Midsayap and Pikit of North Cotabato. Military operations to neutralize the rebel concentration were launched on 2 February 1974 with three infantry battalions on the attack. There was a suspension of operations on the 9th to allow negotiations to take place. Negotiations broke down when the rebels demanded that the government forces withdraw from the area, that negotiations be conducted in the presence of UN observers and that negotiations be conducted in a third country. Military operations resumed immediately after the peace negotiations broke

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-110.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

down and after 52 days the rebels were forced out of the area.⁷⁵

f. The Attack on Jolo

MNLF rebels attacked Jolo on 7 February 1974. Their objective was to weaken the government forces in their secure base and to create a tangible reminder of their cause. The attack was especially timed to coincide with the holding of the Islamic Summit conference in Lahore, Pakistan. The rebels managed to capture the airport but failed to exploit this initial advantage. Government forces engaged the rebels to regain areas that came under rebel control. After three days, the rebels withdrew and in their wake they set the town on fire. Almost two-thirds of Jolo was razed.⁷⁶

The rebels failed to hold Jolo long enough to get international recognition for their Bangsa Moro Republik (Republic of the Moro nation) because they were overconfident of their strength. But over confidence in its ability to defeat the rebels was also the reason why military forces decided to step up the pressure against the rebels toward the end of January. This provoked the rebels to infiltrate and occupy the town. The result was the destruction of Jolo. In losing the battle to control Jolo, the MNLF lost prestige and vital access to medicines and information.

g. Balabagan Operation

In Lanao del Sur, a rebel force of 500 men captured the town of Balabagan on 23 August 1974. The attack cut off two companies of the 26th Infantry Battalion of the Army. Rebels held the town for two weeks before military operations could be launched to reestablish government control. Navy ships bombarded the town on 3 September, followed by the landing of a battalion of marines. The 28th and 33rd. Infantry Battalions from Malabang were also mobilized to link up with the Marines and take back the town from the rebels. The rebels chose to leave the town instead of facing

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.119-121.

⁷⁶ Stockwin, Harvey , " Jolo: A Man-Made Disaster," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 February 1974, pp. 10-11.

the combined strength of three battalions. They burned the town as they left.⁷⁷

h. Cotabato Offensive

The MNLF launched an offensive on Cotabato City in the early hours of 30 January 1975. They started the attack with mortar fire directed at the Philippine Constabulary Hill in the center of the city. The PC hill, is the headquarters of the joint Police Constabulary and Army control, and the Central Mindanao Command (Cemcom). About 14 mortar shells slammed into the PC Hill area, killing a teacher and her mother and injuring a few others. To neutralize the rebels, the military launched Operation Thunderball that called for the control of Tamontaka and Taviran rivers and Tumbao and Kakar-Biniruan areas southeast of Cotabato City. Tumbao was captured on the 18th of March and the Tamontaka-Tumbao-Taviran river area was cleared and secured by the 30th of March. This removed the threat to the security of the Cotabato City-Awang complex.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines committed 14 infantry battalions with accompanying support units against the Bangsa Moro Army in the Parang-Cotabato-Awang complex, the Central Plains of Cotabato and the Kalamansig-Lebak and Tran area. The government deployed a total of 50,000 troops or 75-80 percent of the total AFP's combat strength in Mindanao and Sulu in the 1973-75 period.

2. Diplomatic Offensive

The escalating cost of military operation against the rebels and the possibility of sanctions by the Middle East countries that controlled its oil supply, forced the Philippine Government to find other means to resolve the Muslim problem. An orchestrated diplomatic offensive was launched aimed at closing the flow of foreign support to the Muslim rebels. President Marcos gave priority to establishing friendly relations with Islamic countries, particularly Egypt which hold a great deal of influence among the Arabs. The Philippines also supported the Arab cause in the United Nations to persuade

⁷⁷ See, "The Changing face of death," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 September 1974, pp. 38-40.

Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories. These moves were pursued to win over the sympathy of the Arabs and exert influence to halt the flow of foreign aid to the Muslim rebels in the south. It was also imperative to win the friendship of these countries because of the threat of oil embargo, the Philippines being heavily dependent on the Middle East for its supply of oil.⁷⁸

The Philippine Delegation to the ASEAN forum made effective use of its position in the organization to express great concern over the material and moral support given by some foreign countries to the secessionist movement.

The Philippine government got the support of Indonesia in presenting its case to the OIC Foreign Ministers Conference in Kuala Lumpur in 1974. Indonesia's influential position in the OIC was greatly instrumental in swaying the conferees to agree that secession is not the answer to the 'Muslim problem' in the south. The conferees agreed that secession is not the solution to the Muslim problem. They urged instead the conduct of peace negotiations between the MNLF and the Philippine government.⁷⁹

To dispel rumors that the Philippine Government was waging a genocidal campaign against the Muslims, President Marcos invited representatives of the OIC to visit and see for themselves the conditions in Mindanao. Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Al Shakaff, Libyan Foreign Minister Abdulati al-Obeidi, Somali Foreign Minister Arteh Ghalib, and Senegal Ambassador to Egypt Moustapha Cisse responded to the invitation. They came to the Philippines after the conference in Kuala Lumpur. The group visited Muslim areas in Mindanao and was satisfied of the government programs to uplift the welfare of the people. The President later conferred on them the Ancient Order of Sultan Kudarat, a decoration forged in honor of the famous Sultan of Maguindanao.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Wurfel, David, "Southeast Asian Alignments," *International Journal*, Volume 29, No.3, Summer, 1974, p. 452.

⁷⁹ Stockwin, H., "Marcos gain fame from the Muslims," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 July 1974, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁰ Abat, Fortunato, *Op. cit.*, p. 158.

The government tried to impress on visiting representatives of the Islamic countries that the Philippine policy on the Muslim problem in Mindanao is to undertake full-scale socioeconomic development for the advancement of Muslim and other cultural minorities. Also it tried to show that it is reducing the use of its armed forces to resolve the problem. As part of the administration's policy of pacification and to broaden the base of Muslim participation, the government granted amnesty to rebels who joined the government's peace and order campaign. More and more Muslims got appointed to national and local administrative positions.⁸¹

On 29 May 1974, President Marcos, accompanied among others by Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor, Chairman of the Presidential Task Force for the Rehabilitation of Mindanao, met with President Suharto of Indonesia at Menado, North Sulawesi. They discussed matters crucial to the solidarity of the region and problems affecting ASEAN. What Marcos asked from Suharto and the leaders of Islamic states with whom he has taken care to maintain friendly relations was that they refrain from intervening in the conflict in Mindanao and allow him to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem. Without outside support, the rebels are not expected to fight a successful guerilla war. Then, with a massive development effort to channel more of the nation's resources to Mindanao, the Administration hoped to improve economic and social conditions to a point where it can achieve a peaceful and less costly solution to the Muslim problem.⁸²

Diplomatic moves by the Government apparently had some success, since there was a marked decrease in the flow of arms to the rebels. This coincided with the defeat of Tun Mustapha in the Sabah elections in the middle of 1975. Mustapha's successor, Datuk Harris Salleh, assured the Philippines that he will not support or assist the Filipino rebels.

⁸¹ Stockwin, Harvey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.

⁸² Ronquillo, Bernardino, "The Muslims: Marcos turns to economics," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 February 1975, p. 27.

3. Socioeconomic development

The government also gave emphasis to the policy of wooing the Muslim population, extending to them as much economic aid as possible, promoting their cultural heritage and attending to their educational and social needs. The Government built more roads, irrigation systems and schoolhouses especially in Muslim dominated provinces.

The Amanah Bank, which served the southern provinces, revised its operations to conform with the Islamic concept of banking (no interest and partnership principles). It was also tasked to handle the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca so that Muslims could travel in relative comfort. Restrictions on the historic barter trade with Borneo was also removed.⁸³

Major portions of loans secured from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other United Nations organizations were invested in infrastructure and socioeconomic projects in Mindanao. By pursuing a faster and more meaningful development programme, the Administration hoped to win the support of the Muslims and deprive the rebels of mass base support.⁸⁴

To foster the Muslim culture, an Institute of Islamic Studies was established at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City. The government also proclaimed Muslim holidays for the region. There was also a commitment of the government to codify Muslim laws.

The Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA) was created to foster and accelerate the balanced growth of the region. In 1979-80, the SPDA charter was revised to concentrate on the development of economically viable ventures. Social development functions and non-corporate projects were transferred to the appropriate agencies of government.⁸⁵ A rehabilitation program for MNLF and other allied groups/

⁸³ May, R. J., and Nemenzo, Francisco, *The Philippines After Marcos*, Billing & Sons Ltd, Worcester, 1985, p. 113.

⁸⁴ Ronquillo, Bernardino, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

⁸⁵ May and Nemenzo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

individuals working/ cooperating with the government development effort in Southern Philippines was also established by the president in 1980 with a special fund of P 25 million administered through the SPDA.

4. Moves to Discredit the MNLF

Capitalizing on the ideological and ethnic/regional differences within the Muslim population and the insecurity of the Christians in the south, the Marcos government undertook a program to discredit the MNLF. It tried to show that the MNLF does not represent the sentiments of the Filipino Muslims.

In June 1974, a conference in Marawi City sponsored by the 'Federation of the Royal Houses of Mindanao and Sulu' placed on record its unanimous vote of confidence in President Marcos' leadership. It presented a list of proposals that were broadly sympathetic with the government's attempts to deal with the problem through socioeconomic reform. The government in fact financed the conference.⁸⁶

On 17 April 1975, the government initiated a peace conference with rebel leaders in Zamboanga City. This was timed to coincide with the negotiations between the government and the MNLF in Jeddah. Forty-two "rebel leaders" responded to the invitation and attended with 160 of their followers. The MNLF boycotted the meeting, however the government claimed that 26 of the men who attended were MNLF leaders. An MNLF spokesman admitted that five MNLF cadres did attend but all have already gone over to the government. The government got what it wanted from the delegates, a statement denouncing Nur Misuari and the MNLF's demand for autonomy. In return the Government accepted a list of six demands. These included a call for more development funds for the Muslim areas and punishment of corrupt civil and military officials.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁸⁷ Wideman, Bernard, "All Aboard Marcos' Peace Special," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 May 1975, p. 18.

The Marcos government made strenuous efforts to solicit the support of conservative Muslim leaders to convince MNLF members to surrender. Inducements came in the form of amnesty and incentives ranging from cash grants, logging concessions and scholarships to military commissions and placements in the government at the municipal or regional assembly level.

To further discredit the MNLF in the eyes of the Muslim populace and the international community, the government labeled the organization as 'Maoist' and Nur Misuari as a Communist. The government also blamed the MNLF for every act of violence and lawlessness that occurred in the Southern provinces.⁸⁸

5. Policy toward the Muslim's clamor for greater autonomy

Although the Philippine Government was negotiating with Muslim rebel leaders, the official stand was not to allow the rebels to form a separate entity within a federation. This was made clear by Secretary of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile in a rare press briefing in November 1974. The Government "will not change the political structure of the country," he said. During the briefing attended by senior military officers, Enrile announced that contacts have been made with the leaders of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). He also announced that the Government was negotiating separately with other rebel groups that were not part of the MNLF. According to Enrile and the Military, the number of Muslim rebels fighting the Government dropped from the 1973 peak of 16,000 to about 6,000 in 1974. Enrile however admitted that the mass base supporting the armed rebels was still around 400,000.⁸⁹

6. Initial Peace Negotiations

On January 1975, Presidential Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor led the government panel that went to Jeddah to discuss initial peace plans with the rebels. The

⁸⁸ Stauffer, Robert B., "Philippine Authoritarianism: Framework for Peripheral Development," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 1977, p. 386.

⁸⁹ Wideman, Bernard, "An Approach to the Muslim rebels," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 November 1974, p. 12.

meeting was held under the auspices of the Islamic Conference. The government panel noted that they could get down to some constructive haggling with MNLF leaders on an informal basis outside the conference room, in truly Filipino manner. Over the conference table, the MNLF leaders were unyielding in their demands for full autonomy and a separate security force in the south. It was obvious to the Philippine government panel that the Libyans were dictating to the Muslim rebel leaders. MNLF negotiators refused to do anything but read from a prepared text.⁹⁰

During the negotiations, Government negotiators refused to touch on the issue of autonomy unless ceasefire procedures were first discussed. MNLF representatives were also rigid in wanting to discuss the autonomy issue first. There was no meeting of the minds so the negotiations between the Government and the Muslims bogged down. The Philippine government accused the MNLF of being manipulated by 'outside forces'. Subsequently, Melchor returned to Manila empty handed. The Philippine government said it would never again negotiate with the MNLF outside the country.

7. The Tripoli Agreement

The OIC applied continuous pressure to the Philippine Government and the MNLF to resume peace negotiations. The Islamic Conference meetings in Jeddah in July 1975 and Istanbul in May 1976, reiterated the appeal first made by the Conference in Kuala Lumpur in 1974, for Manila and the Muslim rebels to resume the talk. Philippines' ASEAN partners, Malaysia and Indonesia, also worked behind the scenes to arrange for the two sides to resume negotiations. The visit of Libyan Vice-Foreign Minister Ali Trekki and other Conference representatives to the Philippines in August 1976 started the ball rolling for the second round of peace negotiations. Trekki told Philippine Government officials that Libyan officials prevailed on the MNLF leadership to relax their stand in order to resume talks. He and the other OIC representatives brought the message that the MNLF was ready to resume negotiations. President Marcos

⁹⁰ Tasker, Rodney, "The Moro Rebellion, Who calls the shots?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 January 1977, p. 20.

responded immediately by selecting a panel to represent the Government in talks.⁹¹

The financial support given by Libya and the residency of the MNLF leadership in Libya positioned Muammar Qaddafi to strongly influence the MNLF. The influence became stronger after the 1976 Islamic Conference in Istanbul when the OIC told Misuari that he would have to rely solely on the Libyans for his supplies, as no other Islamic country was prepared to help in the same way.

During the August visit of the OIC representatives, invitations were exchanged for President and Mrs. Marcos to visit Tripoli and for Libyan leader Qaddafi to come to Manila. President Marcos took advantage of the invitation to send Mrs. Marcos to Tripoli in mid-November.

