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Soldiers as Peacemakers Peacekeepers and Peacebuilders



LTGEN BEN D DOLORFINO AFP



INSTITUTE FOR AUTONOMY AND GOVERNANCE



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Established in 2001, the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Inc. seeks to provide research, training and technical assistance to promote meaningful autonomy and governance in the southern Philippines.

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Autonomy and Peace Review

FOREWORD

My advocacy for peace in Mindanao started right at the beginning of my military career thirty-nine years ago in the portals of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). A budding Plebes undergoing summer Camp training, we idolized our Squad Leader 1st Class Cadet Jan Erfe Muyargas, for leading us through our most trying period of abrupt transformation from a civilian to a military life. His sterling display of leadership evoked lasting respect and admiration from us. We witnessed him graduate, and we were glad to hear that he joined the elite Philippine Marines. Unfortunately, 2Lt Muyargas died while leading the Marines in a combat soon after his deployment in Basilan Province. Instead of the common feelings of hatred and anger among the cadets, my heart bled in search for the reasons why our fellow Filipinos have to fight in Mindanao. Are we not all Filipinos? Why do biases, hatred and animosities prevail in the heart of the people in Mindanao? Why do Muslim Filipinos prefer to call themselves “Moros” and rise in arms to secede from our country? Is it because they are Muslims and we are Christians, hence, an irreconcilable religious conflict? Will fighting ever resolve the Mindanao situation?

My search for answer grew stronger as we progressed with our military training in PMA. Primarily, we were trained as warriors to fight the war in Mindanao, where many of our upperclassmen have already perished in search to end the conflict. The Department of Physical Education (DPE) required us to engage in combative sports during our final year to develop the so-called “killer’s instinct”. Our military training was capped with Ranger Course, a month prior to our graduation. We romanticized on never ending tales of combat exploits of our instructors in Mindanao. However, stories

of brutalities and inhumanities of unrestricted application of military force that also brought so much of sufferings to non-combatants appalled my moral and ethical senses. Are we not losing the trust of our people at the same time that we are fighting to win the battles thereby exacerbating the problems?

I joined the Navy where fortuitously, I was exposed to Islam under the tutelage of Commander Robert Abdurahman Bruce, a Muslim convert who was my Executive Officer aboard the Navy's flag ship, RPS Datu Kalantiaw (PS 76). Among others, I learned that Islam is a religion for peace, tolerance and co-existence. So, why the belligerent attitude of our brother Muslim Filipinos? There must be other reasons.

After a year stint aboard ship, I volunteered for flight training and, in no time, was exposed to the realities of the war in Mindanao as a helicopter pilot supporting combat operations of the Marines. My first deployment in 1979 went smack into a combat operation of the MBLT1 against the MNLF in Tarawakan-Busay Complex in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. I was stationed in Naval Station Batu-Batu where I met a beautiful Muslim lass who eventually became my wife. I named one of our sons "Jan", after my hero 2Lt Muyargas. This led to my conversion to Islam which provided me the key to the historical, political, social, economic and cultural context of the Moro problem.

My six years flying stint with the Marines provided me a vantage view of conflict situations and the effects on the civilian population not only in Muslim Mindanao, but also in other conflict affected areas where Marine Units operate like in Zamboanga Provinces, Davao Provinces, Surigao Provinces, Bukidnon,

Agusan, Palawan, Bataan, Bicol Region and Cagayan Valley. In 1985, Marine Commandant BGen Artemio Tadiar invited me to join the Corps. My fellow naval aviators thought I was out of my mind when I eventually volunteered to join the Philippine Marines. To transfer from the Navy to the Marines is uncommon, but I was very determined by that time. My exposure with the Marines strengthened my resolve to give meaning for the untimely death of my young hero and the countless other Marines who offered the ultimate sacrifice in search for the lasting peace in Mindanao.

Life with the Marines entailed untold personal and family sacrifices, but offered immense personal satisfaction of being with the people we have sworn to serve and protect, and having a direct hand in helping resolve our internal security problems. In far flung places which are hardly reached by governance, the Marines provide the face for the government and essential services which should have been the responsibilities of other agencies of the government. They filled in the gaps in government services by linking communities and government agencies, non-government organizations and civil society organizations. Since its creation in 1950, the Marines have excelled in their basic soldiery role as warriors. It is common for us to see people cry when the Marines are redeployed to other areas of operation.

In our setting, insurgents, terrorists and criminals exist and operate among the ordinary people. They maintain mass base communities where their families, sympathizers and supporters live in symbiotic relationship with the armed groups. Insecurity in conflict-affected areas also causes the existence of criminal groups and other community armed groups. The occurrence of culturally motivated 'rido' or clan war always turned into a bloody incident

with soldiers, rebels, terrorists and other community armed groups are drawn into the picture. Unrestricted use of military force would inevitably harm non-combatants in the form of human rights violation, collateral damages and displacements of the civilians. In a situation like this, soldiers are seen as villains and an occupying force, something that must be avoided to keep the trust of the people.

We are faced by two imperatives, winning the battle with the enemy as well as winning peace for the people. Clearly, this requires focused tactical combat operations and comprehensive non-military interventions to win peace for the people to make insurgency, terrorism and lawlessness irrelevant.

After years of cycle of violence, it finally dawned in the Marine Corps that we have to make a radical paradigm-shift in the way we are conducting our internal security operations. After my Bridging Leadership training in 2003, I pioneered the comprehensive approach for the rehabilitation of war-ravaged Buliok Complex in the boundary areas of Pikit, North Cotabato and Pagalungan, Maguindanao. Subsequently, while working for the peace process under the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP), I introduced Bridging Leadership and Conflict Management to the Marine Corps in collaboration with the Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides (now Team Energy Center), Asian Institute of Management (AIM), and Asia Foundation, Inc. (AFI) to support the comprehensive approach to peacebuilding and conflict management. In February 2007, Task Force Thunder in Basilan under the Command of BGen Juancho Sabban pioneered the 20/80 approach, now popularly called as the Sabban's Formula. The mix of 20 percent combat operations

and 80 percent civil military operations underscores the need for intelligence-driven surgical combat operations in neutralizing enemy groups and greater efforts in peacebuilding and conflict management under the ambit of CMO. Rifle Battalions organized and trained Special Operations Platoons to acquire capability in surgical tactical operations. In May 2008, while serving as the Commandant of the Philippine Marine Corps, I embarked on a massive Peacebuilding and Conflict Management Training for Marine Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers in collaboration with the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG), Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI) and Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID). Now, Marine units are confident that even with limited resources they are poised to achieve greater success in their internal security operations. They are now aware that their real strength does not rest on their organic capabilities and resources alone, but also on the quality of their collaborative working relationship with other stakeholders.

