

# CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

## **Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation**

**January 25, 2002**

Larry Nicksch  
Specialist in Asian Affairs  
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

# Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation

## Summary

The U.S. announcement that 650 military personnel will be deployed to the southern Philippines signified that the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group is the next target after Afghanistan in the U.S. campaign against terrorism. The U.S. action partly is in response to Philippine President Arroyo's strong support of the United States following the September 11 al Qaeda attack on the United States. The United States enters a complex situation in the southern Philippines. A historic Muslim resistance to non-Muslim rulers broke out into massive rebellion in the 1970s. Two large resistance groups, a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fought the Philippine government into the 1990s and entered into tenuous truces in 1996 and 2001 respectively. Abu Sayyaf emerged in 1990 as a splinter group composed of former MNLF fighters and Filipinos who had fought in Afghanistan. Abu Sayyaf resorted to terrorist tactics, including kidnappings, executions of civilians, and bombings. In 2000 and 2001, Abu Sayyaf raided resorts in Malaysia and the Philippine island of Palawan and kidnaped foreign nationals. It received large ransom payments for releasing the foreign and Filipino hostages; but it continues to hold two Americans. Abu Sayyaf had links with Osamu bin Laden's al Qaeda organization in the early 1990s, but Philippine officials have given conflicting assessments of current links. U.S. officials have asserted that there is evidence of existing links.

Philippine government policy has been to apply military pressure on Abu Sayyaf. Operations are constrained by several factors including difficult terrain, inadequate Philippine military equipment, and consideration of the safety of the hostages. A direct U.S. military role, if successful, would benefit the U.S. campaign against terrorism and would revive the Philippine-U.S. alliance. However, other implications are more complex, including the impact of the hostage situation on military operations, confining the U.S. military role to Abu Sayyaf in the context of the MILF and MNLF situations, and the possibility of anti-U.S. backlashes by Muslims in Southeast Asia and by nationalist and leftist groups in the Philippines.

## Contents

The Philippine Response to September 11 .....	1
Historic Muslim Insurgency .....	1
Abu Sayyaf: Origins, Strength, and Operations .....	2
Connections to Al Qaeda and Other Foreign Links .....	4
Links to the MILF and MNLF .....	5
Philippine Government and AFP Policies and Operations .....	6
The Implications of U.S. Involvement .....	7

# Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-U.S. Anti-Terrorism Cooperation

## The Philippine Response to September 11

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo voiced strong support for the United States in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. The Philippines, she said, is prepared to “go every step of the way” with the United States. President Arroyo allowed U.S. military forces to use Filipino ports and airfields to support military operations in Afghanistan. She cited morality and Philippine national interests as reasons for her pro-U.S. stand. She defined the national interest as linking a struggle against international terrorism with the struggle against terrorism within the Philippines.<sup>1</sup>

Philippine terrorism has been multifaceted for at least three decades and has been carried out by different groups with different agendas. A significant communist insurgency, the New Peoples Army (NPA) in the 1970s and 1980s engaged in bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings. The communists today still have an estimated armed strength of over 10,000; and President Bush designated the NPA as a terrorist group in December 2001. Criminal syndicates have practiced widespread kidnappings for ransom. The target of President Arroyo’s policy, however, is Muslim insurgency and terrorism.

This report provides an overview and policy analysis of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the Philippines and the recently announced Philippine-U.S. program of military cooperation against it. It examines the origins and operations of Abu Sayyaf, the efforts of the Philippine government and military to eliminate it, and the implications of a greater U.S. military role in attempts to suppress it. The report will be updated periodically.

## Historic Muslim Insurgency

Located on the big southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu island chain southwest of Mindanao, Filipino Muslims, called Moros since the time of Spanish rule, revolted against Spanish colonizers of the Philippines from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, the American rulers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Philippine governments since independence in 1946. From 1899 to 1914, the U.S. military conducted a number of

---

<sup>1</sup>Landler, Mark. Philippines Offers U.S. Its Troops and Bases. *New York Times*, October 2, 2001. P. 5.

campaigns to suppress Muslim insurgents in the southern Philippines—campaigns which were controversial because of heavy civilian casualties. Muslim grievances after 1946 focused on the growing settlement of Catholic Filipinos on Mindanao, which reduced the geographical area of a Muslim majority (there are about 7 million Filipino Muslims). Muslims revolted in the 1970s under a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which demanded an independent Muslim state. An estimated 120,000 people were killed in the 1970s in heavy fighting between the MNLF and the Philippine armed forces (AFP).<sup>2</sup>