The First Lady's visit scheduled to last only two days was extended for another two days to enable her to meet with Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. The meeting resulted in an agreement over the date for the second round of peace negotiations. A mutually acceptable joint communique was also issued by both parties. The negotiation between the Philippine Government panel and MNLF leaders was to start on 15 December in Tripoli. The communique's delicate wording of the passage relating to the Muslim rebellion said that the Libyans expressed satisfaction at the positions of the Philippine Government and that of the liberation fronts of Muslims, be it Moro or elsewhere, in accepting all the resolutions of the Islamic conference aiming at finding a justful {sic} solution acceptable to both parties concerned. This was a bit of double talk because the Libyans agreed to Manila's claim that the MNLF is only one Muslim rebel faction in the south, while "accepting all the resolutions of the Islamic conference" meant recognizing the MNLF as the sole spokesman. The Islamic conference resolution called for a continuation of talks. While the MNLF wants "belligerent status," the Philippine Government can only accord it "non-belligerent status."⁹²

⁹¹ Tasker, Rodney, "The Battle is on for peace," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 December 1976, pp. 8-9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

National Defense Under-Secretary for Civil Relations Carmelo Barbero led the government panel that met with Nur Misuari in the series of talks in Tripoli, Libya starting 15 December 1976. The other members of the government panel were Philippine Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Liningding Pangandaman, Ambassador to Algeria Pacifico Castro and Muslim commissioner for Region XII Simeon Datumanong. Libyan Vice Foreign Minister Ali Trekki carried out most of the negotiations on behalf of the MNLF.⁹³

Before the talks, the government launched a carefully orchestrated campaign to discredit the MNLF in the government guided media. Marcos' favorite tactic of 'divide and rule' was evident in the dailies where feature stories were of pro-Government Muslim officials and "youth leaders" in the south rejecting the MNLF's demands and saying that the rebel group was not supported by the people and should be dissolved.

The nine points demand of the MNLF presented during the talks were: Muslim control of (1) government and (2) security forces in the south; control of (3) administration, (4) judiciary and (5) education up to secondary-school level; (6) economic autonomy; the right to participate in the (7) central Government and (8) all organs of the State; and (9) the "establishment of Islamic life and society".⁹⁴

As the first step toward possible peace settlement, Philippine Government representatives and leaders of the MNLF agreed to a cease-fire on 24 December 1976. Both panels agreed that cessation of hostilities start on December 24 and be consolidated by 20 January 1977. A committee of 52, comprising equal numbers of Government and MNLF representatives with Islamic Conference members, would supervise the implementation of the cease-fire. Further talks were scheduled in Tripoli from February 5 to March 3, to hammer out a more substantive agreement. And finally, all being well,

⁹³ Tasker, Rodney, "The Moro Rebellion, Who calls the shots?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 January 1977 pp. 18-20.

⁹⁴ Tasker, Rodney, "Rebel's resolve puts the heat on Marcos," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 31 December 1976, p. 9.

a peace agreement was scheduled to be signed in Manila on 7 April, to which Qaddafi was invited.⁹⁵

The initial agreement promised autonomy to 13 provinces in the south: Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Palawan, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, South Cotabato and Davao del Sur. The MNLF originally demanded autonomy for the whole of Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan area that comprised 21 provinces. The Autonomous region would have its own security forces, but under the control of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Muslim courts would be organized to enforce Islamic codes relating to administration and personal family relations, but these would have to operate under proposed new centrally adopted codes.

Much of the credit for bringing the two parties to the conference table and inducing them to relax their formerly rigid stands sufficiently to reach an agreement of sorts goes to a committee of four within the Islamic Conference (representing Libya, Senegal, Saudi Arabia and Somalia) and particularly Libya's much maligned leader Muammar Qaddafi.⁹⁶

8. Government action to Implement the Tripoli Agreement

The Government said that the Tripoli Agreement was implementable under the regional autonomy system which is allowed under Article II of the Constitution. Said Article says that "local governments may group themselves or consolidate or coordinate their efforts, services and resources for purposes commonly beneficial to them." This is precisely the same Article that the MNLF wanted to invoke in the past, which they had been told was unacceptable. Working on a loophole that could reduce the size of the area granted autonomy, President Marcos said that a plebiscite in the affected areas is required by the Constitution, a move that was not discussed in Libya. People would be

⁹⁵ Tasker, Rodney, "Marcos moves closer to a Southern peace," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 January 1977, pp. 24-25.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

asked in the plebiscite whether they wanted to become part of the autonomous region.⁹⁷ This was apparently a balancing act by the government. It wanted to appear that it is for Muslim autonomy and at the same time would not want to antagonize the Christian majority in the proposed autonomous region.

President Marcos signed a decree on 14 February 1977 ordering the holding of a plebiscite in the thirteen provinces that comprised the proposed autonomous region.⁹⁸ The plebiscite scheduled on the 21st of February was later reset to 17 March. This was to give people ample time to learn the exact nature of the autonomous region. Meanwhile, negotiations were in progress in Tripoli.

The MNLF panel was upset with President Marcos' announcement and threatened to resume fighting in the south. Their Libyan host however persuaded them to simply agree to a postponement of the plebiscite. The rebels had every reason to be alarmed because only five provinces have Muslim majorities in the proposed autonomous region of thirteen (13) provinces. They feared the vote would be overwhelmingly against their plans for a cohesive Muslim region.

Establishment of the security forces for the Autonomous region was another area of dispute. The Tripoli agreement says that "special regional security forces are to be set up in the area of the autonomy for the Muslims in the south of the Philippines. The relationship between these forces and the central security forces shall be fixed later." Marcos interpreted this provision of the agreement to mean that Muslims could join the armed forces. In one of his speaking engagements, Marcos said,

That merely means, if you want to join the armed forces, sure, qualify, train, by all means because whether you are Muslims or non-Muslims you have the right to be a part of the armed forces. . . . But to take them out bodily without any further qualifications and recognize them as the only

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹⁸ Tasker, Rodney, "Plebiscite for the South," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 February 1977, p. 23.

armed forces in the area, no.⁹⁹

The MNLF interpreted the provision differently. MNLF spokesman Farouk Hussin said, "I think in the agreement, it mentions that we will have our own security forces. There was no question of being under the direct supervision of the Armed Forces of the Philippines."¹⁰⁰

The second round of talks between the Philippine government and the MNLF, which was to complete the peace settlement agreed upon previously, broke down completely by April. The MNLF rejected the Philippine Government's proposal for a referendum while the Philippine government accused the MNLF of abandoning its earlier acceptance of regional autonomy and reverting to a secessionist position. Both sides also accused each other of cease-fire violations. With the breakdown of the talks, Defense Undersecretary Carmelo Barbero returned to Manila for consultations. In a meeting of the National Security Council, Barbero said that what is needed to break the impasse in the peace negotiations is personal diplomacy at the highest level.

Again President Marcos sent the First Lady, Imelda Marcos to Tripoli to woo Qaddafi. The result was an exchange of cables between Qaddafi and President Marcos in which they agreed on a settlement. They agreed that President Marcos will quickly proclaim autonomy in the 13 provinces, set up a provisional government of "concerned parties," and then hold a referendum to settle the administrative details.

The most important aspect of the agreement was the issue on the holding of a referendum. Whatever Qaddafi had in mind, Marcos clearly knew he could use this concession to his advantage. He lost no time announcing that in the referendum, people would still be asked if they wanted to be part of a single autonomous region, even though he had earlier assured the MNLF that they would help to draw up the referendum

⁹⁹ Tasker, Rodney, "A step back to the battlefield," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 March 1977, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

questions. When asked what was the point of proclaiming autonomy in the 13 provinces before the referendum if people could then vote against it, Marcos answer was that every province would eventually have a degree of autonomy under his plan to set up autonomous regions all over the country.

The plebiscite was held on 17 April 1977. In 10 of the 13 provinces voters were asked whether they approved the merger of their existing two regions into a single autonomous region. In the three other provinces, voters were asked whether they wanted to join such a region. Voters were also asked if they wanted the MNLF form of autonomy, based on the MNLF proposal which called for the setting up of a virtually separate state under rebel control or if they wanted the Government's much more diluted autonomous arrangement under central control. The result was a more than 90% rejection of the MNLF plan. The voters also voted against the formation of a Bangsa Moro Islamic state, with its own flag, language, court system and security force under the control of the rebel group. Official record showed that most people wanted Manila to retain control under its form of limited autonomy for the various parts of the region.¹⁰¹

Although 21 embassies accepted the government's invitation to observe the voting, the Islamic Conference did not send any delegates. This was to show its displeasure over the perceived insincerity of the Philippine government in reaching a peaceful solution to the Muslim problem. The OIC's interpretation of the referendum portion of the Qaddafi-Marcos agreement was for the plebiscite to decide only the administrative arrangements for the autonomous region and not to decide which provinces would be included in said region. Predictably, the MNLF boycotted the plebiscite. Misuari himself described the plebiscite as "illegal." He also rejected the provisional government setup by Marcos as agreed in the exchange of cables with Qaddafi. Regional Commissioner Simeon Datumanong and 13 governors comprised the membership of the provisional government. Six of the members were Muslims. Later Marcos increased the membership to 15 and

¹⁰¹ Tasker, Rodney, "Uneasy peace after the plebiscite," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 April 1977, p. 10.

invited the MNLF to supply most of the members including Misuari as chairman. Misuari again rejected the offer so the provisional government remained a government staffed body under the Department of Local Government and Community Development.

The Islamic Conference reacted to the Philippine Government actions by issuing the 11-point resolution on the Philippines during the meeting in Tripoli. The conference deplored Manila's "negative attitude" in "shrinking its international responsibilities and obligations" under the Tripoli agreement. Manila was also held responsible for the breakdown in negotiations after the Tripoli agreement. It ominously called on Islamic countries to support the MNLF "in all ways to achieve all the demands of the Muslims" in the area. It recognized the MNLF as the legitimate representative of Muslims in the Philippines. It also entrusted the Islamic Conference Secretary-General with the task of consulting Islamic states to provide "emergency assistance" to them.¹⁰²

Despite the April 1977 breakdown in peace negotiations, the cease-fire remained in effect officially. Rebels who clashed with government forces were always referred to by government spokesmen as "bandits" to make it appear that the cease-fire was still in force. Continued implementation of the cease-fire however dimmed when a landmine allegedly planted by the MNLF blew up a lorry carrying plantation workers in the island of Basilan. The military launched a retaliatory operation against the MNLF camp in the mountainous Mahayahay region of southern Basilan. Air strikes and artillery backed the government troops. Pitched battles also occurred simultaneously in Jolo. Although there was an escalation in armed confrontation between the government forces and the MNLF, the cease-fire was still holding on the whole.

9. Resumption of Hostilities

The fragile ceasefire finally broke down when Brigadier General Teodolfo Bautista, five colonels and 27 other officers and men were massacred on 10 October 1977 in the municipality of Paticul in Jolo. The General and his men were cut down by

¹⁰² Tasker, Rodney, "Peace gets another Chance," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 June 1977, p. 8.

the rebels as they entered the marketplace in Danag to negotiate the surrender of the rebels. The one responsible for the "act of treachery" was Commander Usman Sali. Revulsion over the killing, both in the Philippines and in other countries, gained propaganda points for the government. Offensive action by government troops aimed at grabbing rebel leader Usman Sali left a large area of Jolo a 'no-man's land'.¹⁰³

Fighting between government troops and Muslim rebels resumed in full swing on several fronts. Negotiated settlement of the conflict became hopeless with the breakdown of the cease-fire. The refugee problem arising from the conflict reached alarming proportions. By this time there were 100,000 people in evacuation centers in the region. With the renewed hostilities, the MNLF's objective shifted from autonomy to complete independence. Misuari instructed his field commanders to drop the autonomy cause and instead concentrate on secession.¹⁰⁴

In a turn around, the Marcos government stopped referring to the rebels in the south as MNLF. The government reasoned out that the MNLF disintegrated into bands of terrorists who carried out more than 600 violations of the cease-fire agreement and against whom "police actions" were conducted by the AFP. In the first 'white paper' issued since the declaration of Martial Law, the Government justified the action against the rebels as "punitive action against terrorists, outlaws and violators of the cease-fire, and as defensive action to protect military outposts and to safeguard civilian population centers." In an interview with then Far Eastern Economic Review Manila bureau chief Rodney Tasker, Marcos justified his not referring to the MNLF by saying,

Yes, because they have, as I have repeatedly said, been reduced now again into the same diverse outlaw bands with their own individual objectives. Many of these men, who are engaged in depredations, pillage and looting, refuse to receive orders from those whom they call their

¹⁰³ Tasker, Rodney, "Zamboanga waits and worries," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 October 1977, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Ocampo, Sheilah, "Renewed Opposition," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 May 1982, p. 12.

senior commanders. That is why we call them outlaws.¹⁰⁵

10. Organizing the Regional Assemblies

The holding of the elections to the first Regional Assemblies for Regions 9 and 12 on 7 May 1979, was in furtherance of Marcos commitment to grant meaningful autonomy to Muslim areas in Southern Philippines. Political observers however viewed this move of the government to speed up "normalization" of the political situation and attain peace in the battle-torn Muslim regions as short on credibility.¹⁰⁶

Despite Marcos personal invitation to Nur Misuari, the MNLF chairman and Hashim Salamat who heads the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front), to participate in the political exercise, the two chose to snub the offer. As planned, the regional assemblies were to be organized through elections in the two southern regions where Muslims are concentrated. Region nine comprises the provinces of Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte (including the cities of Dipolog and Dapitan) and Zamboanga del Sur (including the cities of Pagadian and Zamboanga). Region 12 covers the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat and the cities of Iligan, Marawi and Cotabato. Seventeen elected representatives, four sectoral representatives and an unspecified number of Marcos appointees composed the assembly membership. The regional assemblies as envisaged exercised very limited powers. While they could impose taxes and legislate on regional affairs within the scope of national programs, they had no jurisdiction over defense, security, foreign trade, monetary affairs, communication systems, natural resource utilization, and immigration. Such limited authority was not acceptable to the MNLF.