The advocacy to train the soldiers on conflict management and transform them from plain warriors into peacemakers, peacekeepers and peacebuilders was hatched in August 2005 during a somber discussion on the security situation in Mindanao at Garden Orchid Hotel, Zamboanga City between Colonel Raymundo “Ding” Ferrer, then Commanding Officer, 103rd Infantry Brigade, PA; Mr. Ariel “Ayi” Hernandez, Executive Director, Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. (BMFI); and I, then Commanding Officer, 2nd Marine Brigade and, in concurrent position, Commander, Joint Task Force “Ranao”. We are all graduates of the Bridging Leadership Program of the Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides and AIM. Colonel Ferrer lamented that soon we will retire and yet after almost four long decades of fighting, we do not see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. The problems could

have been solved if indeed the armed forces were making the right approach. We vowed to take the initiative of showing the way how to end the cycle of violence among our people before we finally bow out of the service. The initial roundtable discussions were conducted at Garden Orchid Hotel with the Department of National Defense Undersecretary Ernesto Carolina (then in-charge of the Philippine Defense Reforms program); COMSOUTHCOM; CG, 1st Infantry Division, PA; and Brigade Commanders in attendance. It was followed by another consultation hosted by BMFI in Cagayan de Oro City which was attended by CG, 4th Infantry Division, PA; CG, 10th Infantry Division, PA; CG, 6th Infantry Division, PA; and Brigade Commanders. While the advocacy gained the support from the younger officers, senior officers expressed reservations about soldiers attending the peacebuilding programs as it may water down their traditional warrior culture. Concern was also raised on possible repercussions to military discipline if soldiers are exposed to non-traditional roles. They might hesitate later when ordered to fight. Further, the military might veer away from its traditional role as mere instruments of national policy. These concerns were considered in the formulation of the training objectives and the design of the training program. The training design has continuously evolved since the start of training in 2006 as more lessons are learned. The current design consists of ten (10) modules: 1) Understanding the Mindanao Situation; 2) The Comprehensive Peace Process; 3) Comprehensive Understanding of Human Security; 4) Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law; 5) Soldier as Peacemaker, Peacekeeper and Peacebuilder; 6) Soldier as Bridging Leader; 7) Soldier as a Sustainable Community Development Advocate; 8) Soldier as Information Integrator and Communicator; 9) Soldier as an Environmentalist; and 10) Civil Mili-

tary Operations. Atty. Benedicto “Benny” Bacani and Fr. Eliseo “Jun” Mercado OMI, both of IAG, were primarily responsible in the formulation of this training design. Thus far, the BMFI has conducted fifteen(15) training programs for six hundred seven (607) commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Philippine Army and members of the CAFGUs. For its part, the IAG has conducted five(5) training programs for the two hundred thirty-two (232) officers of the AFP and PNP in Central Mindanao. The IAG, BMFI and AUSAID collaborated for eight (8) training programs for four hundred fourteen (414) officers and three hundred sixty-two (362) non-commissioned officers of the Philippine Marine Corps in Zamboanga City, Basilan, Sulu/ Tawi-Tawi and Palawan in a span of three years.

As I retire from the military service, I am presenting my concept of Focused and Comprehensive Approach (Whole Society) to our internal security problems along with the other written works of my peace advocacy. We are confronted with low-intensity conflict situations. There are two essential tasks involved, namely; 1) winning our small battles with enemy groups; and 2) winning peace for our people. Ding, Ayi, Benny, Fr. Jun and I, together with all the peace advocates who worked with us, are aware that we cannot do it with ourselves alone. Nonetheless, we have provided the initial small steps that many other peace-loving Filipinos can help build on. It would take a top to bottom strategy, policies, values and attitudes reforms to achieve the dream of peace, development and security in our country.

LtGen Ben Deocampo Dolorfino AFP

LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ASG - Abu Sayyaf Group**
- AIM - Asian Institute of Management**
- AFP/PNP - Armed Forces of the Philippines/Philippine National Police**
- ARMM - Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao**
- BDA - Bangsamoro Development Agency**
- BL - Bridging Leadership**
- CSO - Civil Society Organization**
- DENR - Department of Environment and Natural Resources**
- DSWD - Department of Social Welfare and Development**
- DepEd - Department of Education**
- GRP - Government of the Republic of the Philippines**
- IDP - Internally Displaced People**
- LGU - Local Government Unit**
- MILF - Moro Islamic Liberation Front**
- MNLF - Moro National Liberation Front**
- NGO - Non-government Organization**
- NPA - New People's Army**
- OPPAP - Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process**
- OIC - Organization of Islamic Countries**
- PC - Philippine Constabulary**
- PO - People's Organization**
- PMA - Philippine Military Academy**
- SUMO - Suspension of Military Operations**
- 2MDE - 2nd Marine Brigade**

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**SOLDIERS AS
PEACEMAKERS,
PEACEKEEPERS AND
PEACEBUILDERS**

LTGEN BEN D DOLORFINOAFP

**Dedicated to the memories of 2L T JAN ERFE
MUYARGAS PN(M) and all Marines, sailors,
soldiers and airmen who offered the ultimate sacrifice**

**(The views expressed in this publication are those of
the author and not necessarily those of the Armed
Forces of the Philippines)**

Soldiers As Peacemakers, Peacekeepers and Peacebuilders

LTGEN BEN D DOLORFINO AFP

Are we fighting to win a war with our people or fighting to win peace with them?

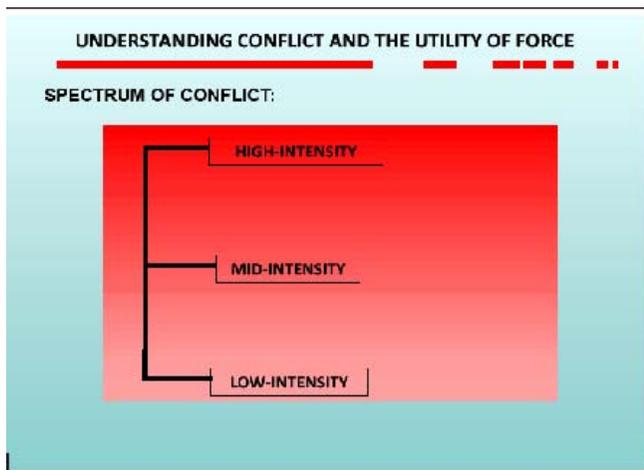
Soldiers are plain warriors by tradition but faced with the complexities of our internal security problems, we must realize that conflicts are not fought and won with arms alone. There are other means of fighting the enemy without using arms. For decades now, we have been fighting the enemies of the state with the full might of the armed forces led by officers who are well-trained both in local and foreign schools. They have employed the best military tactics, techniques and procedures that can be learned from these schools. We are far superior in manpower, equipment, armaments and weaponry compared to insurgents, terrorists and criminal groups. But, are we winning?

At the resurgence of insurgency in the late nineteen-sixties, there were only two groups, the CPP-NPA and the MNLF. These groups mutated through the years of fighting that we are confronted now with more virulent enemy groups, the Communist Terrorist Movement (CTM), rouge MNLF groups, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), lawless MILF groups (LMG) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Also, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a regional terrorist group, and other foreign terrorist organizations have joined the fray. The resultant insecurity in the affected areas complicated the situation and gave rise to the existence of kidnap for ransom groups and

community armed groups. Is there something wrong with the way we are confronting our internal security problems? If yes, how should we go about with our internal security operations? Are we fighting a war or pacifying our wayward countrymen to achieve peace? These questions will be answered in this article.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND THE UTILITY OF FORCE

First and foremost, this introspection process is for you to have a clear understanding of conflict and the utility of force. Not all conflict situations are the same. Conflicts are ranged into a spectrum of three levels, namely: high intensity, mid-intensity and low-intensity. The utility of force varies in resolving these conflict situations.