Since the late 1970s, there have been two trends in the Muslim problem. The first has been negotiations between the Philippine government and the MNLF. As a result, the MNLF abandoned its goal of an independent Muslim state. An agreement was reached in 1996 that created an autonomous Muslim region. This apparent positive trend was countered by the fragmentation of the Muslim movement. A segment of the MNLF broke away in 1978 and formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF demanded independence for Muslim populated regions and proclaimed that a Muslim state would be based on “Koranic principles.” The MILF gained strength into the 1990s. By 1995-96, U.S. estimates placed armed MILF strength at 35,000-45,000 in seven provinces on Mindanao. The MILF had large base camps and functional governmental operations. Its operations included attacks on the AFP and planting bombs in Mindanao cities. A Bangsamoro Peoples Consultative Assembly of approximately 200,000 people was held in 1996 in MILF-held territory and called for an independent Muslim state.<sup>3</sup>

Stepped-up MILF military operations in 1998-99 prompted Philippine President Joseph Estrada to order an all-out military offensive against MILF base camps. The AFP captured the MILF’s main base on Mindanao and damaged the MILF militarily. In 2001, Philippine government-MILF negotiations resulted in a tentative cease-fire. This success was offset, however, by the break between the government and MNLF leader, Nur Misuari. When the Philippine government opposed his re-election as governor of the Muslim autonomous region, MNLF forces attacked the AFP and took civilian hostages on Jolo island in the Sulu chain and in the city of Zamboanga in west Mindanao. Nur Misuari fled to Malaysia where he was arrested by Malaysian authorities.

## **Abu Sayyaf: Origins, Strength, and Operations**

Abubakar Janjalani, the son of a fisherman on Basilan island, formed Abu Sayyaf in 1990. Janjalani had become connected with a Muslim fundamentalist movement, Al Islamic Tabligh, in the 1980s. That organization received financial support from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, including funds to send young Muslim men to schools in

---

<sup>2</sup>Sales, Peter M. War in Mindanao. *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, October-November 2000, p. 8, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Tiglao, Rigoberto. Hidden Strength; Crescent Moon Rising. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995. P. 22-28. Tiglao, Rigoberto. Moro Reprise. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 26, 1996-January 2, 1997. P. 22.

the Middle East. Janjalani studied in Saudi Arabia and Libya and became radicalized. When he returned to Basilan, he recruited two groups into Abu Sayyaf (meaning “sword bearer” in Arabic): dissidents from the MNLF and Filipinos who had fought with the Afghan mujaheddin rebels against the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

Over the next five years, Abu Sayyaf staged ambushes, bombings, kidnappings, and executions, mainly against Filipino Christians on Basilan and the west coast of Mindanao. Its strength grew only slowly to an estimated 600 by 1995.<sup>5</sup> Abu Sayyaf operations declined for four years after 1995, partly as a result of the 1996 settlement between the Philippine government and the MNLF. In 1998, AFP troops killed Abubakar Janjalani. His brother, Khadaffy, and Ghalib Andang took command. Then in April 2000, Abu Sayyaf began kidnaping operations further afield geographically and aimed at foreigners, with a principle aim of extracting ransom payments. Abu Sayyaf forces commanded by Andang, aboard fast speed boats, attacked a tourist resort in the Malaysian state of Sabah and kidnaped 21 foreigners, including Malaysians, Frenchmen, Germans, Finns, and South Africans. In July 2000, Abu Sayyaf seized three French journalists. It released the hostages later in the year after it received ransom payments, including money reportedly from European governments funneled through the Libyan government. Estimates of the amount of this ransom range from \$10 to \$25 million.<sup>6</sup>