To make the elections successful and within the purview of the Tripoli accord, there had to be significant participation of the MNLF. However, candidates with the true backing of the MNLF were conspicuously absent. This greatly dimmed any hope to get

¹⁰⁵ See, "Marcos talks of change," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 November 1977, p. 24.

¹⁰⁶ Tasker, Rodney, "A Showpiece faces scepticism," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 May 1979, pp. 18-19.

an endorsement of the polls by the Islamic conference in its meeting in Morocco.

Apart from timing the elections to coincide with the opening of UNCTAD V, Marcos knew that the day after the election, foreign ministers of the 42-member Islamic Conference were due to meet in Morocco. He may have anticipated that by appearing to hand over a form of self-government to Muslim areas as demanded by the MNLF, he would preempt any move by the Organization of Islamic Conference to take punitive action against Manila.

The traditional political opposition also chose to ignore the elections for it was embittered over the result of the previous elections to the Interim National Assembly which it claimed to have been massively rigged. What came up were token opposition parties against the well-organized ruling party, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (New Society Movement). As predicted, Kilusang Bagong Lipunan candidates swept the polls.¹⁰⁷

11. Rift in the secessionist movement

Attempts to discredit the MNLF and sow discord among Moro leadership began to show some signs of success by the later part of the 1970s. A combination of spontaneous splitting within the movement and alternate enlightening and devious policies by the government caused a rift in the organization.

a. Moro Reform Liberation Movement (MRLM)

Signs of disunity first became evident in January 1977 when a new group, calling itself the Moro Reform Liberation Movement (MRLM) popped up. It sent representatives to see Marcos in Manila and demanded for separate negotiations with the government. Former MNLF rebels comprised the bulk of the MRLM's membership. They claimed to have 26,000 fighters, the same number that the Government claimed to have surrendered over the past four years. Whatever the truth of the group's dubious claim to being a major faction in the south, the fact that Marcos agreed to consider their

¹⁰⁷ Ocampo, Sheilah, "Why the 'water banker' stood," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 May 1979, pp. 20-21.

resolutions upset the OIC, which insisted that Manila deal only with the MNLF.¹⁰⁸

Many prominent MRLM members had reason to be afraid of reprisals under any pro-MNLF autonomous government. For instance one of the MRLM leaders was Judge Abdul Hamid Lukman, a former spokesman for the MNLF who surrendered to the government and later became the deputy commissioner of Region IX (Nine), covering the Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga area. Two others, Maas Bawang Estino and Al Caluang, were well known former MNLF field commanders from Jolo. Another was Amilpasa Bandaying, a former MNLF fighter who became the aide to Southern Command chief Rear Admiral Romulo Espaldon.¹⁰⁹

There was lots of speculation why President Marcos decided to bring in another Muslim faction into play at said time. It could be that the government anticipated that the move would antagonize the Islamic Conference and would therefore preempt any finalization of the peace agreement. Taken from another angle, by agreeing to talk to all factions, he would be seen to be trying to bring genuine peace to the area.

MRLM's surprise bid for recognition as another faction of the Muslim populace that the government needed to deal with, showed that everything was not well within the Secessionist Movement. Throughout the struggle in the south, Misuari and his central committee had been based in the Libyan capital of Tripoli. There was known to be some disenchantment about this situation among certain MNLF field commanders, who, while bearing the brunt of the fighting, felt remote from their leaders. Factionalism began to beset the MNLF organization. Many tough field commanders dissatisfied with the MNLF leadership surrendered to the government.

¹⁰⁸ Tasker, Rodney, "Tightrope test for Marcos," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 January 1977, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Tasker, Rodney, "Marcos' peace manoeuvres," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 January 1977, p. 13.

b. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front

A split in the MNLF occurred in the late 1970s because of differing goals, revival of traditional tribal rivalries, and competition among Muslim leaders for control of the movement. The first break occurred after the April referendum in 1977 when Hashim Salamat accused Misuari of autocratic leadership, communist sympathies and corruption. Supported by ethnic Maguindanaos from Mindanao, Salamat formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which advocated more moderate and conciliatory approach toward the government. Salamat, a former Islamic scholar at Cairo University, chose to establish himself in Cairo after his split with Misuari. His leadership appealed to the more fundamentalist Muslims particularly from his own Maguindanaon tribe.¹¹⁰

The MILF ideology emphasized the role of Islam in the struggle for autonomy and self-determination. It teaches its followers to embrace Islam as their way of life and to make supreme the work of Allah. It considers all Muslims as brothers living in a worldwide community called Islamic Ummah, united and equal despite race, color or station in life. Its emphasis is the establishment of a strong Bangsa Moro Autonomous government in a Bangsamoro homeland where everyone will enjoy equal treatment irrespective of creed and religion under a true Islamic system.

According to the MILF leadership, the breakaway faction seeks autonomy and not secession. It stressed that the MILF abandoned the secessionist stance in response to thousands of appeals and resolutions submitted to the OIC calling for just solution to the Mindanao conflict. It defined its goals as "the establishment of a democratic system of government with equal representation in the executive, legislative and judicial departments following the principle of elections . . . centering on self-determination, except in foreign affairs and national defense."

¹¹⁰ May and Nemenzo, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

It also proposed the creation of a regional security force subject to discussions in a negotiation with the central government. MILF accepted and recognized that Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan are parts of the Philippine Republic. To the MILF leadership, the Tripoli Agreement is a major component in the negotiations for autonomy, since it involved the participation of the OIC. Regarding its position on the territory of the autonomous government, MILF's position was close to the governments idea of two autonomous governments.¹¹¹

While it is in favor of autonomy, the MILF said it will continue stockpiling arms while waiting the result of peace negotiations with the government. MILF spokesman and Vice Chairman for Political Affairs, Ghadzali Gaafar said the arms buildup will continue "unless we achieve our demands for a genuine autonomy for the Bangsa Moro people, including our Christian brothers."¹¹²

c. Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO)

Misuari's larger and more militant MNLF was further weakened during that period when rival leaders formed the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization. The BMLO drew many Mindanao Maranaos away from the MNLF dominated by Misuari's Sulu based Tausug tribe. The Saudi Arabia-based leadership of the BMLO was mainly pre-martial law Muslim politicians and community leaders who lived in voluntary exile. BMLO leader, former congressman Rashid Lucman said that the BMLO differed from the Nur Misuari MNLF leadership over tactics and goals in the Muslim struggle. The BMLO's ultimate aim is to form a united front to represent Filipino Muslims.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ocampo, Sheilah, "Calling in the neighbors," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 February 1980, p. 19.

¹¹² Tiglao, Rigoberto, "Hidden Strength," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 February 1995, p. 22.

¹¹³ Tasker, Rodney, "An Islamic Boost for the Rebels," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 June 1979, p. 38.

In 1978, MNLF Vice-chairman Abul Khayr Alonto surrendered to the government after a difference of opinion with Misuari. His decision to quit the MNLF might have been aggravated by Misuari's alleged communist sympathies. He later accepted the offer of President Marcos to become the speaker of Region XII assembly.

d. MNLF-Reformist Group

A further split in the MNLF occurred in 1982 when then Vice Chairman Dimasangkay Pundato, a Maranao, formed the MNLF 'Reformist Group' (MNLF-RG) in Jeddah. Pundato later reached an alliance with the BMLO and the Salamat faction in a 'Coordinating Council of the MNLF-BMLO'. Pundato's breakaway was the result of a dispute with Misuari over the latter's reversion to a secessionist position.¹¹⁴

The Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization eventually collapsed, giving way to the Moro National Liberation Front-Reformist Group. The breakaway group declared itself opposed to the extremist left revolutionary ideology of the MNLF. Some observers believe that the new group only sought decentralization of power that had become a monopoly of the main line MNLF. Pundato is more of a moderate leader who seeks only real autonomy in the predominantly Muslim areas. He was believed to be based in Sabah when he broke away from Misuari's faction. Though estimates of his field strength vary, his faction was viewed by the military as one with more growth potential than the other two factions.¹¹⁵

Moro factionalism, compounded by declining foreign support and general war weariness, hurt the Muslim secessionist movement both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. MNLF's Libyan based chairman Nur Misuari, and his former deputy, Hashim Salamat, had accused each other of absconding with foreign funds intended for the movement. The split in the MNLF coincided with the cooling off of the relationship between Misuari and Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi. Misuari later set up MNLF

¹¹⁴ May and Nemenzo, *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹¹⁵ Tasker, Rodney, "Calm on the Moro Front," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 August 1984, p. 30.

offices in Damascus, Jeddah and Tehran. He appeared to have shifted his base to these places and received support from King Khalid of Saudi Arabia and from the Khomeini regime in Iran.

President Marcos capitalized on the split in the leadership of the MNLF as a reason to be reluctant to seek further peace talks with the rebels. Moro fighting strength declined to about 15,000 by 1983, as more rebels surrendered to the government. During Marcos' last year in office armed confrontation was sporadic.¹¹⁶

Following the assassination of former senator and opposition leader Benigno Aquino on 21 August 1983, the MNLF struggle suffered a loss of momentum. Aquino's assassination gave Misuari a reason to reject any further negotiations with the Marcos regime. In an interview, Misuari said "We don't want to be identified with a murderous regime." He also said that he had been in touch with various factions of the political opposition in Manila since Aquino's death. He claimed that these groups were prepared to accommodate Muslim demands for independence in a post Marcos scenario.¹¹⁷

Despite the breakaway of the MILF and MNLF-Reformist Group from the main line MNLF organization, it appeared that Nur Misuari still has the predominant following in the field and the most prominent leadership status in the Muslim region. However, if he persists on maintaining his hard line demand for secession, he could lose the support of both the International Islamic community and large parts of the Movement who are prepared to negotiate for a more realistic solution to the Moro problem.

B. THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT CORAZON AQUINO (1986-1992)

The February 1986 "People's revolution" ousted President Marcos from power and Corazon Aquino was sworn in as the next President. Corazon Aquino is the widow of the late former Senator Benigno Aquino, the political archrival of Marcos, who was

¹¹⁶ Bunge, Frederica, *Op. Cit.*, p. 292.

¹¹⁷ Kamaluddin, S. and Tasker, Rodney, "Pressing the Point," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 December 1983, p. 26.

assassinated at the Manila International Airport in August 1983. Upon her assumption to office, President Aquino granted amnesty and released a number of political prisoners. The amnesty was part of a confidence building gesture to pursue her reconciliation program with all sectors of society.

Intense diplomacy coming from Southeast Asian capitals and the Middle East prompted President Aquino's decision to meet MNLF chairman Nur Misuari early in her term. The Aquino family's private links to Misuari also played a key role in bringing him back to a meeting with the President after 13 years of exile. The relationship date back to the 1970s when members of an anti-Marcos "Sandigan army" connected to Agapito "Butz" Aquino's Philippine Democratic Socialist Party, reportedly received weapons-training in MNLF camps in Sabah. Butz Aquino is President Aquino's brother-in-law. Butz Aquino maintained communication with Misuari during the whole period of the Marcos regime. The slain husband of the President, former Senator Benigno Aquino was also reported to have made two trips to Saudi Arabia, before his tragic death, to meet Misuari. His purpose was to act as mediator between MNLF and Manila.¹¹⁸

In mid-August 1986, Misuari was confirmed to visit the island of Jolo to attend a "Second National Bangsa Moro Congress," scheduled on 2-5 September. Seizing the opportunity, President Aquino announced her dramatic gesture of meeting Misuari during or after the congress, in Jolo or possibly in nearby Zamboanga City.¹¹⁹

1. The Aquino-Misuari Meeting

Setting aside protocol, President Aquino met with Nur Misuari on 5 September in a Roman Catholic convent in Jolo under stringent security. This historic meeting led to an agreement between the government and the MNLF providing for the cessation of hostilities. More importantly, it laid the ground work for formal discussions aimed at

¹¹⁸ Clad, James, "The Misuari Gamble," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 September 1986, p. 18.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

finding a political rather than a military solution to the conflict in Southern Philippines. Aquino and Misuari agreed on the continuation of informal, localized cease-fire accords between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MNLF and that these would be formalized. The negotiating timetable called for the initial consolidation of the agreed cessation of hostilities. This would be followed by substantive talks that would start when both sides had selected their negotiating panels. Peace negotiations were to be carried out under the auspices of the OIC. A joint statement named AFP Brigadier General Jose Magno and MNLF intelligence chief Abdul Sahrin as the first panelists, concentrating on military matters. Named civilian coordinators were the president's brother-in-law, Agapito "Butz" Aquino and Sharif Jain Jale, a moderate Muslim from Zamboanga.¹²⁰

Although local commanders of the Dimas Pundato (Reformist) and the Hashim Salamat (Fundamentalist) factions of the MNLF had, as early as April, signed cease-fire agreements with military authorities of the AFP Regional Unified Command 12, peace in Mindanao, continued to be unstable. Cases of warring Muslim groups and power politics caused the uneasy situation in the area.

There was wide belief that President Aquino committed a tactical error by resuscitating Misuari, who no longer commanded the respect of the Muslims. Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile said on 18 October 1986 in Zamboanga City that President Aquino had unnecessarily rekindled the Philippine Muslim separatist problem by agreeing to meet MNLF chairman Nur Misuari in September.¹²¹

2. The Jeddah Accord

In furtherance of the initial agreement between President Aquino and Nur Misuari, government negotiator National Affairs Minister Aquilino Pimentel and MNLF leader Nur Misuari signed an autonomy agreement in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on 4 January

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹²¹ Villegas, Bernardo M., "The Philippines in 1986," *Asian Survey*, Vol XXVII, No. 2, February 1987, p. 197.