High-intensity conflict is characterized by the utmost use of military force utilizing massive manpower and industrial resources of nations. It is war among nations. World War I and II fall under this category. This type of conflict gave rise to the so-called “Western Way of War”, the overwhelming use of force to destroy the enemy’s will to fight. Mid-intensity conflict is also war among nations but at a lower level of violence. Aside from military force, other instruments of national power such as diplomacy, economic embargo and information warfare also take its part to weaken the will of the adversary nations. This is a regional war situation like the Gulf War where the US-led coalition of nations fought Iraq. At the bottom level is the low-intensity conflict situation where our internal security problems fall into. It is a war among people. According to Sir Rupert Smith, in his book entitled “The Utility of Force”, the battlefields rest in the hearts and minds of the people in a low-intensity conflict situation. Aside from the use of military force to achieve peace and stabilize the situation, other instruments of national power play prominent roles in resolving the conflict. Low-intensity conflict is an enigmatic situation. Many nations have applied overwhelming force and failed in the process. History is replete of examples of failures in the use of force to fight irregular warfare in low-intensity conflict situations. The US armed forces intervened in the internal conflict among the Vietnamese people using all the modern weaponry they can muster, but miserably failed. North Vietnam fought asymmetrically thru information warfare that destroyed the will of the American people by systematically portraying the costliness, unjustness and inhumanity of the war through the international mass media. In the end, the American people demanded

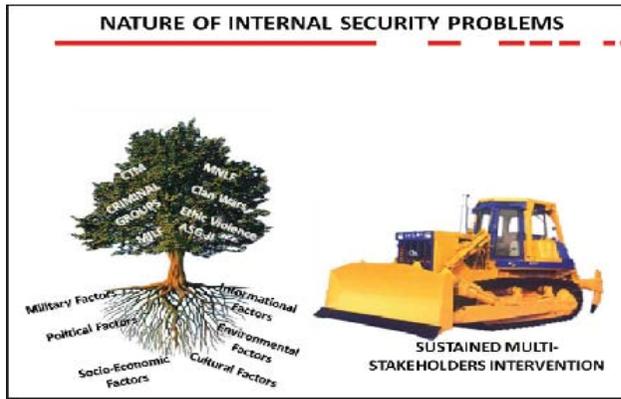
the pull-out of US troops. Likewise, the former Soviet Union failed in its intervention in Afghanistan despite the use of state-of-the-art weaponry. We have been confronting our internal security problems for decades now without success. From mere insurgencies, the situation has worsened to include terrorism and organized criminality. Why is this so? An in-depth analysis of our internal security problems would provide us the reasons.

NATURE OF OUR INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS

The armed forces, being the primary agency in the security sector, are often seen as the single entity that can address and promote peace, stability and security. But internal security problems are not only a military concern as these disturbances to peace and order are merely symptoms or physical manifestations of deeper societal problems that caused these events.



Our internal security problems are likened to a tree. The branches and leaves represent the different threat groups and their respective members. The roots represent the multi-dimensional root causes of these existing problems. The use of military force can only go as far as cutting the branches and removing the leaves. Unless you go down the trunk and eliminate the roots, new branches and leaves will grow in time.



This was clearly illustrated during the Ramos administration when the armed forces achieved strategic victory over the CTM in 1994. Over time the CTM regained strength, because the concerned instrumentalities of the civilian government failed to effectively address the root causes. Lasting solution to our internal security problems would entail sustained non-military interventions that are multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders in nature.

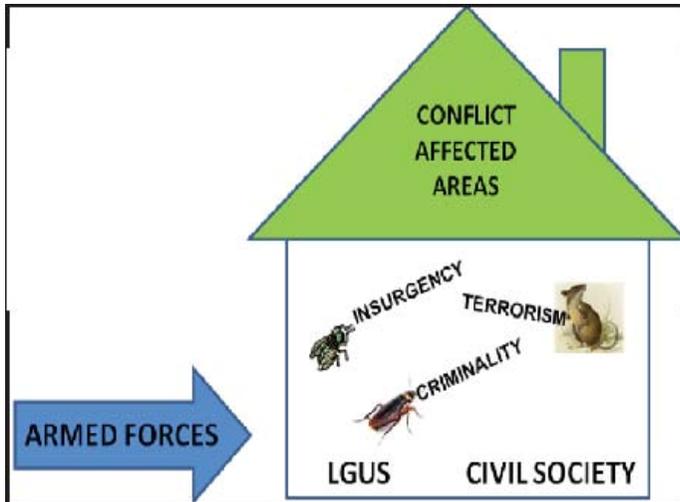
The “whole government approach” called for by the National Internal Security Plan (NISP) is deemed insufficient. It would require a “whole society approach” involving the three basic stakeholders of the society: the government, armed forces

and people. There is no better wisdom than the words of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari during the 10th Anniversary celebration of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement in Davao City on September 2, 2007 that, “Peace can never be imposed on the people for it would take the people themselves to create peace.”

Any solution that is imposed would surely elicit resistance from the adversely affected sector of the society. When there is resistance, inevitably, conflict situation follows. Have we not been imposing peace on our people using military force? Is this the reason why we cannot achieve lasting peace in our country? In the conduct of internal security operations, do we appear as if we are waging war against our people regardless of whether they are enemies of the state or innocent civilians? And worse, are we using overwhelming military force where innocent civilians are harmed as well? In the conduct of our combat operations, have we been committing human rights violations, causing collateral damages and displacing civilians? If yes, then we are part of the problems rather than the solution. What is the utility of force in low-intensity conflict situation?

Tasked to conduct internal security operations in a given area of operations, the armed forces are like visitors of the house pestered by pests. While we can eliminate the pests using force, we cannot solve the problems that breed the existence of these pests by ourselves alone. The cultural barrier will always pose as obstacle in giving unilateral solutions to local problems because we have a multi-ethnic society. It would take the residents of the house to do a lasting house cleaning

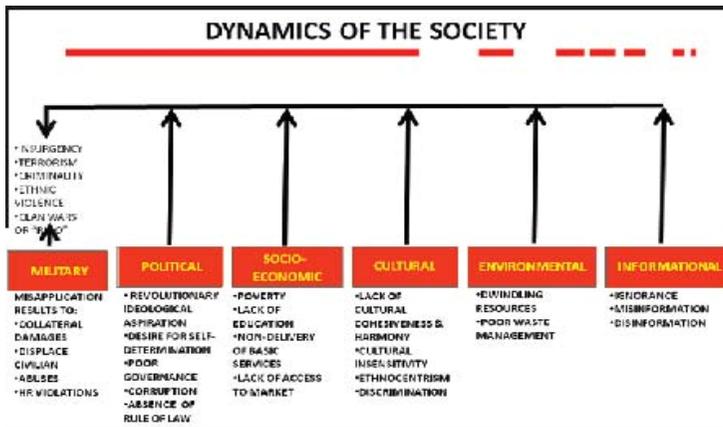
job. Who are the residents of this proverbial house? They are the local government units (LGUs) and the civil society. Clearly, fighting insurgents is different from fighting insurgency. Insurgency is a societal condition that breeds the existence of insurgents. While we can use military force in fighting insurgents, we cannot use it in fighting insurgency. We cannot use bullets and bombs to resolve social inequities, poverty or cultural disharmony. It would entail sustained non-military interventions that are multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders in nature to resolve insurgency.



In the Philippine setting, there are six dimensions that significantly affect the lives of people, namely: military, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and informational. Each of these dimensions is not isolated but rather interconnected with each other. There are problems in each dimension that collectively contribute to our internal security problems. Their dynamics result to what we have in the society

such as the existence of insurgency, terrorism, criminality, clan wars and ethnic violence. These are systemic problems that need sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders interventions.

The armed forces can be part of the problem if the military units misapply its military force. In a low intensity conflict situation, military force should be applied with utmost circumspection. Definitely, the use of overwhelming force is not applicable in this type of conflict. It will result to displacement of civilians, collateral damages and human rights violations.



These adverse effects of military force to non-combatants alienate the people and exacerbate existing conflict situations. In the eyes of the affected civilians, soldiers are villains.

Central to any conflict situation is politics. Carl Von Clausewitz, a renowned Prussian military theorist, claimed in his treatise "On War" that, "War is an extension of political intercourse by other means". When political differences are

not settled peacefully, nations or groups go to war. In our country, armed conflicts are caused by violent political struggle that are ideological, secessionist and religious militancy in nature. They are fueled by subsidiary problems like political inequities, poor governance, injustices, corruption, neglect, oppression and absence of rule of law.