According to Philippine government officials, Abu Sayyaf used the 2000 ransom to recruit new members, raising its strength to an estimated 1,000 or more, and acquire new equipment, including communications equipment and more fast speedboats. Abu Sayyaf used speedboats again on May 27, 2000, in venturing 300 miles across the Sulu Sea to attack a tourist resort on Palawan, the Philippines’ large, westernmost island. Khadaffy Janjalani commanded the operation. Abu Sayyaf kidnaped 20 people, including three Americans. It took them to Basilan. Abu Sayyaf announced in June 2001 that it had beheaded one of the Americans, Guillermo Sobero, of Coronado, California. As of January 2002, Abu Sayyaf holds Martin and Gracia Burnham, Christian missionaries of Wichita, Kansas, and Deborah Yap, a Filipino nurse. Most of the other abductees from Palawan were freed after more ransom was paid, reportedly as much as \$1 million per person. Throughout 2000 and 2001, Abu Sayyaf kidnaped numerous Filipinos on Basilan and Mindanao, releasing some after ransom payments and executing others. Ex-hostages claim Abu Sayyaf is demanding \$2 million for the Burnhams.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>In Mindanao, the Islamic Fundamentalist Movement Appears to be Spearheaded by the Tabligh and Abu Sayyaf. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 29, 1994. P. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Richburg, Keith. Spoilers of the Peace. *Washington Post*, May 25, 1995. P. A33.

<sup>6</sup>Fisk, Robert. The Double-Edged Sword of Gaddafi’s Links with the Philippines. *London Independent* (internet version), August 22, 2000. Tan, Abby. Kidnappings a Blow to Philippine Image. *Christian Science Monitor*, June 6, 2001. P. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Romero, Paolo. Abus Attempting a Robin Hood. *Philippine Star* (internet version), July 27, 2001. What Ransom? *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (internet version), June 18, 2001. Quezon City GMA 7 television broadcast, December 7, 2001.

## Connections to Al Qaeda and Other Foreign Links

The *Wall Street Journal* of December 3, 2001, quoted Admiral Denis Blair, Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command, that “we’re seeing increasing evidence that there are potential current links” between Abu Sayyaf and Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda terrorist organization. Blair gave no details. There have been varying accounts regarding Abu Sayyaf’s relationship with al Qaeda. It is accepted that Abu Sayyaf received funding and support from al Qaeda in the early 1990s. Money came from Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, a Saudi and brother-in-law of bin Laden, who operated a number of Islamic charities in the southern Philippines. Ramzi Yoesef, an al Qaeda operative, came to the Philippines in 1994. He and other al Qaeda operatives reportedly trained Abu Sayyaf fighters.<sup>8</sup> Yoesef established an al Qaeda cell in Manila. Yoesuf used the cell to plan an assassination of Pope John Paul II, the planting of bombs aboard 12 U.S. airliners flying trans-Pacific routes, and the crashing of an airplane into the Central Intelligence Agency’s headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Filipino police uncovered the cell in 1995 and provided information on the plot to the C.I.A. and F.B.I.. Yoesef later was arrested in Pakistan and extradited to the United States for trial over his complicity in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.<sup>9</sup>

There is less information regarding Abu Sayyaf’s recent relationship with al Qaeda. Filipino officials close to President Arroyo have contended that the relationship declined after 1995 when the Ramzi Yoesuf plot was uncovered and Khalifa left the Philippines. Civilian officials assert that there is no hard evidence of current ties. They cite the decline in foreign financial support as a key reason for Abu Sayyaf’s expanded kidnappings for ransom. In contrast, Filipino military officials claim that active links exist. A secret AFP intelligence report of early 2000 reportedly asserted that Abu Sayyaf received training, arms, and other support from al Qaeda and other Middle East terrorist groups.<sup>10</sup> AFP officers subsequently reported that “foreign Muslims” were training Abu Sayyaf on Mindanao to conduct urban terrorism and that Osama bin Laden had ordered stepped-up aid to Abu Sayyaf, including possibly \$3 million in 2000.<sup>11</sup> In July 2001, Philippine Senator Rudolfo Biazon, chairman of the Senate committee on national security and defense and a former

---

<sup>8</sup>Police Hunt for Sudanese Terrorist in Mindanao. *Manila Chronicle*, December 15, 1995. P. 3. Pomonti, Jean-Claude. Al Qaeda’s Invisible Presence in Southeast Asia. *Le Monde*, November 4-5, 2001, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>For a detailed account of the Ramzi Yousef bomb plot, see: Brzezinski, Matthew. Bust and Boom. *Washington Post Magazine*, December 31, 2001. P. 15-17, 27-28.

<sup>10</sup>Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. Terrorism War’s New Front. *Washington Post*, December 22, 2001. P. A1. Kurlantzick, Joshua. Muslim Separatists in Global Network of Terrorist Groups. *Washington Times*, May 2, 2000. P. A13.