1987. The accord proposed to grant autonomy to all of Mindanao and the island provinces of Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, Sulu and Palawan "subject to democratic processes." The words 'democratic processes' refer to the results of the 2 February plebiscite to ratify a draft constitution that contained provisions to grant autonomy to parts of the country. The other "democratic process" is the need for a stamp of approval by a future Philippine legislature and the holding of a plebiscite. In signing the agreement, Misuari has indicated that he abandoned his bid for a separate Muslim state and accepted instead a form of autonomy within the Philippines.¹²²

While the agreement might have placated Misuari, it drew resentment from the other MNLF splinter groups. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) reacted sharply at being sidelined in the negotiations and to show its displeasure, conducted coordinated attacks on bridges and government buildings. National Affairs Minister Aquilino Pimentel quickly patched up the problem by concluding a temporary cease-fire with Haji Murad, the deputy leader of the MILF on 18 January. In reaction to the violent resentment of the MILF, the government changed its policy toward the conduct of peace negotiations with the rebels. Pimentel later announced that the peace panel would include all important groups in Mindanao, Christian or Muslim, to discuss a comprehensive peace for the troubled island. Besides the violent reaction of the MILF, a growing backlash by the Christian majority against Manila's emphasis on the Muslim dimension of the island's problem might have triggered the government turnaround.¹²³

3. The 1987 Peace Talks

A 26-point demand submitted by Chief MNLF panelist Habib Hashim to Chief government negotiator Emmanuel Pelaez on 20 February 1987, revolved around the creation of a "semi-parliamentary" Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region (BMAR) headed

¹²² Clad, James, "Autonomy and Acrimony," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 15 January, 1987, p. 17.

¹²³ Clad, James, "Delivering a warning," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 January 1987, pp. 22-23.

by a "chief minister" and three deputy chief ministership coming from representatives of the Christian, Muslim and tribal communities. The chief minister heads a 16-member cabinet and has the power to appoint senior civil servants. He and his government would serve appointed terms until 1992- and there after face elections. The MNLF claimed that the Philippine Government had already agreed to grant full autonomy to the 23 provinces mentioned in the proposal.¹²⁴

The government maintained that it had agreed only to continue discussion of the proposal, subject to the proviso that any final agreement would be subjected to "democratic processes." It insisted that the proposal of the MNLF is contrary to the Jeddah Accord. By mid-April, the MNLF retreated from its 23 province demand to just 13 provinces and for the other 10 provinces to be the subject of plebiscite. Pelaez initially welcomed the shift but after consulting with the President, he reported on 21 April that the government would not budge on plebiscite and constitutional procedure. As the 9 May expiration of the MNLF-government cease-fire agreement loomed, both sides tried feverishly to arrive at a mutually agreeable arrangement on the autonomy issue. The government rejected MNLF notions to use Aquino's residual decree-making powers to create a Bangsa Moro Autonomous Region (BMAR) of at least 13 provinces. The Government could not accede to the MNLF demands, noting that the Constitution and the Jeddah Accord do not sanction the steps suggested. Culpable violation of the Constitution would have exposed Aquino to possible impeachment. Consequently, the peace talks collapsed and the Moro insurgency remained unresolved.¹²⁵

4. Developments After the 1987 Peace Talks

Despite breakdown of the talks, the Government pursued its Constitutional mandate to form an autonomous region in Southern Philippines. The Mindanao Regional

¹²⁴ Clad, James, "Dampening demands," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 April 1987, p. 28.

¹²⁵ Clad, James, "Peace talk with Moros stalled," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 7 May 1987, p. 28.

Consultative Commission (MRCC) was organized and tasked to help Congress in drafting an "Organic act" for the proposed autonomous region. The Office of the Peace Commissioner (OPC) supervised the formation of the MRCC. The OPC, with the Mindanao Consensus Building Panel, evolved a selection process that sought fair and adequate representation of all affected sectors. From an initial list of nominees, the President personally interviewed and selected the 52 MRCC Commissioners.

The MRCC was officially constituted on 26 March 1987. Besides the usual plenary sessions, the Commissioners held a series of consultations with their constituents to ensure that the draft organic act duly reflected their aspirations. The MRCC leadership submitted to Congress an unfinished working document in October. The body was not able to reach consensus on key aspects of the organic act in the time allotted to them. Only eight articles reached second reading. None of the provisions however, reached a third and final reading. Despite its drawbacks, the Executive Branch duly recognized the significance of the MRCC document. Many provisions reflect the aspirations of the various sectors in the region. Later, Congress used the MRCC output as a valuable input in formulating the organic act for the autonomous region in Southern Philippines.

5. Dismissal of Dimasangcay Pundato as head of MNLF-RG

The MNLF-RG tried to realign with the MNLF and MILF during the talks between the Aquino Government and the Nur Misuari faction. The Reformist group was hoping to gain national recognition and to initiate the formation of a broader political base. The Reformist group however, was accused of having betrayed the Muslim rebel movement for participating in government reconciliation programs in the region.

Pundato's appointment as Executive director of the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA) on 27 October 1988 led to his dismissal as head of the MNLF-Reformist Group. Despite his dismissal, Pundato continued to advance the interest of the Muslims. His program at the Office of Muslim Affairs gave priority to institution building, organizational development and community building. Emphasis was given to the enhancement and institutionalization of Madarasah, Shariah, Islamic financial institutions,

pilgrimages, endowments and even Quran readings. Agricultural and small business cooperatives, adult education and functional literacy programs and human resources developments in the Muslim sector were also of great interest to the OMA.

6. The Organic Act of 1989

In August 1989, an organic act offering significant autonomy for Mindanao became part of the law of the land. A plebiscite held in November decided which of Mindanao's thirteen provinces and nine major cities would join the autonomous region. Nur Misuari rejected the plebiscite as a violation of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. He urged the five million Muslims to boycott it, and threatened to reignite his armed struggle for independence. Despite Misuari's threats, the plebiscite was relatively peaceful and voter turnout was moderate. As expected, only four provinces with Muslim majorities voted to join the autonomous region.¹²⁶

The four Muslim-dominated provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur composed the new Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Elections for a regional governor, vice governor and a 21-man legislative assembly followed the holding of the plebiscite. The election was set for the following February.

Zacaria Candao won the seat for regional governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) on February 1989. As regional governor, Candao's initial thrust was the laying of the foundations for the ARMM while on the side he tried to find ways to surmount intertribal differences, mediate in family feuds, and raise more money for his badly depleted treasury. Given the way intertribal rivalry led to a degree of fragmentation within the Muslim secessionist MNLF, observers expected conflicts between the Tausugs from Sulu and Tawi-Tawi, the Maguindanaos and the Maranaos from Lanao del Sur, to remain near the surface in the new administration. There was some effort to strike a balance in the regional autonomous government. Candao is a Maguindanao, while vice-governor Ben Loong and assembly speaker vice-governor

¹²⁶ Timberman, David G., "The Philippines in 1989," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXX, No. 2, February 1990, p. 170.

Ismael Abubakar are both Tausugs. The rest of the autonomous government comprises three representatives from Tawi-Tawi, and six each from Sulu, Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao.

Although the MNLF rejected the new organic act and the result of the plebiscite, it decided to respect an informal truce forged after the cancellation of the peace talks. The MNLF instead embarked on an aggressive diplomatic campaign to gain international recognition to its cause. In particular, it targeted the influential Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for its campaign for recognition. It made a bid for full membership in the body. When the MNLF first submitted its application, the OIC turned it down. It expects to renew its bid in succeeding OIC meetings.

C. THE REGIME OF PRESIDENT FIDEL RAMOS (1992-TO DATE)

Fidel V. Ramos was elected president by popular vote in the May 1992 elections, which saw as many as seven presidential contenders. He won over Miriam Defensor Santiago, his closest contender who ran under the Peoples Reform Party (PRP), Eduardo Cojuangco of the National Peoples Coalition (NPC), Jovito Salonga of the Liberal Party (LP), Imelda Marcos of the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan Party (KBL), Ramon Mitra of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP) and Salvador Laurel of the Nationalista Party (NP).¹²⁷ The rebellions of the left (the communist), of the right (disgruntled military leaders), and of the Muslims in the south were the major sources of instability in the Aquino government that Ramos inherited. To come up with a workable national reunification programme, the President tried to reach out to every shade of rebel group. The National Unification Commission (NUC) created in September 1992 spearheaded the President's peace effort. Former Election Commissioner and University of the Philippines law professor Haydee Yorac headed the commission. To show its sincerity in its effort to solve the various insurgencies, one of the first actions of the Ramos Administration was to pass Republic Act 7636. The new law repealed the 35 year old

¹²⁷ Fontaine, Roger W., "The Philippines: After Aquino," *Asian Affairs*, 1992, pp. 177-179.

anti-subversion law and in effect legalized the Communist Party of the Philippines.¹²⁸

The NUC brought together the various groups that had been fighting against the government to discuss the attainment of peace. Ambassador Manuel Yan heads the government panel tasked to negotiate with the MNLF. Batangas Representative Eduardo Ermita is his vice-chairman.

1. Peace Negotiations

Negotiators from the Ramos government first met with MNLF head, Nur Misuari, in Indonesia in April 1992. After several delays, both panels agreed to start formal talks the following year in Indonesia. On 14-16 April 1993, Nur Misuari and a Philippine Government panel headed by Representative Eduardo Ermita met in Jakarta. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the mechanics of the peace talks. The government agreed to let the OIC be the facilitator in the talks in Mindanao. Both sides further agreed to begin peace negotiations before the end of June. Libya again played a major role in arranging the April meeting in Jakarta.¹²⁹

Although MILF representatives were not included in the Jakarta meeting, it remained predisposed to participate in the peace process. It formed its own peace panel and presented four points aimed at reaching a just and peaceful, social, economic and political solution to the problems in Southern Philippines. The MILF talking points are: resumption of discussions on the Tripoli agreement, safe return and rehabilitation of refugees to their places of origin, cessation of hostilities and provocative acts during the peace process and other matters that may contribute in arriving at a just and peaceful social, economic and political solution to the problem.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Brillantes, Alex B. Jr., "The Philippines in 1992, Ready for Take Off?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, February 1993, pp. 225-226.

¹²⁹ McBeth, John, "Sympathetic Ear," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 20 May 1993, p. 27.

¹³⁰ Santos, Oscar, *Toward a just, comprehensive and lasting peace*, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, Quezon City, 1993, p. 12.

Significantly, the conferees in the Islamic Conference Foreign Minister's meeting in Karachi, Pakistan decided to temporarily set aside the MNLF membership bid in order not to disturb the peace negotiations. The OIC replaced the membership issue with something related to economic reconstruction in Muslim Mindanao in its agenda.

The Philippine Government and the Moro National Liberation Front signed an interim cease-fire agreement in Jakarta on 7 November 1993.¹³¹ Ground rules and guidelines for the ceasefire were formulated by a joint ceasefire committee headed by Brig. Gen. Guillermo Ruiz and Abdul Sahrin of the MNLF. The ceasefire agreement covered the 13 provinces and nine cities originally provided for in Article III of the Tripoli agreement. The provinces covered were: Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Davao del Sur, and Palawan.

The two panels conducted a second mixed committee meeting on 6-7 April 1994 in Zamboanga City. During the meeting, Nur Misuari said that in his consultation with various sectors in Mindanao, the feed back that he got is that the people in the region are clamoring for peace. He said that he was convinced that the MNLF should now give peace a maximum chance to succeed and to pursue the peace process to its logical end. Areas where both panels had some difficulty agreeing are the transition of autonomy, the issues on national defense and regional security forces and the judiciary and shariah law. On 13 April, the Committee on the Judiciary and Shariah Law completed their special meeting and were able to agree on a consensus.¹³²

2. The Muslim Extremist Movement

Breakaway factions of the MNLF, however, threaten to disrupt the peace negotiations between the government and the Muslim rebels. The Muslim Extremist

¹³¹ See: "Philippines, Ceasefire Accord," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 November 1993, p. 15.

¹³² Aguinaldo, Sandra S., "Peace with the MNLF," *Business World*, 9 May 1994, p. 6.

Movement in the Philippines has become the most disruptive of the breakaway faction. The Extremist group started out as a local version of Tabligh (preachers of Islam) movement in Marawi City. Radical and young Muslims soon infiltrated the Tabligh, espousing the basic Islamic teachings based on the Quran and advocating the use of terrorism. The rise of the extremist group was attributed to the feeling among some Muslims that the MNLF has betrayed the Islamic cause by negotiating with the government for peace terms. The group recognized Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani as their leader. Janjalani is also known by his alias, Comdr. Abu Sayaff or Abusayap (Servants of Allah). The Abu Sayaff Group numbering 680 are active in Isabela, Tipotipo, Sumisip and Lantawan, all in Basilan, and in Campo Muslim and Mariki in Zamboanga City. The new recruits reportedly underwent training in demolition and sabotage operations under foreign trained MNLF rebels in various training camps in Isabela. There were reports that they were coordinating their efforts with the local MNLF units operating in Basilan and Zamboanga del Sur.¹³³

Efforts to establish MNLF alliance with the Muslim extremist group began on 18 March 1992 in Pakistan. There were reports that the Jamiatul Al-Islamic Tabligh (JAT) invited members of the MNLF Central Committee to integrate the MNLF plans with the programs of JAT. On 22 May 1992, the MNLF Central Committee approved the proposal that all MNLF military plans and projects should pass through the JAT Central Committee for proper study and appropriate funding. This reported formal MNLF-JAT alliance added a new dimension to the MNLF strategy because of the increased militancy of the Abu Sayaff Group.

The Abu Sayaff group also made some overtures to join the MILF in December 1994 but was turned down. The MILF leadership wanted the group to first renounce terrorism against civilians before their membership could be considered. MILF vice-chairman Ghazali Jaafar voiced out the sentiments of the MILF when he said,

¹³³ Tiglao, Rigoberto, "To Fight or Not to Fight," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 March 1995, p. 21.

We don't agree in the manner Abu Sayaff is undertaking its struggle. Islam clearly prohibits the killing of women, children, the elderly and leaders of other religions.¹³⁴

There were at least 44 reported terrorists activities from May 1992 to May 1993 attributed to the local Muslim Extremist Group. These are broken down into 25 bombings, 13 kidnaping, five liquidations and one mortar shelling incident, mostly committed in Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga City. These acts of terrorism resulted in 15 persons killed, two of whom are missionaries, and 93 injured mostly Roman Catholic devotees. Military and police launched surgical operations against Muslim Extremist Groups and MNLF lost commands involved in kidnaping and other criminal activities in Isabela, Basilan starting 3 May 1993 . The operation resulted in 46 rebels killed. The government suffered eight casualties and five wounded in action.