Our internal conflicts have a socio economic factor. Poverty results to subsidiary problems like illiteracy, social inequities, unemployment, and poor hygiene and sanitation that in turn drive people to insurgency, terrorism and criminality. Hardship in life may drive a devout Muslim to militancy when agitated by terrorist groups and promised of a better life in paradise if he becomes a “shahid” or martyr. In a similar manner, Communism becomes a promised alternative for social justice and a better life.

We are in a multi-ethnic society. Hence, cultural problems play a big role in the existence of conflict situations. We lack cultural cohesiveness and harmony. Even within an ethnic group like the Maranaos and Tausogs, clan war or “rido” is the primary cause of disturbances to peace and order. Ethnocentrism leads to discrimination, biases, animosities and ethnic violence. As a matter of fact, cultural problems are the primary caused of conflict situations in Mindanao.

The environment also plays a part in the dynamics of our internal security problems. Problems created by dwindling natural resources and improper waste management lead to disturbances to peace and order. In the provinces of Basilan, Sulu

and Tawi-Tawi where illegal forms of fishing are rampant, maritime resources in the municipal waters are rapidly getting depleted. The local fishermen are now venturing to the high seas where they experience hostile encounters with the “Superlights”, the big fishing fleets from other places. This adds fuel to the existing conflict situations in the area. Poor hygiene and sanitation in poor communities caused the spread of diseases. Since the people live in poverty, they are driven to criminality just to gain quick and easy money to save the life of a sick family member.

In the informational dimension, ignorance, misinformation and disinformation also lead to conflict situations. A good case in point was the abortive signing of the MOA-AD in August 2008. Lack of information about the document and the GRP-MILF peace process created villains out of the stakeholders. Some MILF Commanders attacked and pillaged Christian communities thinking that it was the end of the peace process. The armed forces responded in kind to MILF attacks that in turn caused collateral damages and massive displacement of civilians. Politicians also joined the fray that only added fuel to the existing animosities. Prompt and truthful public information mean a lot in mitigating conflict situations. A well-informed citizenry makes a peaceful society.

Our internal security problems are being fueled by tough and complex situations that are multi-dimensional and systemic in nature. No less than a whole society approach will provide a lasting solution to our internal security problems.

CENTER OF GRAVITY

In war, one does not need to hit the entire being of the enemy to defeat him. It would be an ineffective use of energy and resources to do so. There lies a key quality in the enemy that serves as the hub of all his power and strength. We call this as the center of gravity in military parlance. Hitting the enemy's center of gravity results to debilitating consequences that will make him fall like a deck of dominoes. The biblical duel between David and Goliath illustrates this military phenomenon. David, who was vastly inferior in strength compared to Goliath, hit the latter with a slingshot on the forehead through an opening in his armor. The exposed forehead, a vital kill point, was Goliath's center of gravity. In the Vietnam War, this was also demonstrated by the way North Vietnam defeated the US. They wittingly identified the center of gravity as the "will of the US government and the American



people”.

They hit and destroyed two sides of the “trinity of war” (government and people). By portraying the Vietnam War as a costly, inhuman and unjust war thru the international mass media, American domestic opinion went against the war efforts. It led to the pull-out of US troops. Both were ingenious cases of asymmetric warfare by hitting the enemy’s center of gravity.

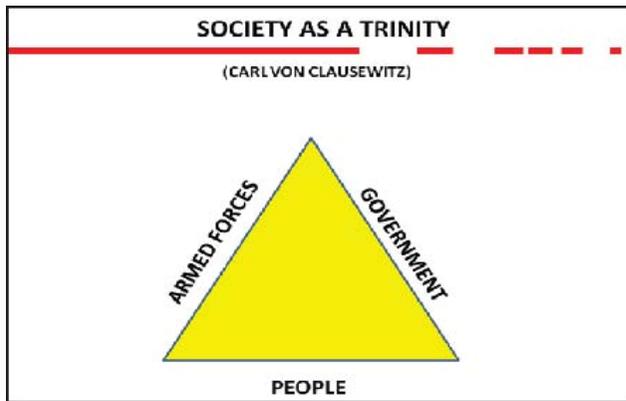
In our setting, what is the center of gravity of the insurgent, terrorist and criminal groups? At the operational level, these are the societal conditions that make them relevant, the “roots” of the proverbial problem tree. Eliminating the “roots” would make them irrelevant. What is the center of gravity at the tactical level? These are the elements that provide strength to the branches which enable them to support the weight of the leaves. They are the key leaders who provide the moral strength, ideological motivation and operational direction to the members. Deliberate focus to eliminate the key leaders, through tactical or legal means, will lead to the collapse of the



different threat groups. It must be noted that the cadre of leaders are bred in our best universities and madrasah schools.

SOCIETY AS A TRINITY

Clausewitz describes what he calls a “fascinating trinity”. He sees society as a trinity composed of the government, armed forces and the people. The people form the base of the trinity being the focal point in a democratic system. The government and armed forces exist to serve and protect the welfare and well-being of the people. Both in times of peace and

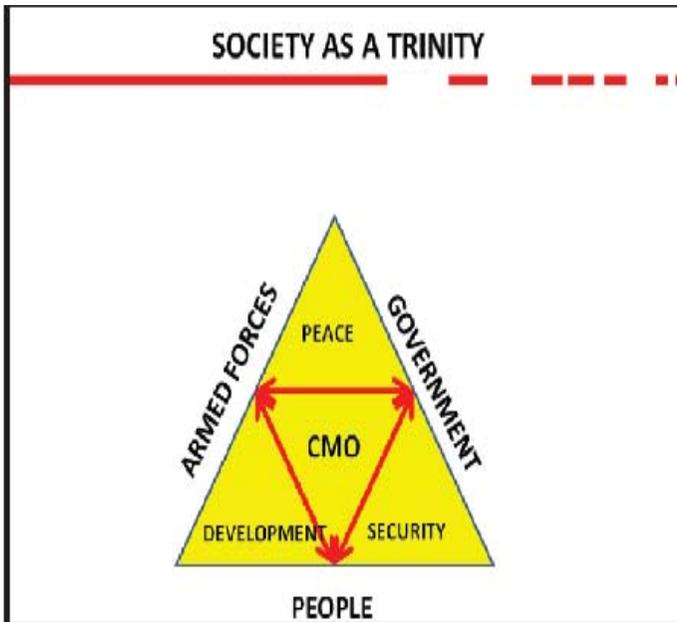


war, this trinity of stakeholders must interact and support each other. A strong foundation of this trinity is an indicator of a strong society, with peace and order reigning as long as these stakeholders mutually support each other.

Through this concept of a trinitarian society, interventions through sustained multi-stakeholders dialogue, partnership and collaboration can be undertaken to fill the gaps toward peace, development and security. It is along this line that

in addition to its primordial military task of fighting the enemies of the state, the armed forces must expand its role in Civil Military Operations (CMO) by taking the lead in building and transforming relationships with the local government units and the people to address the root causes of our internal security problems.