<sup>11</sup>Arquiza, Ray. Interpol Alerts RP on Bin Laden’s Men. *Philippine Star* (internet version), July 10, 2001. Gomez, Jim. Philippine Rebels, bin Laden Linked. Agence France Presse report, June 20, 2000.

highly decorated Marine General, cited reports from United Nations sources that at least 50 Abu Sayyaf members were being trained in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

Abu Sayyaf's other foreign links are with individuals and possibly groups in Malaysia and with Libya. A prominent Malaysian, Sairan Karno, helped to negotiate the release of the hostages in 2000. Libya's leader, Moammar Gaddafi, was the key intermediary in hostage negotiations in 2000 and 2001 involving Abu Sayyaf and other Filipino Muslim groups. Libya was a conduit for ransoms paid to Abu Sayyaf by European governments and other parties. Libya has been accused of aiding the MILF, and it was involved in Philippine-MILF negotiations in 2001 for a truce. Libya also funds Muslim schools, mosques, and other facilities in the southern Philippines. It offered money for "livelihood projects" in its role in the 2000 hostage negotiations. Like the prior charities of Mohammed Khalifa, this raises the possibility that Libyan money gets channeled to Abu Sayyaf. Libya officially has condemned Abu Sayyaf kidnappings.<sup>13</sup>

## Links to the MILF and MNLF

Leaders of the MILF and MNLF have denied any supportive links with Abu Sayyaf. They have criticized Abu Sayyaf's terrorist attacks against civilians. The MILF rejected the Afghan Taliban's call for a jihad against the United States and condemned the September 11 attack.<sup>14</sup> There have been reports of links between the MILF and al Qaeda. The latest was an allegation reportedly by Singapore officials that an MILF trainer and bomb specialist assisted the group of 13 al Qaeda-linked terrorists arrested in Singapore in January 2002.<sup>15</sup> The claims that links exist and that elements of the MILF and MNLF give active aid to Abu Sayyaf.<sup>16</sup> There clearly is contact between Abu Sayyaf and units of the two larger organizations in the Sulu islands, Basilan, and western Mindanao, where all three groups operate. The MNLF's attack on AFP units on Jolo island in November 2001 demonstrated the proximity of MNLF and Abu Sayyaf units. A number of MILF units operate on Basilan. Some Abu Sayyaf members were formerly with the MNLF. Several thousand MNLF members kept their weapons despite the 1996 agreement and operate as independent commands. Factions with the MILF and MNLF are hard-line advocates of Muslim independence and reject autonomy proposals; they undoubtedly would be inclined to

---

<sup>12</sup>Nocum, Armand N. Talibans Training 50 Abu Members, says Biazon. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (internet version), July 6, 2001.

<sup>13</sup>Mydans, Seth. Libyan Aid Helps to Free Hostage Held in Philippines. *New York Times*, October 21, 2001. P. A9. Sheehan, Deidre. Buying Trouble. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 7, 2000. P. 29.

<sup>14</sup>Mendez, Christina. MILF Rejects 'Holy War' vs US. *Philippine Star* (internet version), September 17, 2001.

<sup>15</sup>Mydans, Seth. Suspects in Singapore Are Linked to Al Qaeda and Plans for Anti-U.S. Attacks. *New York Times*, January 12, 2002. P. A8. Marinay, Manny B. Philippine Military Bares MILF's Foreign Sources of Funds. *Manila Times* (internet version), March 27, 2002.

<sup>16</sup>Alipala, Inot. MILF, MNLF Aiding Abu, Military Charges. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (internet version), July 5, 2001.



cooperate with Abu Sayyaf under certain circumstances.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the tenuous relations between the Philippine government and the MILF and MNLF raise the strong possibility of shifting linkages among the three Muslim groups.

## Philippine Government and AFP Policies and Operations

The basic Philippine government policy since August 2000 has been constant military pressure on Abu Sayyaf. In September 2000, President Estrada ordered the AFP to commit over 1,500 troops into Jolo to conduct operations against Abu Sayyaf units that had taken the foreign hostages in Malaysia. President Arroyo ordered the AFP into Basilan after the hostage-taking on Palawan. As many as 4,500 troops were deployed to Basilan in 2001. AFP operations apparently have reduced Abu Sayyaf strength from the level of over 1000 in early 2000. The AFP estimated in December 2001 that Abu Sayyaf strength on Basilan was below 100 and was about 500 on Jolo.