Kidnaping of American linguist Charles Walton in November 1993 brought back the Muslim rebellion in the south to world focus. The kidnaping of five foreigners including two Spanish nuns over the past 12 months by renegade Muslim bands known as "Lost Commands" revealed the weak control of the MNLF over the various Muslim armed groups. A series of bombings in Davao City in December 1993, including three explosions at San Pedro Cathedral, resulted in the death of six people. These incidents heightened fears of a renewed religious war in the Southern Philippines.

In June 1994, Abu Sayaff rebels stopped a busload of 60 people, many of them school teachers, on Basilan island. The rebels immediately killed fifteen of the passengers. They later released thirty-seven and held the rest as hostage for weeks. They were eventually freed after payment of a substantial ransom.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The most recent incident involving the Abu Sayaff guerillas was the attack on Ipil in Zamboanga del Zur on 4 April 1995. The Muslim separatists killed 46 people, robbed banks and burned the town's business district.¹³⁶

Military intelligence sources say the group is in possession of recently bought high-powered arms and that Pakistani veterans of the war in Afghanistan are helping to train its fighters. Sayaff's lieutenants are mostly Filipino Muslim volunteers who joined the International Islamic Brigade that fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. With the ability and the will to conduct a campaign of urban terrorism, Abu Sayaff emerged as one of the most serious threats to national security.

The MNLF and MILF officially denied any formal links with Abu Sayaff. Authorities, however, suspect that the MNLF tolerated the existence of Abu Sayaff. The MNLF and the Abu Sayaff Group have their power-bases in the Sulu and Basilan islands. There are persistent military intelligence reports that MNLF veterans had been training Abu Sayaff fighters. Some members of Abu Sayaff are the sons of MNLF guerillas killed by government forces in the 1970s, who now feel duty-bound to avenge their fathers.

In spite of the disruptive activities of MNLF splinter groups, President Ramos remains confident that his emphasis on conciliation and consensus building will ultimately triumph over the innate fractiousness of Philippine politics. "I would like to believe that we have gradually built up social cohesion," Ramos says. "We are getting people who were bitter political rivals to get together, and realize that there is now a common goal." Ambassador Manuel Yan, chairman of the government panel negotiating with the Muslim rebels and the concurrent Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process said peace efforts by the Government should be seen in the light of the country's economic take off. He further said that the peace process is the principal cornerstone of the Ramos Administration goal of becoming a newly industrialize country by the year 2000.

¹³⁶ Shenon, Philip, "Muslim Rebels Attacks Big Philippine City," *The Monterey County Herald*, 5 April 1995, p. 2A.

Looking back into how government tried to resolve the secessionist problem in the south, the Marcos administration initially used the military solution to control the Muslim rebels. Instead of dissipating, the rebels gained strength and found support in Middle East countries who rendered foreign assistance to the rebel cause. The Marcos government shifted strategy and launched a diplomatic campaign to bring the sympathy of the Middle East countries to the side of the Philippine government. Coupled with this the government initiated a policy of attraction to the Muslim rebels to lay down their arms. Socio-economic development in the South was also intensified to show the people there that the government was intent on improving their welfare. These actions resulted in diminished rebel activity. Peace negotiations under the Marcos regime were not however successful because of the perceived insincerity of the government to implement meaningful autonomy to the Muslim region in the south. The Aquino government, building on private ties with Nur Misuari, tried to resolve the secessionist problem by initiating peace negotiations with the MNLF. By that time, the MNLF had split into three factions. The Aquino government's concentration of peace negotiations with one faction antagonized the other factions. The government had to change its negotiating policy to appease the various groups that were left out in the negotiations. The Marcos and Aquino governments were firm in their positions that autonomy will only be in the areas where the people had so expressed in a referendum that they are amenable to such status. There was no meeting of the minds between the government and the rebel panel because Nur Misuari, the chairman of the MNLF was equally adamant of his position that the Tripoli Agreement be followed to the letter. The Ramos government, in resuming the negotiations with the Muslim rebels, is trying to avoid the pitfalls that the previous governments encountered. By widening the scope of the negotiations to include all important interest groups in the South, the Ramos administration hopes to come up with a solution that would be acceptable to the majority of the people.

V. HOW OTHER COUNTRIES RESOLVE PROBLEMS OF SEPARATISM

The wave of ethnic nationalism and unrest that we are witnessing in various parts of the world today is challenging the existence of nation-states. Several factors have contributed to the growth of ethnic nationalism. One factor is the democratization of former authoritarian societies. Democratization has allowed ethnic minorities greater freedom to express themselves. Another factor is the greater international concern for human rights that tend to override the traditional respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of a country. A third factor is the bigger role that emerging regional powers play to influence neighboring countries.¹³⁷

When a group of people composing a minority within an existing state, become increasingly aware of their separate and distinctive identity try to seek some degree of self government short of total independence to preserve said identity, we have a case of separatism.¹³⁸

If that group of people attempt to establish a separate sovereign state, what we have is secession. Collective ethnic consciousness will trigger off a separatist/secessionist movement. Ralph R. Premdas in his article entitled "Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective" said:

The object of secessionist quest is first to affirm a boundary between 'its people' and 'others'. The 'we-they' dichotomy is essential to its identity. This is often followed by a claim to territory for self-government. Where the 'people' and 'territory' are both clearly distinguishable and separable, the claim to autonomy is in part validated and reinforced by these facts. Often, however, neither people nor territory can be desegregated, easily reassembled and homogenized without strong counterclaims and acrimonious controversy. Regardless, the secessionist claim cannot be contained by these practical objections. Its aim, however, can be attained either in the form of a proper sovereign

¹³⁷ Premdas, R.R, Samarasinghe S., and Anderson, A., *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective*, St. Martin Press, New York, 1990, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Jackson, Robert H., and James Alan, *States in a Changing World, A Contemporary Analysis*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993. p. 57.

state or in a semi-sovereign segment of a decentralized state . . .

A secessionist movement:

1. May have several contending factions each claiming the mantle of legitimacy to represent the aspirations of the group . . . The word 'movement' contains a dynamic element suggesting struggle and resistance. If there is no struggle there is no need for a movement. A secessionist struggle embodies action, tension and resistance. . . The longer the struggle, the more likely that the history of the movement, with its heroes and legends, will become part of the added baggage of emotional claims to be defended and upheld.

2. Invariably seeks a territorial base, which is often enshrined in the claim to a 'homeland' in which to govern itself, avoid exploitation and preserve its way of life. A movement that seeks to obtain recognition of its cultural values, but does not seek a separate territory, cannot be regarded as secessionist . . .

3. May be sustained in its claims by alleged underlying unique factors such as common language, religion, race and values. These primordial features may be mythical or apply only to a core within the claimed population.

4. Is involved in a moral quest. It affirms a right to self-determination as God-given and natural. It is asserted as a collective group right. . . Without a recognized and widely accepted doctrine of self-determination, few secessionist movements would arise.¹³⁹

Premdas further said that organization, ideology, leadership, response of the state and the conflict-management techniques it deploys and the attitude of the international community determines the evolution of any given separatist/secessionist movement.¹⁴⁰

The separatist/secessionist movements in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma will be viewed in light of the above framework and a comparative analysis will be made with the Philippine separatist/secessionist problem.

¹³⁹ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 13-16.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

A. THE SEPARATIST PROBLEM IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is an island state populated mainly by two major ethnic groups, the Sinhalese, and the Tamils. Sinhalese constitute 74 percent of the Sri Lanka's population and are mostly Buddhist. They speak Sinhala, an Indo-European language similar to the language in Northern India. On the other hand, the Tamils constitute 18 percent of the total population and form the largest ethnic minority group in the country. They are predominantly Hindu and speak the Tamil language, which is a Dravidian language spoken in South India. The Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian or plantation Tamils form the two subgroups of Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils are descendants of the Tamils of Dravidian stock who arrived in Sri Lanka a few centuries after the arrival of the Sinhalese. The Indian Tamils are descendants of the Tamils from South India who came to the island starting in 1830 to work in the plantations. The population of this subgroup is shrinking through repatriation programs to Tamil Nadu in India.¹⁴¹

The country was successively colonized, first by the Portuguese in the 16th century, then the Dutch, and finally by the British in the late 18th century. The British succeeded in uniting the island that they named Ceylon. During colonial rule, the British treated the Tamils more favorably than the Sinhalese, enabling the Tamils to avail of more educational and civil service opportunities.¹⁴²

1. Independence and the Emergence of Political Parties

British rule ended with the signing of the Ceylon Independence Act of 1947. The United National Party (UNP), founded by Don Stephen Senanayake emerged as the largest political party after independence. The party derived its popular support from the Sinhalese majority regions of central, southern and western Sri Lanka. The UNP won

¹⁴¹ Kearney, Robert N., "Territorial Elements of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 4, 1987-88, pp. 561-562.

¹⁴² Ross, R. R. and Savada, Andrea Matles, *Sri Lanka, A Country Study*, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990, pp. 17-34.

the first national elections in 1947.¹⁴³

A split in the UNP occurred in July 1951 when S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's left of center bloc bolted out of the party and formed the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP). Thereafter, the contest over the reigns of the government would be between the two parties. While the UNP was more conciliatory towards Tamil interests, the SLFP became the advocate of Sinhalese dominance.¹⁴⁴

In the 1956 elections, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike organized a coalition of political groups to form the People's United Front. Campaigning on a platform that advocated Sinhalese control over trade and industry and the use of Sinhala as the only official language, the PUF won the elections. After the elections, the new government proceeded to fulfill its election promise by presenting the Official language Act to parliament, declaring Sinhala as the only official language. The passage of the act resulted in an increase in antagonism between the Tamils and the Sinhalese.

Prior to independence in 1947, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress emerged as the first political party dedicated to the protection of the welfare of the Tamil ethnic minority. It tried to secure from the British adequate constitutional safeguards for the Tamils. They were afraid that British domination would simply give way to Sinhalese domination. In 1949, radical members of the Tamil Congress felt that their political interests were being ignored by the mainstream political parties led by Buddhist Sinhalese. They believed that the only way to preserve Tamil identity was to create an autonomous Tamil state within a federal union of Sri Lanka. These radicals led by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam broke away from the Tamil Congress and formed the Federal party. Subsequently, because of its more aggressive stance, the Federal Party displaced the conciliatory Tamil Congress as the major Tamil party.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴⁵ Shastri, Amita, "Sri Lanka's Provincial Council System, A Solution to the Ethnic Problem," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXII, No. 8, August 1992, p. 724.

2. Protest Actions Against the Government

Following the passage of the Official Language Act in the parliament, the Federal Party led a nonviolent protest that ended in a pact between Bandaranaike and S.J.V. Chelvanayakam providing for Tamil autonomy in the Northern and Eastern provinces. It also provided for the use of the Tamil language in administrative matters. The agreement was not consummated because the Buddhist clergy protested it.

The assassination of Bandaranaike in September 1959 led to a brief take over of the reigns of government by the United National Party. In the July 1960 elections, the widow of the former prime minister, Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike, led the SLFP to victory to become the first woman prime minister. Her first official act was to carry out the policy making Sinhala the only official language of Sri Lanka. In reaction, the Tamils launched a civil disobedience campaign in the restive Northern and Eastern provinces.¹⁴⁶

The elections of March 1965 resulted in UNP regaining the upper hand. The UNP tried to earn favor with the Tamils by enacting the Tamil Regulations in 1966. The regulations made Tamil a language officially parallel to Sinhala in Tamil speaking regions. Sinhalese activists immediately expressed hostility toward the Tamil Regulations and civil violence followed. The government had to declare a state of emergency to control the disorder.

Sirimavo Bandaranaike returned to power in 1970 on a platform that promised radical structural changes, including land reform, increased rice subsidies and nationalization of local and foreign banks. After assuming the prime ministership, Bandaranaike tolerated the radical left. When she lost control over the radicals, she declared a state of emergency in March 1971. In reaction to the declaration of state of emergency, the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna- JVP) launched a blitzkrieg operation to take over the government in April. The rebel offensive nearly overthrew the government. The military suppressed the movement and imprisoned the

¹⁴⁶ Ross and Savada, *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

top leadership and about 16,000 suspected insurgents.¹⁴⁷

3. Government Policies Detrimental to Tamil Interests

A new constitution promulgated in May 1972, transformed Sri Lanka into a republic. The constitution vested legislative, executive and judicial functions of government on the National State Assembly. While the constitution guaranteed primacy for the Buddhist religion among the religions in Sri Lanka, it lacked provisions for federalism and protection of the rights of minorities. These earned the ire of the Tamils. Government sanctions to discriminate against Tamil youth in university admissions aggravated the matter. Sinhalese believed that the disproportionate favorable allocation of university places for Tamils was the result of Jaffna having a superior secondary school system. To compensate for disparities in educational facilities, the Sinhalese controlled government made the requirements for admission of Tamils in the university more stringent than those of Sinhalese students to make the outcome more equal. Tamils, however, rejected such steps as maneuvers designed to discriminate against them.¹⁴⁸

The government also embarked on a land policy which allocated state land for cultivation to Sinhalese families in the 'traditional Tamil homeland'. The influx of many immigrants slowly changed the demography in Trincomalee and Ampara districts in the eastern province. Tamils strongly objected to the land policy for they believed that they had the right to prior claim to land which they considered their homeland. Tamils were afraid that if the migration of Sinhalese in traditional Tamil areas continue, they would be swamped by the Sinhalese. A demographic change would result in an electoral imbalance that would favor the Sinhalese. If this happens, they would lose control over a homeland that provided them security from ethnic violence. On the other hand, Sinhalese do not accept that Tamils have prior claims, more so, an exclusive claim to any part of the country especially the east. They asserted that it is economically justified to

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁴⁸ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

allocate land to the landless irrespective of ethnic considerations.¹⁴⁹

4. Formation of Tamil Secessionist Movements

In reaction to the discriminatory aspects of the 1972 constitution and preferential policies that favored Sinhalese, Tamils founded the Tamil United Front in 1974. In 1976, it became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TUFL). The aim of the TUFL is to establish a separate Tamil state called 'Eelam'.¹⁵⁰ Tamils saw the government policies on the official language, university admissions and land settlement and also the periodic outburst of ethnic violence as a systematic process of relegating their status to that of second-class citizens. In the 1977 general elections, the TULF asked the electorate to give it a mandate for 'Eelam'. Voters responded by endorsing the TULF position. The party won all fourteen seats in the Northern Province and four seats in the East.¹⁵¹

The death of Chelvanayakam before the elections left the party without strong leadership. Tamil separatist underground groups collectively known as Tamil Tigers filled the vacuum left by Chelvanayakam. These militant groups failed to unite because of ideological reasons, regional affinities, caste and competition for leadership. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) founded in 1972 by Velupillai Prabhakaran emerged as the strongest of these groups. The Jaffna peninsula became the power base of the LTTE.¹⁵²

A new constitution promulgated in 1978 contained substantial concessions for the Tamils. It gave legal legitimacy to the official use of the Tamil language. This did not however fully satisfied the Tamils. Inadequate resources hampered the move to use the Tamil language in administration and this became a cause of Tamil frustration. To

¹⁴⁹ Kearney, Robert N., *Op. cit.*, pp. 571-572.