Through CMO, soldiers may serve as catalysts and bridges for multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders processes to resolve societal inequities and divides through sustained dialogue, partnership and collaboration. With this, social innovations and new arrangements that offer shared solutions to the divides help bring about a new, co-created social reality that



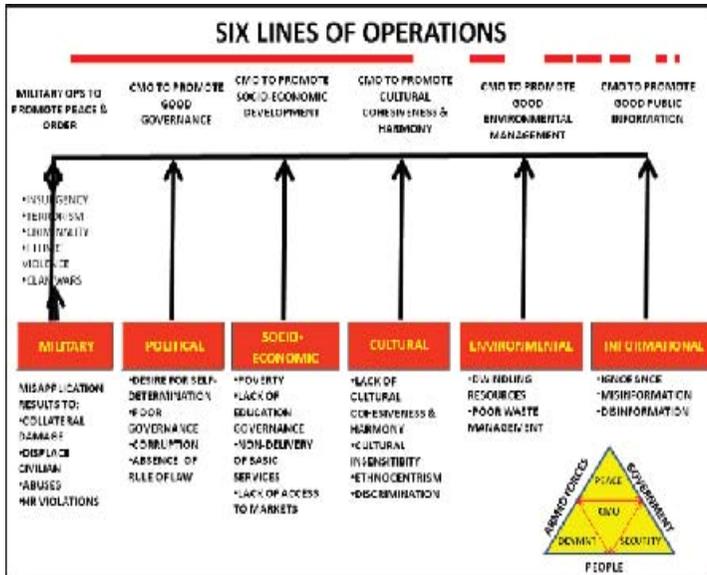
result to peace, development and security. This united front-building activity strengthens the trinity that in turn builds a stronger society and alienates the enemies of the state from the civil society.

WINNING BATTLES AND WINNING PEACE FOR OUR PEOPLE

Resolving a low-intensity conflict situation is not all about warfighting to win battles, but primarily winning peace for our people through non-military multi-stakeholders processes that address the root causes of the problems to make insurgency, terrorism and criminality irrelevant. It is where the important “gunless battles” for the hearts and minds of people are waged. The role of the armed forces requires the highest form of soldiery. It brings to mind the old adage of Sun Tzu that, “The acme of skill in warfare is subduing the enemy without fighting”. Rather than warfighting, soldiers shall be involved in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

In resolving our internal security problems, military force must be used with utmost circumspection. Soldiers must be discerning when to use and when not to use force. They should weigh all circumstances and look at possible consequences of their actions. We are faced with wayward countrymen who were forced by circumstances not of their making to embrace militant ideologies, radical beliefs and revolutionary aspirations that they see will offer them a better life. Peacemaking is characterized by intelligence-driven, surgical combat operations to achieve a physically and psychologically secure envi-

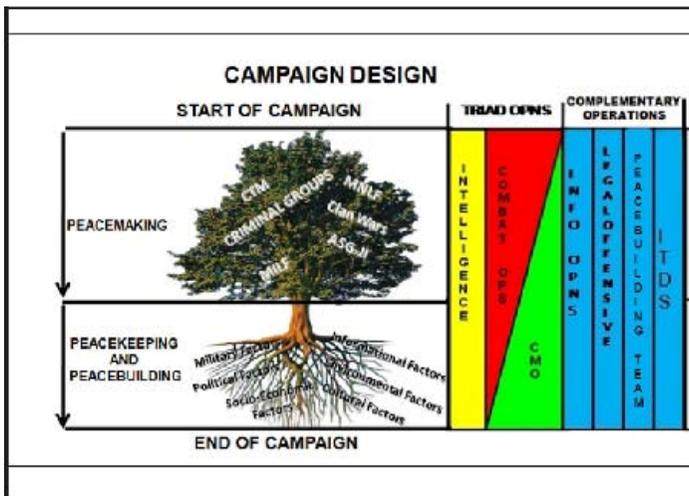
environment conducive to multi-stakeholders processes that address the root causes of the problems. It is a people-oriented approach rather than an enemy-oriented approach in the conduct of military operations. Care must always be considered to avoid harming innocent civilians. Human rights, International Humanitarian Law and rule of law must be respected at all times. Peacekeeping involves community-based security operations to maintain peace and stability in cleared areas utilizing territorial forces. Peacebuilding pertains to civil-military engagements with the LGUs, government agencies, non-gov-



ernment organizations, civil society organizations and the people to promote human security, good governance, socio-economic development, cultural cohesion, sustainable environment and good public information.

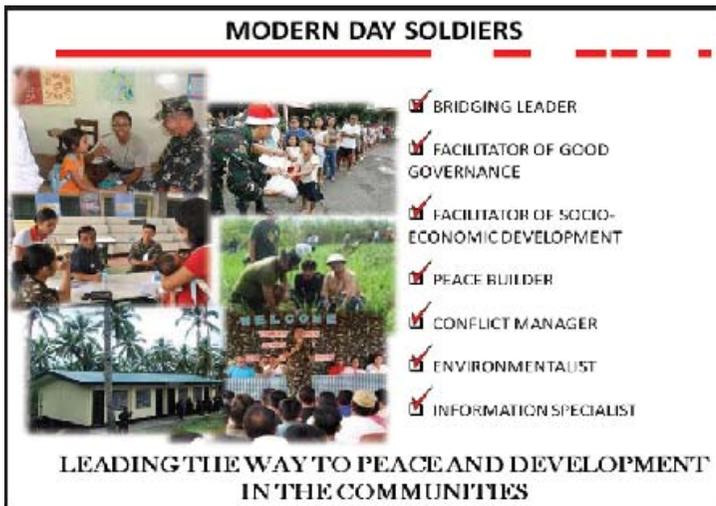
The only way to give a lasting resolution to our internal security problems is to co-create a new social reality that significantly improves the living conditions of our countrymen in all aspects of life. We must aim for a condition wherein the people and their institutions are free from violence; they are free to engage in productive enterprises; their human rights are respected at all times; and their welfare, well-being, way of life and environment are always protected and enhanced. This situation approximates national security as espoused by the National Defense College of the Philippines. This is our broad concept of security.

In line with this new concept of internal security operations, the armed forces must pursue six lines of operations that correspond to the six societal dimensions affecting the lives of our people, namely: 1) military operations to achieve peace



and order; 2) CMO to facilitate good governance; 3) CMO to promote socio-economic development; 4) CMO to promote cultural cohesion and harmony; 5) CMO to achieve good environmental management; and 6) CMO to promote prompt and truthful public information. It should be noted that out of these six lines of operation, only one line uses military force. If ever there is a need to use military force, it should be conducted with an intelligence-driven, surgical combat operation to avoid harm and collateral damages to civilians. Gone are the days of large and prolonged military operations that only do more harm to civilians than the enemies of the state.

The campaign design retains the triad of intelligence, combat operations and CMO. While intelligence operation is constant throughout the campaign, combat operations and CMO follow an inversely proportional role as the campaign



progresses. Combat operations tapers down while CMO widens toward the tail end of the campaign. The triad shall be complemented by aggressive information operation, legal operation, Peace Building Team (PBT) operations and integrated territorial defense system.

Under this concept, a soldier is not only a warrior, but also a bridging leader, facilitator of good governance, catalyst of socio-economic development, conflict manager, environmentalist and public information specialist. Rather than a villain, he is a savior in the hearts and minds of the people. In the eyes of Sun Tzu, he is the ultimate warrior.

UNITED FRONT FOR PEACE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY

Our internal security problems cannot be resolved by arms alone. Referring back to the analogy of the proverbial house, soldiers may eliminate the “pests” in the house, but not a lasting “house cleaning” job. It would take the residents of the house themselves to eliminate the societal conditions that breed the existence of “pests”. Fighting insurgents is largely different from fighting insurgency. It would take the partnership and collaboration of the stakeholders, a united front of the armed forces, LGUs and civil society to resolve the root causes of our internal security problems. This is the area where CMO should be deepened and widened. Deeper than the usual CMO, it would entail the establishment of sustained working relationships with the LGUs and civil society to co-create new and innovative arrangements that would significantly improve



the lives of the people and make insurgency, terrorism and criminality irrelevant. The scope is widened in the sense that soldiers will go beyond their military box to work with stakeholders in other dimensions. Areas that should be covered are public affairs, civil affairs, environmental management and public information.