AFP operations have been limited by several factors. One is the mountainous, jungle terrain of the two islands pockmarked by underground caves. A second is the support civilians on Jolo and Basilan reportedly give Abu Sayyaf, although recent surveys of Muslims on Basilan suggested that many are disillusioned by Abu Sayyaf's violence. A third is the limited military equipment of the AFP, including an absence of night vision and other surveillance equipment and shortages of helicopters, mortars, naval patrol craft, surveillance aircraft, and even basic necessities like military boots. A fourth limitation appears to be the unevenness in the quality of the AFP. The attrition of Abu Sayyaf strength appears to reflect AFP successes, but there also have been failed operations. The most controversial was the failed encirclement of the Abu Sayyaf holding the Burnhams and Filipino hostages in a church in the town of Lamitan in June 2001. Several AFP units pulled out of their positions without explanation, allowing the Abu Sayyaf unit to break out of the encirclement. A Catholic priest and other witnesses charged that Abu Sayyaf had bribed AFP commanders to pull units from their positions, and Filipino Catholic bishops have called for an inquiry. A Philippine Senate Committee is investigating the Lamitan incident.<sup>18</sup>

A fifth limitation is the hostage situation itself. In 2000, European governments reportedly pressured the Philippine government to refrain from "excessive" military operations while Abu Sayyaf held the European hostages.<sup>19</sup> There are no reports of similar U.S. pressure regarding the Burnhams. Nevertheless, Arroyo Administration officials and AFP commanders say they are restrained from air bombing and using artillery and mortars out of concern over the safety of the hostages. A sixth limitation

---

<sup>17</sup>Sheehan, Deidre. Swords into Ploughshares. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 20, 2001. P. 30-32. Lerner, Marc. Philippines Guerrilla Group has bin Laden Links. *Washington Times*, September 24, 2001. P. A13.

<sup>18</sup>Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. Rebels' Escape Draws Scrutiny. *Washington Post*, September 1, 2001, p. A 18.

<sup>19</sup>Sheehan, Buying Trouble, p. 529. See also Kyodo News Service (Tokyo) report, July 13, 2000; and the Agence France Presse report, July 12, 2000.

is the AFP deployment of most of its forces in the southern Philippines in the broader areas of Mindanao dominated by the MILF and MNLF. Only a small percentage of Filipino troops is committed against Abu Sayyaf. A final constraint is the danger of AFP operations producing a large numbers of civilian casualties or displaced civilians. The Estrada Administration came under criticism in 2000 over reports that the AFP offensive on Jolo caused civilian casualties and displacement among the island's more than 200,000 residents.

The Philippine government has opposed payment of ransom for hostages. The reality is that the government has allowed the payment of ransom from members of hostages' families and from European governments through Libya in 2000. Although the U.S. Government opposes the payment of ransom for hostages, Filipino officials asserted that unidentified parties are trying to negotiate a ransom deal for the Burnhams.<sup>20</sup>

The Arroyo Administration also is negotiating with Indonesia and Malaysia to form a mechanism for trilateral cooperation against terrorist groups. It appears to have some success in securing Malaysia's cooperation. Malaysia has increased its naval patrols in the Sulu Sea, and it arrested Nur Misuari after he fled to Malaysia in November 2001.

## **The Implications of U.S. Involvement**

Beginning in October 2001, the United States sent groups of military observers to Mindanao to assess AFP operations against Abu Sayyaf, render advice, and examine AFP equipment needs. President Bush extended \$93 million in military aid to the Philippines when President Arroyo visited Washington in 2001, and he offered a direct U.S. military role in combating Abu Sayyaf. President Arroyo insisted that the U.S. military role should be advisory and that the AFP would retain full operational responsibility. By late December 2001, the AFP on Mindanao began to receive quantities of U.S. military equipment. Moreover, AFP commanders expressed frustration over the failure to rescue the hostages and suggested that they would support President Arroyo if she sought a more direct U.S. military role.<sup>21</sup> It was announced in January 2002 that the United States would deploy 650 troops to Mindanao and Basilan within a month. Support/maintenance personnel would number 500. Special Forces numbering 150 would perform training and advisory functions; and some of these would accompany AFP units on Basilan. U.S. military personnel would not conduct independent operations, but they would be armed and authorized to defend themselves. Such a role on Basilan would likely place U.S. Special Forces in direct combat situations in AFP-Abu Sayyaf encounters.