¹⁵⁰ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵² Ross and Savada, *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

further assuage the Tamils, Jayewardene also abrogated the "standardization" policy, which made university admission criteria for Tamils more difficult. Tamil civil servants also received appointments to many top-level positions. In spite of all these concessions, the Tamil Tigers escalated their terrorists attacks, which provoked Sinhalese backlash against Tamils and therefore precluded any successful accommodation.

5. Communal Riots

The first nationwide communal riot after independence occurred in May 1958. The disturbance was sparked by a rumor that a Tamil killed a Sinhalese. Many Tamils died in the riots. It left a deep psychological scar between the two major ethnic groups.

The most savage communal riot in Sri Lankan history occurred in 1983. It was sparked by the ambush of an army patrol where thirteen Sinhalese soldiers died. The communal disturbance that followed resulted in a death toll of 400, mostly Tamils. About 150,000 Tamils fled the island. The conflict acquired international dimension when the refugees gained sympathy and asylum in India. Tamil militants also got material support and military training in India. The biggest support came from Tamil Nadu, the Indian province with a majority of Tamil population.¹⁵³

6. Start of Peace Negotiations

The government of President J. R. Jayewardene initiated an All-Party Conference in late 1983 aimed at finding a solution to the separatist problem. The parties that attended the conference were the ruling UNP, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the largely Sinhalese opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The position of the Tamil delegation was outlined in a prepared statement entitled "Four Principles". The statement called for recognition of (1) the Tamils as a "distinct nationality," (2) the Tamil-populated areas as a Tamil "homeland," (3) the right of self-determination for the Tamils, and (4) the right to citizenship for all Tamils residing in Sri Lanka. The Jayewardene government did not accept the Tamil demands on the grounds that these in essence constituted a demand for a separate state. The failure of

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

the negotiations signaled the renewal of terrorist attack by the Tamil rebel forces.¹⁵⁴

7. Events that led to Indian Intervention

In the period between 1983 and 1987, the Jayewardene administration focused its efforts to strengthening its military forces. When it gained sufficient strength, it launched a major attack on LTTE positions in the Jaffna peninsula. Within two weeks the Sri Lankan forces overcame LTTE resistance and were about to take Jaffna town. It was at this point that India directly intervened. A flotilla of fishing boats loaded with supplies were first sent by the Indians but the Sri Lankan navy turned them back. The next move was to air drop supplies. The Indian action was a public announcement that it would not allow the Sri Lankan government to vanquish the Tamil rebels militarily. The Indian Ambassador in Sri Lanka informed the Colombo government that India would intervene militarily if the Sri Lankan offensive in the north continued.¹⁵⁵

The presence of Indian and 'stateless' plantation Tamils in Sri Lanka were an important reason for Indian involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. For over forty years, India had been negotiating with Sri Lanka to solve the problem of plantation Tamils of Indian origin. An agreement reached between the two governments in 1964 and 1974 called for India to take 600,000 and Sri Lanka 375,000 plus the respective natural increases in each group. Over a fifteen-year period, there was partial implementation of the agreement. One hundred thousand stateless Tamils who should have applied for Indian citizenship failed to do so and the repatriation of those who got Indian citizenship fell behind schedule. When ethnic violence broke out against the Tamils in July 1983, the Indian government immediately expressed concern over the safety of its citizens in Sri Lanka. The influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka to India compounded India's concern. The use of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu as a

¹⁵⁴ Hubbell, L. Kenneth, "The Devolution of Power in Sri Lanka, A Solution to the Separatist Movement?" *Asean Survey*, Vol XXXVII, No. 11, November 1987, pp. 1177-1178.

¹⁵⁵ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

base of operation by Tamil militants, was the second factor that brought involvement of India into the Sri Lankan conflict. Not wanting to invite the conduct of terroristic activities inside India, the Indian government was careful not to antagonize the opposition in Tamil Nadu by allowing them to support the Sri Lankan Tamils. India's perception of itself as the South Asian regional power and the expectation that Sri Lanka should conduct its affairs in a manner that would not undermine India's own security and interest was the third factor that drew India into the conflict.¹⁵⁶

8. The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord

The Sri Lankan government decided to seek a negotiated settlement when it realized that India stood in the way of a possible military victory over the separatists. In July 1987, India and Sri Lanka signed the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord. The separatist groups were not signatories to the Accord. The salient points of the Peace Accord are: (1) it provided a framework for the settlement of the ethnic conflict, (2) it affirmed Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state composed of the four main ethnic groups; the Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Burghers (3) it recognized that the Northern and Eastern provinces were areas of "historical habitation of the Tamil speaking population," (4) it committed the Sri Lankan government to the establishment of a system of provincial councils with devolved powers, (5) it called for the temporary merging of the northern and eastern provinces into one administrative unit which could be made permanent if approved by a referendum in the east, (6) it called for a cessation of hostilities within forty eight hours of the signing of the agreement and (7) the surrender of weapons within seventy two hours by the rebels.¹⁵⁷

At the invitation of the Sri Lankan president, an Indian peacekeeping force landed in Sri Lanka to assist in the collection of arms from the militants. Many of the Sinhalese bitterly resented the signing of the Accord and the arrival of the Indian troops. Significant groups of Sinhalese in the southwestern region saw the provisions of the

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁵⁷ Shastri, Amita, *Op. cit.*, pp. 724-725.

Accord relating to the Provincial Councils as being imposed by India and a mass mobilization was organized to try to over turn it. The Tamil population however, warmly welcomed the Accord and the IPKF, with the exception of the LTTE who refused to hand over all its weapons. The relationship between the LTTE and the IPKF quickly turned to one of open hostility. The original IPKF token force of 6,000 rose to over 60,000 and stayed for over two and a half years in the north east to try to defeat the Tamil rebels. In time, not only the Sinhalese but many Tamils came to view the IPKF as an army of occupation.¹⁵⁸

In January 1989, the new president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, demanded a quick withdrawal of the Indian troops. The LTTE, which began peace negotiations with Premadasa, joined Colombo in demanding the Indian withdrawal. The Indian government took time to react to the demand for the IPKF's withdrawal. The new Indian Prime Minister, V.P. Singh finally withdrew the Indian troops by the end of March 1990.¹⁵⁹

Tamil separatist groups were able to mount a serious challenge to the Sri Lankan security forces in the 1980s because they were able to avail of direct military assistance from India. When India signed the peace accord with Sri Lanka, the militants lost their source of military support. It is unlikely that they can now overcome the Sri Lankan security forces with their own meager resources. In signing the Accord, India indicated its lack of further desire to help the Tamil militants establish a separate state. In retrospect, India signed the Accord because it was to its best interest. If it had chosen otherwise, it would have encouraged separatist in the Punjab, Kashmir, Tamil Nadu and other regions to break away. It would have also created an anti-Indian Sinhalese state which would be prejudicial to the security of India. The collaboration between India and Sri Lanka revealed a mutual interest for self preservation that overrode the principle of

¹⁵⁸ Jackson and James, *Op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁵⁹ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

self-determination of an ethnic group.¹⁶⁰

The Colombo government realize that the only way to end the costly military operations and preserve the territorial integrity of the State is through a devolved system of government that is acceptable to the Tamils and essentially endorsed by India. In signing the Peace Accord, the Sri Lankan government reaffirmed that the state is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and that each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which have to be carefully nurtured.

The Provincial councils provided the basic framework for devolution. However this would take sometime to implement because of the natural tendency of an administration that is accustomed to centralized control to resist change. Also it is difficult to create quickly a new resource base for a new layer of administration in a resource poor-country. For integration to succeed, Sri Lanka has to revive its sagging economy. Sri Lanka's future economic prosperity, however will only partly depend on internal factors. It will also depend on the international economic environment, especially on aid and capital flows and on continuing access to western markets.

The Sri Lankan case suggest that the odds are largely against secessionists who wish to redraw existing political boundaries to create new states. For various reasons the international community generally disapproves of this method of solving ethnic conflicts. This case illustrate that the preferred solution is devolution, a subject which is bound to occupy the center stage in national integration processes in the 1990's in many ethnically divided societies. For the conflict to be solved peacefully and in a democratic manner, the Sri Lankan government must make substantial concessions in the form of enhanced devolution or federalism to the country's minority population.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

B. BANGLADESH CASE

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign state through the break-up of Pakistan in 1971. To better understand why the Bengalis, who populate the former East Pakistan, chose to initially support the struggle to gain Pakistani independence in 1947 and later decided to form their own state, we have to examine the events that led to break up and the emergence of Bangladesh.

1. The People of East Pakistan

The partitioning of British India gave way to the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947. The state of Bengal was also partitioned, with East Bengal forming the East wing of Pakistan. The majority of the people of the east wing are Bengalis, 85 percent of whom are Muslims. Prior to the partition, Hindus owned and controlled most of the land that the Bengalis cultivated. After the partition, many of the Hindu landlords and officials in key positions in East Pakistan migrated to West Bengal creating a power vacuum in the East Bengal society. Only a few educated East Pakistanis were available to take their place. To remedy the situation officials from the west wing transferred to the east. The Bengalis were unhappy over the arrangement for it increased dominance of the Urdu speaking Muslims from the west wing.¹⁶²

Bengali Muslims played an indispensable role in Pakistan's struggle for independence from British rule in the 1940s. To emancipate themselves from Hindu landlords and money-lenders, the Bengalis supported the All-India Muslim League in its bid for independence. The immediate objective at that time was to get rid of Hindu domination. As a result of the overwhelming endorsement by the Bengali Muslims to the concept of Pakistan, the Lahore resolution providing for two states was rescinded by a conference of all Muslim Leaguers summoned by Jinnah.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Williams, L. F. Rushbrook, *The East Pakistan Tragedy*, Drake Publishers Inc., New York, 1972, pp. 16-19.

¹⁶³ Baxter, Craig, *Bangladesh, A New Nation in an Old Setting*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1984, p. 27.

2. The People of West Pakistan

The majority of the people of West Pakistan are Urdu speaking Muslims. They received preferential treatment in recruitment to the army and civil bureaucracy during the British colonial rule and continued to receive the same kind of treatment in the post Pakistan period. Most of the Muslims in the west are land owners. The capacity of the west wing to progress more rapidly than the east wing was reinforced with the preferred migration of Muslim entrepreneurs and traders from minority provinces in India to West Pakistan. As a result, the civil-military bureaucracy, the commercial-industrial gentry and the landed oligarchy became the dominant social forces in the west.¹⁶⁴

3. Imbalance in East-West Pakistan Relations

In spite of the important role they played in the formation of Pakistan and their greater number (Bengalis constitute 54 percent of the total population) the Bengalis quickly came under the domination of the non-Bengali Urdu-speaking Muslims in the new state. Their lack of effective representation in the League made this so.

The non-Bengali power elite decided that the capital of the state and the headquarters of the defense forces should be situated in West Pakistan. Dominance of the Urdu speaking Muslims was also evident in East Pakistan. Urdu speaking Muslims manned all key post in the East Pakistan Secretariat. Compounding the problem was the government decree designating Urdu as the only state language despite the fact that not even one percent of the Bengalis spoke the language. East Pakistan was also economically exploited by the west wing in the classical colonial pattern. As the largest producer of jute, East Pakistan contributed a large portion of Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings. Profits earned from East Pakistan's agricultural produce were not however channeled back but rather invested in the industrial and commercial sectors in the west wing. No effective steps were undertaken to develop import substitution industries in East Pakistan. The foreign trade balance from 1948-9 to 1966-7 showed that East Bengal had a cumulative surplus of 4,878.7 million rupees. In spite of the surplus, figures show

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-36.

that it had a deficit trade balance of 5,712.1 million rupees with West Pakistan during the same period. East Pakistan's share in development expenditures under the 2nd (1960-5) and 3rd (1965-70) Five year plan were 31 % and 36 % respectively while the West had 69 % and 64% respectively. The Bengalis found themselves in a new kind of subordination to Karachi and Lahore.¹⁶⁵

The central government's response to Bengali demands for parity rights did not lead to accommodation but rather to confrontation. The first demand that led to confrontation was the language controversy. The Pakistanis only agreed to the Bengali demand that their language be made one of the state languages of Pakistan, after they were forced to do so by the blood of the Bengali language martyrs in February 1952.¹⁶⁶ The question of representation was another source of conflict between the two wings. The Bengalis persistently clamored for a parliamentary form of government based on the principle of 'one man, one vote' to turn their advantage of numbers into political power. The completion of the Constitution was delayed for nine years because of this issue. To curb the political power of the Bengalis, the West Pakistani power-elite pushed the establishment of parity in representation in the National Assembly between the two wings. Political parity was accepted by the East Pakistanis on the understanding that it would also apply in the economic, administrative and military sectors. Despite government efforts, parity between the two wings was not achieved quickly.¹⁶⁷

The Bengalis demand for regional autonomy fell on deaf ears. The central government opted for a strong center, giving the impression that this alone could hold the two wings of Pakistan together. The military take-over under General Ayub Khan in 1958 formalized the political dominance of the civil-military bureaucracies of the West which lasted till the disintegration of Pakistan. The Ayub period contributed to the

¹⁶⁵ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁶⁷ Baxter, Craig, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

radicalization of the Bengali demand for autonomy.¹⁶⁸

4. The Awami League

The Awami League (People's League) emerged as the embodiment of the Bengali nationalist movement. In 1966, Awami League leader Mujibur Rahman set forth the Six Point Program that would guide the League in coming up with its election program. These points were: (1) establishment of a federal government through free and regular elections; (2) the federal government would have control over foreign affairs and defense; (3) movement of capital from east to west would be controlled by a separate currency or fiscal account; (4) the power of taxation would rest at the provincial level with the federal government subsisting on grants; (5) each federated unit would be free to enter into foreign trade agreements and control its own foreign exchange earnings; and (6) each unit would raise its own militia. The program aroused the same amount of enthusiasm among the East Pakistanis as the Pakistani cry for independence in the 1940s.¹⁶⁹

The central government of General Khan found the six point program unacceptable on the ground that it smacked of secessionism. Ayub's non appreciation of the autonomist sentiments of the Bengalis led the latter to make even more radical demands. Ayub ordered the arrest of Mujibur Rehman on 23 April 1966 hoping that it would undermine the developing autonomist sentiments in East Pakistan. He only succeeded in creating the opposite sentiment. Growing opposition to his regime caused Ayub to capitulate. He first dropped the Conspiracy case against Rehman and later released him. Ayub held a Round Table Conference on May 1969, hoping to stem the opposition to his regime. When the Conference failed to move towards a resolution of the problems facing both wings, violence erupted. Ayub was forced to hand over power to General Yahya Khan who promptly declared Martial Law.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁹ Baxter, Craig, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁰ Heitzman, J. and Worden, R. L., *Bangladesh, A Country Study*, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., 1989, p. 208.