This new concept of CMO is an exercise of bridging leadership. Simply, it is convening the stakeholders to co-create solution to tough and complex problems. Military officers and non-commissioned officers when trained in bridging leadership, communication skills and social marketing can become effective bridges and catalysts for multi-stakeholders processes. They possess inherent leadership capital that gives the credibility to convene and link stakeholders. Under the expanded CMO program, Peace-Building Teams (PBTs) shall be orga-

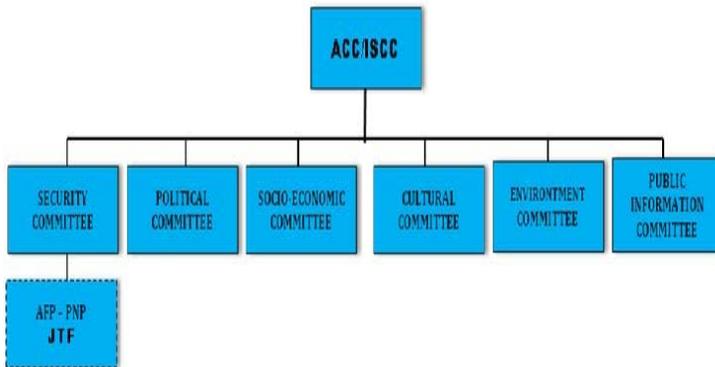
nized, trained and employed to engage the LGUs, civil society organizations and the communities. The PBT shall build from the roles previously played by the Special Operation Team (SOT) and SA-LAAM Team.

We have tough and complex internal security problems fueled by centuries old of strife over varied issues and concerns amongst our people. Status quo will not yield any solution. Only a co-created new social reality, concrete solutions that resolve the inequities and divides, can untangle our problems. In a democratic society, solutions can never be imposed. Only sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders processes that result to co-created solutions offer the best option. The efforts should be spearheaded and orchestrated by the LGUs.

How can we establish the united front? We are aware of the problems and we know what should be done. Through CMO, we can provide the bridge and be the catalysts for multistakeholder engagements with the LGUs and civil society. Training has to be conducted on bridging leadership, communication skills and social marketing. Eventually, the community of bridging leaders has to be enlarged to include other key leaders in the locality. The preparation phase ends with the organization of a convenor group and the establishment of mechanisms for sustained dialogue, partnership and collaboration.

The LGU must provide the lead role in the promotion of peace, development and security. There are existing local

bodies like the Peace and Order Council, Development Council, Disaster Coordinating Council and Crisis Management Committee maintained by the LGUs, however, there is no mechanism to facilitate coherence and convergence of efforts provided before by the defunct Area Coordinating Center (ACC) although some LGUs are still maintaining this mechanism. EO 739 and 773 have created a similar mechanism called the Internal Security Coordinating Center (ISCC), but only at the regional level. This mechanism has to be replicated at the provincial, city and municipal levels where it is most needed. Pending action on the matter, the LGUs need to



re-establish the ACC with six working committees, namely: security, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental and public information. The concerned civilian governments agencies/offices, armed forces and civil society must be represented in each committee to harness the desired dynamics and synergy of the trinity. The ACC/ISCC will serve as the operation center of all the peace and development interventions that will be implemented in the locality.

The Security Committee is composed of the armed forces and other government agencies involved in the promotion of peace and order and law enforcement. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with other entities that may help in its activities. It shall facilitate integration of efforts in the following functions: 1) conduct of counter-insurgency, anti-terrorism and anti-criminality campaigns; 2) protection of the people and their institutions; 3) promotion of peace and order; and 4) enforcement of government authority and rule of law.

The Political Committee is composed of representatives from all local government offices involved in governance and public administration. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with other entities that may help in enhancing local governance and public administration. It shall facilitate integration of efforts in the following functions: 1) enforcement of government authority; 2) delivery of government services; 3) promotion of rule of law and justice system; 4) promotion of respect for human rights and civil liberties; and 5) formulation and implementation of interaction and feedback mechanism with the people.

The Socio-Economic Committee is composed of representatives from all local government offices, agencies and organizations involved in socio-economic development. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with other entities that may help in the promotion of socio-economic development of the people. It shall facilitate integration of efforts in the following functions: 1) socio-economic empowerment of the people; 2) promotion of welfare and well-being of the people through the delivery of basic government services; 3) education

and literacy; and 4) calamity and disaster response preparedness and operations.

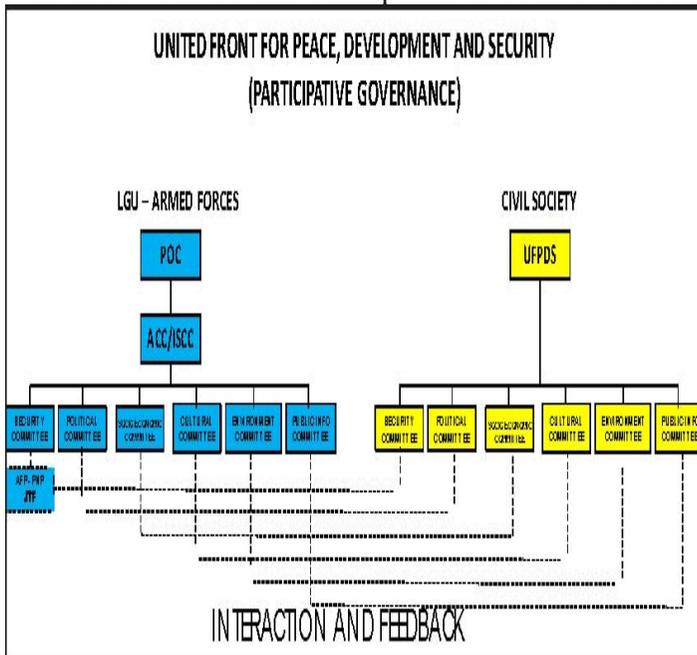
The Cultural Committee is composed of representatives from all local government offices, agencies and organizations involved in the promotion of cultural harmony, peace advocacy and conflict resolution. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with other entities that may help in its advocacies. The committee is involved in activities like inter-cultural activities, conflict mediation/reconciliation, peace advocacy and culture sensitivity. It shall facilitate integration of efforts in the following functions: 1) promotion of cultural cohesiveness and harmony; 2) conflict mediation and reconciliation; 3) promotion culture of peace; and 4) other cultural activities.

The Environmental Committee is composed of all local government offices, agencies and organizations involved in environmental preservation and waste management. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with other entities that may help in its advocacies. It shall facilitate integration of efforts in the following functions: 1) promotion of sustainable environment; 2) promotion of proper waste management; and 3) promotion of good hygiene and sanitation.

The Public Information Committee is composed of representatives of all local government offices, agencies and organizations involved in the dissemination of information to the public. It shall establish linkage and working relationship with the mass media and other entities that may help in public information. It shall facilitate the integration of efforts in the

following functions: 1) prompt and truthful delivery of public information; 2) dissemination of information about government programs, projects and activities; and 3) counteraction of disinformation and misinformation.

A very vital component of this united front building is the unification of civil society organizations in every locality under one umbrella organization called the United Front for Peace, Development and Security (UFPDS) which shall be accredited by the LGU in accordance with the Local Government Code of the Philippines. The accreditation facilitates the membership of key leaders of the unified civil society organizations to the ACC or ISCC and other pertinent bodies created by



the LGU. The interactive and feedback relationship pursues the vision of President Benigno Simeon C Aquino III of a participative kind of governance. The President professed in his inaugural speech that, “*Kayo ang boss ko, kaya’t hindi maaaring hindi ako makinig sa mga utos ninyo. We will design and implement an interaction and feedback mechanism that can effectively respond to the people’s needs and aspirations*”.

Organizing a united front of civil society organizations is a big challenge to the bridging leadership, social marketing and organizational skills of the PBTs. Key to success in this effort is the training and organization of a Convenor Group of civilian stakeholders which will provide the collective leadership and motivation to sustain the advocacy of multi-stakeholders dialogue, partnership and collaboration. They shall be trained on Bridging Leadership and Social Marketing.