---

<sup>20</sup>Echeminada, Roel and Romero, Paolo. The Military to Unmask Group Negotiating Abu Ransom. *Philippine Star* (internet version), December 21, 2001.

<sup>21</sup>More US 'Advisors' to Help Fight Sayyaf. *Manila Times*, January 4, 2002. P. 1. Ng-Gadil, Mirasol. AFP Admitted that Operation Against Abu Sayyuf Bandits is Difficult. *Manila Kabayan* (internet version), December 30, 2001.

This enlarged U.S. military role has several implications. Successful military operations against Abu Sayyaf would extend U.S. successes beyond Afghanistan and reinforce the Bush Administration's message to governments everywhere that the United States is determined to fight terrorism on many fronts. The Philippine government's example could influence other governments to cooperate with the United States. Success against Abu Sayyaf would further revive the Philippine-U.S. security alliance, a goal of U.S. policy since the signing in 1998 of a Philippine-U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement. It undoubtedly will produce greater Philippine-U.S. cooperation against any future attempts by al Qaeda to plant cells in Manila or elsewhere in the Philippines.

Other implications, however, are complex and contain uncertain outcomes. One is the likely heightened danger to American citizens and businesses in the Philippines, who could be targeted by Abu Sayyaf or al Qaeda, or even by the communist NPA. Another is the issue of military objectives, which Pentagon officials have not defined. If the primary U.S. objective is the rescue of the hostages, the U.S. military likely would limit its role to precise operations targeting the Abu Sayyaf group on Basilan holding the hostages. Restraints on the use of bombing and artillery would have to continue. Training and advice probably would focus on a rescue operation on the ground and on prior surveillance and intelligence operations. However, if an objective of equal priority is to destroy Abu Sayyaf, U.S. military activities would be broader in scope and would have to be carried out on Jolo and areas of western Mindanao and include maritime surveillance and possibly maritime patrols.

Another implication relates to confining the mission to Abu Sayyaf. The Bush Administration reportedly wants to avoid military involvement with the MILF.<sup>22</sup> If the tenuous Philippine government truces with the MILF and MNLF should collapse, the AFP undoubtedly would use recently supplied U.S. military equipment against these groups. The Philippine government might want U.S. training and advice for AFP units committed against the MILF and/or MNLF. U.S. military personnel with the AFP could become involved in clashes with MILF or MNLF units in areas where these groups are in proximity with Abu Sayyaf. AFP operations against Abu Sayyaf, which used aerial bombing or artillery, could link the United States with potentially heavy civilian casualties. Finally, if reports of MILF-al Qaeda links are validated, a strong case would emerge in U.S. policy deliberations to target the MILF as well as Abu Sayyaf. In short, an enlarged U.S. role against Abu Sayyaf contains a high level risk of wider U.S. military involvement affecting large elements of the Muslim population of Mindanao. The risk was highlighted by threats in late January 2002 from MNLF elements loyal to Nur Misuari to attack American targets in Philippine cities, including Manila.

The enlarged U.S. military role also carries the risk of political backlashes. Muslims in neighboring Indonesia and Malaysia might react against the United States, especially if the U.S. military role expands beyond missions against Abu Sayyaf and if it becomes prolonged. Influential Filipino "nationalist" and leftist groups already are criticizing the U.S. military role, even though polls indicate overwhelming Filipino

---

<sup>22</sup>Landler, Mark. The Temperature's a Lot Warmer but the Mission's the Same: Hunting Down Terrorists. *New York Times*, November 4, 2001. P. B4.

public support for it and the influential Catholic Bishops Conference endorsed it. Critics charge that the United States is plotting to restore a permanent U.S. military presence in the Philippines. They were influential in the Philippine government's decision in 1991 to order the United States to withdraw from the large U.S. military bases in the Philippines. The critics also are reviving accounts of the controversial American military campaigns of 1899-1914.

The U.S. military role also has implications for a U.S. political role on Mindanao. The Bush Administration will face sentiment and pressure to influence the political, social, and issue issues underlying Filipino Muslim discontent: the scope and extent of autonomy of the Muslim populated region; the role of Islam in education; and economic development issues. The likely U.S. involvement in these issues was evidenced by President Bush's promise to President Arroyo in November 2001 of \$55 million in development aid for Mindanao.