5. The 1970 Elections

The results of the elections on 7 December 1970 indicated the polarization of popular feelings between East and West Pakistan. The Awami League headed by Rehman won 160 out of 162 seats and received 74.9 per cent of the popular vote in East Pakistan. In West Pakistan, the Awami League failed to win any seat while Bhutto's People's Party won 81 out of the possible 138 seats. The West Pakistanis realized that with a Bengali majority in the National Assembly, their primacy is in jeopardy. Bhutto and his People's Party tried to delay the convening of the National Assembly. After recognizing the developing secessionist movement in East Pakistan, Yahya announced on 13 February 1971 that the National Assembly would meet on 3 March 1971.¹⁷¹

6. Rise of a Secessionist Movement

A powerful opposition movement emerged in East Pakistan in the fall of 1970. The military committee of the Awami League started as a paramilitary band under the leadership of a retired Pakistani Army officer, Colonel M. A. G. Osmany. As the political struggle between East and West Pakistan intensified, the military arm evolved into a conventional, but illegal, armed force. The membership of the force came from the East Pakistan Students League, the security militia called Ansars (Arabic for helpers), and Mujahids (holy warriors). The group became known initially as the Mukti Fauj (freedom fighters) and later as Mukti Bahini.¹⁷²

A cracked down launched by the Pakistani armed forces on 25 March 1971 led to the shift in loyalty of the East Bengal Regiment and East Pakistan Rifles to the side of the Mukti Bahini. Most of the East Pakistani police and their auxiliaries also joined the revolt on the side of the rebel forces. The wholesale defection of the Bengalis from the Pakistan Army in the early weeks of the war surprised the Pakistani military command. The amalgamation of forces grew into a unified military force as it

¹⁷¹ Ganguly, Sumit, *The Origins of War in South Asia, Indo-Pakistani Conflicts Since 1947*, Westview Press, Boulder and London, 1986, p. 111.

¹⁷² Heitzman and Worden, *Op. cit.*, p. 209.

confronted the Pakistanis.¹⁷³

Border clashes between Indian and Pakistani armies also occurred during this period. An Indian incursion into East Pakistan in late November became an excuse for Pakistan to launch a series of preemptive air strikes on Indian airfields on 3 December 1971. This triggered India to order a national mobilization and launch a full-scale invasion of East Pakistan the following day. The Indian strategic plan called for containment of West Pakistan while its main thrust was to defeat the enemy in East Pakistan. The combined force of nine infantry divisions with attached armor units and support arms advanced in five columns toward the capital of Dhaka. The Mukti Bahini fought side by side with the Indian forces with at least three brigades. On 16 December, Dhaka fell and Pakistani's commander, Lieutenant General A.A.K. Miazi with about 75,000 troops surrendered to Lt. General J.S. Aurora, the Indian commander of the combined Indian and Mukti Bahini forces. After consolidating their victory and helping stabilize the new government, Indian military forces returned to India on 12 March 1972.¹⁷⁴

The case of Bangladesh demonstrates that the decline of colonial empires in the post World War Two era caused the introduction of potential sources of conflict in the International system. The origins of these conflicts could be traced to the nature of the colonial disengagement arrangements. The failure of colonial powers to work out clear cut plans for transferring power to the native elites, give rise to ethnic violence both within and across national borders.

The major ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences between East and West Pakistan resulted in a very fragile unity. This was further aggravated by the great disparity in their economic status and the physical distance between the two wings. These factors proved to be unsuitable to the development of an integrated national political structure and a national ideology which would form the basis of nationhood. The

¹⁷³ Ganguly, Sumit, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁷⁴ Heitzman and Worden, *Op. cit.*, pp. 208-211.

emergence of Bangladesh was inevitable when the short-sightedness of West Pakistani leadership and the wide gulf between the political structures of the East and West led to the formation of the Secessionist Movement and the degeneration of the conflict into a civil war.

C. THE BURMA CASE

1. British Colonial Period

As a colonial power, British initial interest in Burma had been secondary to their main concern which was India. Concerns over security, after some disputes along the frontier, led to the annexation of Arakan and Tenasserim in the first war of 1824-6. Further annexation of other parts of the territory were done piecemeal until the threat of French influence caused the annexation of Upper Burma. Finally in January 1886, the whole of Burma was annexed as a province of India. Evolution of a distinctive and separate form of administration for Burma took a long time to form. The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 started the series of reforms to bring about change. In 1935, the Government of Burma Act was introduced as a limited form of Home Rule. Separation from India finally occurred in 1937.¹⁷⁵

The British applied the policy of 'divide and rule' in the colonization of Burma. Recruitment into the armed forces was preferred to come from the minority ethnic groups, most especially from the Karens. Local Karen villagers served as guides for the British Army in the wars of 1824-5 and 1852-3 and Karen troops played a vital role in suppressing the rebellions in Lower Burma in 1886 and the Saya San rebellion of 1930-32. The figures in 1939 showed that there were only 472 Burmans in the British Burma Army, as compared to 1,448 Karens, 886 Chins and 881 Kachins.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Smith, Martin J., *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, Zed Books Ltd., London, 1991, p. 40.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Believing that the various groups are unassimilable, the British kept the Karens apart from the Burmans, who in turn were kept distant from Kachins and so on. The British intentionally favored the minorities over the Burmans to keep the latter weak and thus perpetuate British colonial power. As a result of the special treatment given to them by the British, Karens soon developed a separate identity from the rest of the ethnic groupings. The conversion of a great number of Karens to Christianity accelerated the creation of that distinct identity. By the mid 1800s, Karens saw themselves as a racially distinct group with a set of shared customs and ancestry. The close relationship between the Christian missionaries and Karens was strongly resented by the Burmans.

2. The Karen National Association

As the Karens acquired better education, they became aware of their roots and this inspired them to move for the unification of the various Karen groups. The Karen National Association (KNA) was formed in 1881 as a vehicle to unite all Karens.¹⁷⁷ The KNA opened its membership to all Karens regardless of religion or location. It aimed to promote Karen identity, leadership, education and writing and bring about social and economic advancement for the Karens. A small group of educated Sgaw and Pwo Karens, mostly teachers from Bassein, Rangoon Insein, Moulmein and Tavoy, dominated the association. Virtually all the leaders were Christians, several of whom studied in Britain, the United States and in Europe.¹⁷⁸

KNA members began arming themselves after the 3rd Anglo-Burmese War of 1884-6 when many Burmans took revenge on Karens whom they accused of being British lackeys. The fight against the Burmans provided the impetus for the Karens to seek a state of their own.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, Martin J., *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

Initially in the Chelmsford-Montagu hearings in India in 1917, the Karens opposed the nationalist bid for independence when they argued that Burma was not 'yet in a fit state for self-government' since it was 'inhabited by many different races, differing in states of civilization, . . . religion and social development' which could take years of 'strenuous training under British governance' to rectify. The Karens later changed their stand in 1920 with the granting of Home Rule. KNA chief spokesman Sidney Loo Nee, in criticizing the Craddock Reforms argued that the Karens, as Burma's second largest indigenous race, should have their interests and identity protected by separate electorates and thus 'advance step by step with the Burmans'. Despite Burman objections, the British granted the Karens five (later twelve) seats in the Legislative Council of 130 (later 132) members.¹⁸⁰

Increased activity of the Burmese national liberation movement alarmed KNA leaders. They felt that communal representation was not enough to protect Karen interest. The decline of Karen-speakers in the Delta alarmed Karen leaders of the increase in the rate of assimilation into the Burman culture. They felt that Karen interests especially in the schools and the judiciary were being seconded to the Burman position.

Proposal for the creation of an independent Karen State was first articulated by Dr. San C. Po, widely regarded 'father' of the Karen nation, in 1928. In his book "Burma and the Karens", he wrote: 'It is their desire to have a country of their own, where they may progress as a race and find the contentment they seek. . . "Karen Country," how inspiring it sounds.' His vision was akin to Great Britain, where he compared the Burmans, Karens, Arakanese and Shans to English, Welsh, Scots and Irish. He associated the Karens to Wales.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Smith, Martin J., *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

3. The Second World War

When World War II broke out, the Burman majority saw an opportunity to launch a major uprising to attain national independence from the British. The Burma Independence Army (BIA) fought on the side of the Japanese believing that they would be rewarded with Burma's independence. Alliance with Japan did not result in the attainment of Burman independence. A shift in alliance occurred on August 1944 with the formation of a new front called the Anti-Fascist Organization later known as Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), this time to fight against the Japanese.¹⁸²

The majority of Karens and their close Karenni cousins chose to remain loyal to the British through out the whole duration of the war. Many joined the British underground forces while others withdrew to India with the British. Over 12,000 weapons were air drop by the British to these groups. They proved valuable in the fight against the Japanese by inflicting considerable damage to the Japanese forces.¹⁸³

During the war, communal strife between Christian Karens and Burman nationalist aggravated the division between the two groups. Fighting between Burmans, Karens and Indians occurred in Papun and Myaungmya districts and in the outlying areas of the Delta in the first half of 1942. The hostilities resulted in thousands of fatalities among the Karens. The Japanese later on brought the hostilities under control and for the rest of the war only sporadic fighting occurred. The killing of Karens was precipitated by Burman belief that the former were potential fifth-columnists. The conflict left lasting mutual distrust between the Burmans and the Karens.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Silverstein, Josef, *Burma, Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1977, pp. 16-18.

¹⁸³ Smith, Martin, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁸⁴ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 100.

4. Bid for a Separate Karen State

A draft of the Constitution presented by the Constituent Assembly in 1947 failed to provide for a Karen state. Instead it contained a provision which stated that the final designation and status of a Karen territory and political rights would be left to be decided after independence. This was not acceptable to the Karens. The All Karen Congress was organized at Rangoon on February 1947 and Karens agreed to merge all existing Karen parties into a new organization, the Karen National Union (KNU). They further agreed to push for the creation of a separate Karen State with a seaboard, continuance of racially exclusive Karen units in the armed forces, increased number of seats in the Constituent Assembly and a new ethnic census of Burma. In spite of Karen objections, the British went ahead with the recognition of Burmese independence which was formalized in a treaty signed by Clement Attlee and U Nu on 17 October 1947. The Karens, under Saw Ba U Gyi were dismayed that the British would agree to the treaty in spite of strong Karen reservations to it.¹⁸⁵

Saw Ba U Gyi began active planning for revolt, to establish a Karen-Mon state to include all of Tenasserim, Salween State and some adjacent territory. U Nu tried to reduce tension among the minority group by the creation of the Regional Autonomy Enquiry Commission. In an effort to prevent the outbreak of the rebellion U Nu met with San C. Po, Saw Ba U Gyi and other Karen leaders on several occasions. U Nu's enemies however took the opportunity to attack him as being pro-Karen. Nothing came out of the negotiations.¹⁸⁶

5. Outbreak of Hostilities

Efforts to find a peaceful solution to the problem proved elusive and by mid January 1949, the Karen National Union's military arm, the Karen National Defense Organization (KNDO), began disarming government officials just seven miles out of Rangoon. On 31 January 1949, the rebellion was in full swing with the occupation of

¹⁸⁵ Smith, Martin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁸⁶ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

Insein by the Karens. The wholesale mutiny of the Karen Rifles and later one regiment of the Kachin Rifles gave the initial edge to the Karens. The general plan was for various Karen forces to converge on Rangoon. Columns from Prome, Toungco, Bassein and Insein all set out for the capital. The first three were checked by military units that remained loyal to the national government. The column from Insein came within four miles of Rangoon before being held up by a scratch force of pro-government militia, army regulars, Sitwundans, Gurkhas and PVOs sent in to defend the capital.¹⁸⁷

Government forces regained control over Mandalay, Maymyo, Insein and Thaton and carried the fight to the Shan States, Karenni and Pegu State. By 1950, the long struggle between the government and Karen guerillas on the western border began. The Burmese government dealt a serious blow to Karen leadership with the death of Saw Ba U Gyi and some associates in an ambush in August 1950. Joshua Poo Nyo assumed the leadership of KNU. His autocratic methods was not well received so his stay in said position was short lived. Skaw Ler Taw was finally selected to lead the KNU on December 1954.¹⁸⁸ In July 1950, U Nu offered amnesty to the Karen rebels but very few availed of it. Karen policemen who were suspended when rebellion broke out were reinstated back into the Rangoon Police Department. On the political side, U Nu established the Karen State out of the old Salween State in 1952. The United Karen League (UKL) was established outside the Karen State to succeed the Karen Youth Organization. Inside the Karen State, the United Karen Organization (UKO) was also established. The two parties contested power over Karen affairs in the Union of Burma until 1956.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, Martin J., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁸⁹ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 104.