The civil society’s UFPDS shall be led and administered by a Council of Civil Society Leaders who represents the six pillars of peacebuilding, namely: security, good governance, socio-economic development, cultural cohesion, sustainable environment and good public information. It is composed of civil society organizations in the locality. It shall be organized with the same structure (six committees), functions and advocacies of the ACC or ISCC. To achieve convergence of efforts, civil society organizations with the same advocacies will be joined together under the corresponding Committee and its leader sits as a member of that committee. The ACC/

ISCC and UFPDS shall promote an interactive and complementary working relationship. Unhindered by the bureaucracy, the UFPDS has tremendous potentials in providing direct services and assistance to the people. Civil society organizations have extensive network of local and international government agencies, non-government organizations and foundations that are willing to help our people. The synergy of all these multi-stakeholders interventions is expected to do wonders in terms of alleviating the lives of our people and in making insurgency, terrorism and criminality irrelevant.

The united front of the LGU, armed forces and civil society will co-create focused and comprehensive peacebuilding packages. Selected insurgents/terrorists-influenced barangays shall be transformed into model communities along the six pillars of peacebuilding. These model communities shall be declared as Zones of Peace and Development (ZPD). Parameters of success will be the existence of a community-based security and law enforcement system, participative barangay governance, shelter and infrastructure adequacy, robust livelihood programs, food sufficiency, quality education, effective adult literacy program, social cohesion, good hygiene and sanitation, sustainable environment and effective public information. Through sustained multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholders efforts, peace and development will radiate from the ZPD and eventually overlap with other ZPDs. The collaborative efforts will lead to an irreversible condition of human security such that insurgency, terrorism and criminality become irrelevant.

The dream will not be realized overnight. It would take unwavering will, perseverance and dedication to put our aspirations into reality. We will be faced with many challenges along the way, but with “*bayanihan*” or collaborative spirit and unity of purpose, we will be successful.

WISH LIST OF REFORMS

The dream of peace, development and security in our country will not be realized unless “top to bottom” reforms are institutionalized. As desired, the government, armed forces and civil society need to march in step in pursuit of this dream. The advocacy is national in scope.

First and foremost, there must be a clear-cut national direction that should be embraced and pursued by all citizens



and institutions. Former President Ferdinand Marcos thought that we must be guided by a Filipino Ideology, but I think it should be a National Security Strategy (NSS). We must be guided by a NSS, which should be made a public document. The NSS pursues our vital national security interests encompassing all important aspects of the people's life like security, political, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, informational, techno-scientific and foreign affairs. It must be noted that six of these dimensions are covered at the local level by the UFPDS. Strategy is composed of three indispensable components, ends, ways and means. The vital national security interests are national objectives (ENDS) that must be pursued by every concerned sector. Our vital national security interests may include peace and order; political stability; good governance and public administration; infrastructure adequacy; robust economy; socio-economic equity; food sufficiency; quality education and adult literacy program; cultural cohesiveness and harmony; sustainable environment; disaster and calamity response preparedness; public informational awareness; techno-scientific prominence; and international amity. Strategic concepts, principles and policies (WAYS) must be formulated to clearly lay the paths to be followed in pursuit of the national security interests. Institutions, capabilities and resources (MEANS) necessary to pursue the national security interests must be identified and pooled together.

The NSS serves as the beacon for all citizens and institutions in pursuit of national aspirations. It gives coherence and convergence to the programs, projects and activities of the different agencies and instrumentalities of the government.

It provides clear guideposts for non-government and civil society organizations which government institutions are they going to work with and align respective advocacies and resources for the common good of all Filipinos. It identifies values, knowledge and skills that educational institutions should promote and nurture. At the individual level, it awakens responsible citizenship and civic-mindedness. It provides a sense of purpose and direction in contributing their share for the common good.

Clearly guided by this grand strategic direction, the Armed Forces of the Philippines prepares the National Military Strategy (NMS) in the same manner that other national government agencies and instrumentalities are guided in preparing their respective national strategy. The NMS, a public document, must be shared with counterpart government institutions to facilitate coherent and convergent programs, projects and activities down to field units and offices. The Military Area Commands prepare their respective Campaign Plan based on the strategic guidance provided by the NMS. Down the line, military units prepare their Operation Plans and Orders in the same manner that counterpart field government units and offices are guided by strategic concepts and operational policies provided by their respective Departments.

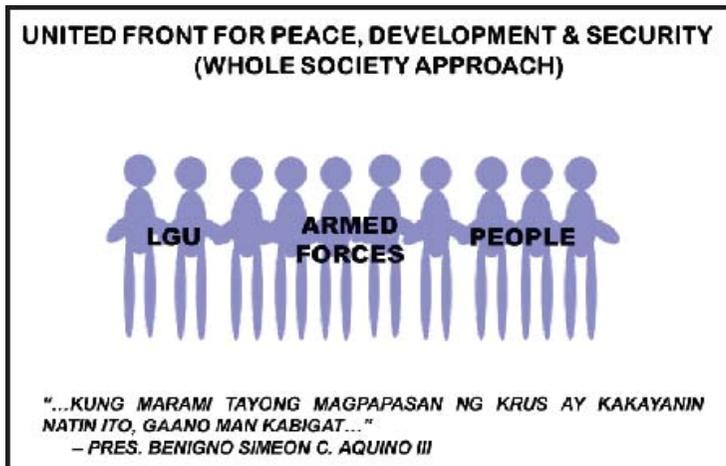
The “whole society” concept will be facilitated if a sequel is provided to Executive Order No. 773 (Enhancing the POC). It created the Regional Internal Security Coordinating Center (RISCC). The mechanism needs to be replicated down to the provincial, city and municipal levels, and the scope should be expanded to encompass six dimensions (security, political,

socio-economic, cultural, environmental and informational). Subsequently, the Joint Implementing Rules and Regulations (JIRR) must be formulated to give official guidance to the Local Chief Executives and all concerned local government units and offices.

There is nothing new in the conceptualization of the “whole society” approach. All the ideas, concepts and principles used were learned from schools and field experiences commonly shared by members of the armed forces. While many reforms are needed in the armed forces, it is knowledge that will catalyze the reforms. Therefore, reforms will emanate from education and training to refocus and emphasize certain basic knowledge, important military aspects, best practices and lessons learned. Starting with the basic career courses, military personnel must be deeply indoctrinated on responsible citizenship, human rights, international humanitarian law, historical background of internal security problems, culture sensitivity, conflict resolution, multi-dimensional concept of national security, art of war, levels of command, spectrum of conflict and utility of force. Advance career courses should give emphasis on tactical art throughout the course. Likewise, the Command and Staff Course should give focus on operational art or the art of campaigning. Master in National Security Administration must be made a mandatory career course to broaden the horizon of senior military leaders on the multi-dimensional nature of national security. Short civilian courses on bridging leadership, effective communication, social marketing and public information will help tremendously in the advocacy of united front building for peace, development and security.

At the individual level regardless of our position in life, we must practice good and responsible citizenship. This is the most important value that should be deeply ingrained at home, in school and in every institution. Beyond ourselves and our family, we have civic duties and responsibilities for the common good. We must link hands with the rest in the society in pursuit of peace, development and security in our country. With fortitude and perseverance on our part, the bad elements of the society will be lost eventually in the sea of good and responsible citizens.

All told, this is not the fight of your soldiers alone, but all of us Filipinos. We are all stakeholders of peace, development and security, hence, each and every one of us must be a part of the solution.