6. Ne Win's Rise to Power

On 26 September 1958, U Nu hand over power to the Army Chief of Staff, Ne Win to avert a coup of the Tatmadaw (Burmese Army) . Ne Win's job was to form a new government which would be in control, until the next elections could be held. On 28 October, U Nu formally resigned in favor of Ne Win, who was elected prime minister by an uncontested vote. U Nu returned to power when his 'clean' AFPFL party won the general elections in February 1960. His triumph was symbolic of the country's verdict on Ne Win's military rule. Despite its popular mandate, U Nu's government lasted only two years.¹⁹⁰

A determined effort of the Shan and Kachin separatist movement gained momentum in 1962. This gave Ne Win the excuse to seize power in a military coup in March of that year. This brought to an end the brief era of parliamentary democracy in Burma. With Ne Win at the head of the government a full scale operation was launched to defeat the rebels. The breakdown of peace talks with many of the insurgent leaders in Rangoon in 1963 gave an added impetus to the military crackdown. In 1974 a new constitution was introduced and the one party rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) and Ne Win's unique 'Burmese Way to Socialism' were ratified by a national referendum.¹⁹¹

No change in the status of the rebellion occurred with Ne Win in control of the reigns of the government. Karens still controlled the border areas with Thailand from just north of Victoria to the boundary with Kayah State. During the dry season, government troops would conduct operations against the rebels and when the rains come they would withdraw and the Karens reestablish themselves.

¹⁹⁰ Silverstein, Josef, *Burma, Military Rule and the Politics of Stagnation*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1977, pp. 28-30.

¹⁹¹ Smith, Martin J., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 190-197.

7. Support for the Rebellion

The Karen rebels received little overseas support in its fight against the government. To finance the rebellion, Karens assess a tax of about 5 percent of all goods crossing their areas. They were able to dominate the cross border trade at the Burma-Thai border. A black market flourished to compensate the deficiencies in local production. Considerable amount of goods coming from Thailand to Burma passed through Karen areas. To pay for these goods, unprocessed agricultural products and minerals like cattle, rubber, rubies and teak were transported in the opposite direction. In 1984 alone, the lumber trade kept sixty five Karen saw mills busy, supplying Teak to Thailand. Income derived from the trade supported Karen troops and bought them weapons. Although the Burmese government finds the black market troublesome, it recognized Burma's need for it. The government has not pressed too hard to curtail this trade. The black market trade symbolizes Burma's economic decline and the ability of the insurgents to run their own governments.¹⁹²

In 1992, the Burmese army launched a massive assault on the Karen rebel camp of Manerplaw (Field of Victory) on the banks of the Moei river at the border of Thailand and Burma. The operation which deployed more than 10,000 troops failed because of the army's outdated tactics and unfamiliarity with the area. A unilateral ceasefire was declared by the Army and efforts were focused on consolidating forward positions and familiarizing themselves with the terrain. Opportunities to weaken the Karen fighters were also looked into. The opportunity presented itself when Buddhist rank and file members of the Karen rebel force mutinied against the predominantly Christian leadership in December 1993. These mutineers guided the Burmese army through secret trails into the Karen redoubt at Manerplaw. Unable to defend the camp, the Karen rebels burned it on 26 January 1995 before withdrawing into the mountains or fleeing into Thailand. The Burmese army is expected to hand over Manerplaw to the break-away Karen faction, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army. This group will most likely be

¹⁹² Premdas and Anderson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 107.

afforded the same status as other ethnic rebel armies that have made peace with the ruling junta and will probably represent the Karens in the National Convention in Rangoon.¹⁹³

The Manerplaw operation was followed by another attack on the Karens Kawmoora redoubt on 22 February 1995. Following intense Burmese army shelling of the KNU position, the Karens abandoned the last bastion of Karen resistance on Burmese soil. This does not however mean the end of Karen resistance to Rangoon. Diplomats and intelligence sources in Thailand agreed that prolonged conflict is possible. KNU will probably attempt to wage guerilla war from Thai territory. On the other hand, the Burmese military has shown in the past that it will not hesitate to violate Thai territory just so it can pursue the insurgents. Although the Thai government expressed warnings that continued fighting would sour the relationship between Thailand and Burma, it is unlikely that it will abandon constructive engagement with Burma.¹⁹⁴

In spite of the capture of major rebel camps, the Karen rebellion continues to be a major irritant to the Burmese government. Resources which could have been channeled to the development of the country continue to be spent trying to defeat the Karens. There seems to be no sign of the Karens relenting. With the governments inability to increase incentives to entice sufficient number of rebels to lay down their arms, the possibility of a peaceful solution to the conflict is remote.

D. ASSESSMENT

The ethnic secessionist problems in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma had their origins during the colonization period of respective countries. The policy of "divide and rule" practiced by various colonizers, whether Spanish, British or American, spawned the idea of separate identity for the various ethnic groupings.

¹⁹³ Lintner, Bertil, "Loss and Exile," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 February 1995, p. 23.

¹⁹⁴ Vatikiotis, Michael and Tasker, Rodney, "Rude Neighbour," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 March 1995, p. 32.

Geographical, religious, cultural and economic factors were the predominant influences in the propagation of the secessionist spirit in these countries.

In all four cases, ethnic minorities felt that they were discriminated against by the majority sector of the state and the fear of ethnic domination drove them to seek autonomy or secession. Disparities in development at the disadvantage of the minority, bred jealousy resulting in the feeling of being oppressed.

The involvement of an outside power was instrumental in the escalation of the conflict in three of the four cases. The support given by Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and former Sabah minister Tun Mustapha to the MNLF gave it the strength to challenge central authority in the 1970s. Indian support especially that of the state of Tamil Nadu to the Tamils in Sri Lanka caused an escalation of the conflict in the 1980s. The support given by India to East Pakistan in its bid to separate from Pakistan gave rise to the establishment of the state of Bangladesh. The withdrawal of foreign support to the rebel movements resulted in the dissipation of secessionist activity, unless the local source of funds was sufficient to sustain or even expand the movement. In Burma, the Karens compensated their lack of foreign support with the lucrative black market trade in the border regions with Thailand. This was profitable enough to support the maintenance of the organization and to buy its arms and ammunition.

The use of military force by the central government in all four cases were unsuccessful in solving the separatist/secessionist problem in these countries. Aside from the tremendous amount of resources spent in these military operations, the degree of animosity between the two sides tend to get deeper with armed confrontation.

In the case of Pakistan and Bangladesh, scholars like W. H. Morris-Jones, K. B. Sayeed, Rounaq Jahan and G. W. Choudhury, say that Pakistan might have been saved if the rulers had not resorted to the 'military solution'. Harun-or-Rashid thinks this is untenable. According to him it was not a matter of choice on the part of the Pakistani rulers; rather it was the only recourse they could adopt to safeguard the existing relationship between the two parts of Pakistan. The differing social structures, regional based nature of the power elite of the state, abnormal geography and the strategy of the

capitalist economic growth and development ruined the prospects of permanent integration.¹⁹⁵

Of the three cases discussed above, the Sri Lanka case appears to have more similarities to the Philippine Secessionist problem. These cases effectively illustrates the fact that the odds are largely against secessionist who wish to redraw existing political boundaries to create new states. The international community tends to disapprove of this method of solving ethnic conflicts. Devolution of power appears to be the preferred solution to ethnic secessionist problems.

¹⁹⁵ Premdas and Anderson, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 91-92.

VI. CONCLUSION

The origins of secessionism among the Filipino Muslims traces back to a long history of separateness in terms of religion and ethnicity. The effects of an irreversible process of demographic and economic change gave impetus to the formation of a secessionist movement. The rise against central authority in the 1970s was out of fear of assimilation and a desire for an autonomous 'Moro nation'.

Repressive military actions initially undertaken by the Marcos government to solve the Moro problem strengthened rather than diminished these feelings. The Muslim rebels found a common cause with other opposition forces to fight the Marcos regime. Later attempts to solve the problem in terms of economic and social development were less successful because of the lack of appreciation of the religious and ethnic character of the rebellion.

The strength of the secessionist movement peaked during the first half of the 1970s and abated toward the end of the Marcos regime. Several factors caused the MNLF's decline. On the military aspect, the strategy of trying to hold territory against government forces who had superior fire power and logistics backup caused the defeat in many battles during the early stages of the conflict. The decline in foreign support especially arms and ammunition and the cumulative effect of combat fatigue and attrition contributed to the decline in armed confrontation. It was however the unrelenting, divisive inter-ethnic group antagonism that fragmented the Movement and dissipated its strength.

Marcos' diplomatic moves in the ASEAN region and the Middle East were instrumental in diminishing the flow of military support to the rebel movement. It also paved the way for peace negotiations to be held between the government and the MNLF. The government's policy of attraction, enticing the rebels to lay down their arms and participate in government, contributed to the disintegration of the MNLF into various factions. While Misuari and his faction of radicals insisted on their secessionist stand, most of the traditional elite chose to abandon the goal of secession and accepted Marcos' offer to positions in the regional autonomous government. Intensified socio-economic

development efforts of the government also help in convincing many rebels to lay down their arms. Toward the end of the Marcos regime, the Movement represented a minor threat to the government.

President Corazon Aquino's decision to meet Nur Misuari in Jolo in 1986 resuscitated the secessionist issue. The moribund leadership of Nur Misuari got a new breath of life as a result of the meeting. Ensuing peace negotiations however failed to settle the autonomy issue. Misuari was inflexible in his stand of creating an autonomous region comprising thirteen provinces. The government was willing to grant autonomy to only five provinces where the Muslims are the majority and only after the holding of a referendum. The rigid stand of Nur Misuari arose from his perception that Corazon Aquino was a weak president and one that could be pressured into agreeing to his demands. In focusing the peace negotiations on the Misuari faction, the Aquino administration antagonized the other factions. Violent reaction from the latter group brought about a change in the negotiation policy of the government. The resultant policy widened the participation in the peace negotiations to include all important Muslim and Christian groups in Southern Philippines.

President Fidel V. Ramos, benefiting from the early attempts to find a solution to the Moro problem, started his term with the passage of Republic Act 7636, which repealed the 35-year old anti-subversion law. This in effect legalized the Communist Party of the Philippines and provided a measure of credibility to the Ramos government in its bid to bring back the various rebel movements to the mainstream of Philippine society. In creating the National Unification Commission and tasking it to conduct peace negotiations with the Muslim rebel groups, the Communist Party of the Philippines- New Peoples Army (CPP-NPA) and the Reform the Armed Forces Movement- Soldiers of the Filipino People-Young Officers Union (RAM-SFP-YOU), the government hopes to integrate the various demands to arrive at a solution that is acceptable to the majority.

The cases of separatism in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma suggest that the odds are largely against secessionists who wish to redraw existing political boundaries to create new states. For various reasons the international community generally

disapproves of this method of solving ethnic conflicts. The Sri Lankan case illustrated that the preferred solution is devolution, a subject that is bound to occupy the center stage in national integration processes in the 1990's in many ethnically divided societies. For conflicts to be solved peacefully and in a democratic manner, governments must make substantial concessions in the form of enhanced devolution to the country's minority population.

The peace negotiations made under President Marcos and President Aquino failed because the extent of autonomy that the government was willing to grant the Muslim Filipinos was not acceptable to the MNLF leadership. For the conflict in the south to be resolved, the government must concede to a reasonable extent the legitimate demands of the MNLF for some degree of Islamic autonomy. An acceptable agreement should be under terms that will enable the Moro leadership overseas to return to the Philippines to participate in it. There is however a need to balance the demands of Moro rebels against the potential dangers of arousing a non-Muslim backlash in the south. If such a reaction does occur, tensions of 1971 will be recreated all over.

It must have dawned on Nur Misuari when he returned to the country in January 1994, that the chances of success for a separate Moro nation is nil. Misuari has once again changed his position from separatism to autonomy when he agreed to resume peace negotiations with the Ramos administration. He admitted during a meeting of the peace negotiating panel in Zamboanga City last 7 April 1994 that after consultations with different sectors in Mindanao, he came to realize that the people are clamoring for peace. He must have also realized that the Ramos Administration is more flexible to the MNLF demands than its predecessors. This is manifested in the governments willingness to discuss the possibility of expanding the area covered by the autonomous region from the present four provinces in order to accommodate the MNLF's demand of full implementation of the 1976 agreement.

Despite the seemingly smooth progression of the peace negotiations, there is some cloud of doubt on Misuari's sincerity to the peace process. His moving around the region with armed followers numbering in the hundreds is causing alarm among the

military. The activities of the Abu Sayaff splinter group is another cause of growing concern by the government. The MNLF disavowed any connection with the group however intelligence sources indicated some connections between them. It could be that Misuari is using the Abu Sayaff as a bargaining chip in the peace negotiations. If indeed there is no connection between the MNLF and this splinter group, then there is one more group that the Ramos administration has to worry about. The April 1995 attack by the Abu Sayaff on the town of Ipil in Zamboanga del Sur exemplifies the destruction that this group is capable of doing.

The government should continue availing of the instrumentalities of the Organization of Islamic Conference to negotiate with the MNLF. The government must avoid the situation where the OIC will change its stand towards resolving the Muslim problem. In continuing good relations with the OIC, the government will be in a better position to block Nur Misuari's bid for permanent membership in the organization.

A commitment of sufficient resources for reconstruction and rehabilitation in the south would be a clear manifestation of the government's firm resolve to settle the Secessionist problem. The government should also initiate moves to help reduce the widening income gap between Muslim and Christian Filipinos. Resources should also be committed to repatriate the thousands of Filipino Muslim refugees who fled to Sabah at the height of the war in the south. Aside from showing the sincerity of the government in looking after the welfare of the Filipino Muslims, it would improve the relations between Malaysia and the Philippines.

Muslim Filipinos should however realize that even with a good measure of autonomy, they would not be able to resist the socio-political and economic changes in a modernizing society. Just like in any traditionally-oriented ethnic minority in a developing country, they should expect that gradual integration and partial loss of cultural identity or progressive marginalization will happen.

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