**INSIGHTS FROM THE PEACE-BUILDING
AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TRAINING
OF THE PHILIPPINE MARINE CORPS**

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**Not Hawks, Not Doves: The Modern Philippine
Conflict Managers Military as Conflict Managers**

**Reflections on new initiatives to embed peace-
building and conflict management in the Armed
forces of the Philippines**

Jose Jowel Canuday

Not Hawks, Not Doves: The Modern Philippine Military as Conflict Manager

Reflections on initiatives to embed peace-building and conflict management in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Introduction

On May 30, 2008, Major General Benjamin Dolorfino, commandant of the Philippine Marines, and his party boarded two Huey helicopters at the Edwin Andrews Airbase in Zamboanga City to a conference with field commanders and other officers in Basilan province.

Barely a week earlier, armed men had harassed a Marines detachment in the remote Basilan town of Unkaya Pukan, wounding fourteen men, reminiscent of an assault a year ago that killed 23 troopers. One day before Dolorfino's visit to Basilan, an explosion rocked the street fronting the main gates of the airbase there, killing two persons. The general did not call for an all-out counter offensive. In fact, he was on his way to Basilan for a Peace-Building and Conflict Management Seminar Workshop and Command Conference.

As main speaker, he made clear that he was out to teach and rally his commanders towards winning the war by tempering military action with greater and deeper understanding of the nature of Mindanao and its armed conflicts. Dolorfino also emphasized the importance of respect for human rights, sensitivity to local cultures, the learning of Islam, patience, and the necessity of brokering peace among feuding communities

where the field commanders were deployed.

Joining Dolorfino on board the dark green Hueys were academics, development workers, a Minister Counsellor of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Australian Defense Attache to the Philippines, an army general, and other ranking military officials who were speaking, observing and training junior officers in the three-day seminar. Dolorfino and the other speakers repeatedly stressed that the seminar was not meant to dissuade the military from fighting. Their message was to make the soldiers well-rounded warriors, capable not only in combat operations but also knowledgeable in tackling the complex social, political, economic, and cultural conditions that created and sustained close to 40 years of armed conflicts in Mindanao.

“The purpose of this training is to make a better warrior out of you,” read a slide in the PowerPoint presentation that Dolorfino gave during a panel discussion in the conference.

Transforming the Military: The Goals of Peace-Building

This paper documents recent peace-building initiatives within the Philippine military, with focus on the discussions and insights from the conflict management seminar and commanders’ conference in Isabela City, Basilan. The activities offer a glimpse of what appears to be an opening for broader societal participation in the transformation of the military mindset, and possibly the crafting of a new strategy in dealing with the protracted fighting in Mindanao. More importantly, these ini-

tiatives seem to create the conditions from within the AFP for deeper rethinking of the significance, success, and failure of its long experience in fighting multiple insurgencies in the country. This process of rethinking does not only consider the military standpoint, but also takes into account the multi-cultural and multi-dimensional character of Philippine society in which the armed conflicts are set.

The Basilan seminar and command conference, which had about 40 junior officers as participants, is part of a series of peace-building initiatives initiated by the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG), the Balay Mindanaw Foundation, Inc. in coordination with the Philippine Marine Corps. AusAID funded the series of trainings. About 90 Marine officers attended a similar activity in Sulu in mid-May this year.

Titon Mitra, Minister Counsellor of AusAID, said that the agency was drawn to support peace-building efforts within the Philippine military after realizing that it is one institution that can critically make or break the peace efforts and therefore determine the fate of development work in Mindanao.

For decades, AusAID has been working with the Philippine Government and various groups towards the goal of easing poverty and improving children's education, including the areas affected by armed conflicts. The Australian Government believes that the lasting solution to poverty and poor education is development and investment in Mindanao and other parts of the country, said Mitra. But this is predi-

cated on an end to the armed conflicts, and ending the conflicts depends in turn, on the way the military fights the war and makes peace.

“You may ask why an aid donor is working with the military,” Mitra told the participants. “The reason clearly boils down to one simple fact - how you as officers conduct yourselves has a huge bearing on the prospect for peace.

The Military and Conflict Transformation

For all the recent initiatives, it is clear that peace building efforts have not yet taken deep root across the military structure, gauging from the intensity of the military response to the June 8 kidnapping of television reporter Ces Drilon, her two camera crew, and peace advocate Professor Octavio Dinampo in Sulu.

Soldiers fired artillery toward the hinterland areas where the kidnap victims were thought to be held by members of the bandit group, Abu Sayyaf. Criticism from civil society and human rights groups was swift as the bombardment triggered civilian evacuations and wounded an aged woman. On June 25, soldiers and MILF guerrillas reportedly clashed in Maitum, Sarangani province, leaving eleven persons dead and thousands of civilians displaced.

All is not lost in the historic efforts of peace-building in the military, however. A closer examination of the views offered by ranking and field-based military commanders who

attended the seminars reveals that the policy of using full military force in dealing with just any armed groups is an idea that is seriously being rethought and even questioned. The peace-building initiatives appear to be opening an avenue that allows military officers with new ideas to articulate their views. Given time, the process has the potential of ushering significant shifts in the military's conduct of the war.

Dolorfino and other generals supportive of peace-building have been pursuing the idea of transforming the long-held view of "military" or "whole of government" solution to a more holistic "whole society" approach in dealing with the insurgency. Under the whole society approach, the generals recognize the need to emphasize the value of strict observance of human rights, cultural sensitivity and religious tolerance in military work.

An integral component of such an approach is for the military to closely work with the broadest sector of society, in particular with civil society groups, rights advocates, academics, church, and traditional leaders. The peace-building seminars and conflict management conferences may well reflect the idea of broad sectoral participation in tackling the insurgency. In Basilan, an array of resource persons, including aid and development workers, a historian, a theosophist, a Muslim university professor, and members of civil society groups took the lecterns and discussed various issues with the Marines.

Professor Rudy Rodil, a member of the government peace panel and author of books detailing the history of the minoritization of Muslims and indigenous peoples, presented

maps and arguments supporting and contesting the territorial claims of both Moro and Lumads (indigenous peoples) in Mindanao.

Jose Penaranda, a theosophist, offered a view of an ancient and spiritualist Indian military philosophy embodied in the book of Bathava Gita. Taking off from the conversation of Indian warriors in the Bathava Gita, he emphasized that the code of a warrior is to help the “helpless and valiantly defend those who are unjustly attacked.”

Other speakers explored readings, analysis, and other bodies of knowledge on wars from classical accounts of those fought by Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Sun Tzu, Genghis Khan, the Shaolin, and the Samurai. Discussions also include ideas from the writings of Karl von Clausewitz and more recent war analysts like Mary Ann Kaldor.

No less than Mindanao State University (MSU) Prof. Dinampo, before his kidnapping, also served as a resource speaker on the “Dynamics of Rido,” a term for violent feuds among kindred that has complicated the military’s counter-insurgency efforts and caused the unnecessary deaths of probably thousands of soldiers.

The Ways of the Warrior: Transforming the Mindset

Major-General Raymundo Ferrer, commanding officer of the Army’s 6th Infantry Division, who teamed up with Dolorfino in addressing the Marines in Basilan, highlighted the

need for a re-orientation of the military mind from “plain” fighting soldiers to “conflict managers.” Ferrer said the idea of the military as conflict managers, rather than merely engaging in combat in “internal conflicts,” should be made an integral part of the modernization program of the AFP.

For Ferrer, modernization does not only mean updating military hardware and equipment, but more importantly, the mindset, values, attitudes as well as the conduct of officers and their troops.

Dolorfino and Ferrer came across as both inspiring speakers and powerful commanding officers with deep, wide ranging, and clear knowledge and experience in the appropriate methods of confronting the complicated forty-year old war. The messages and the policy that both generals enunciated markedly departed from the traditional military approach of clearing, holding and containing the problems of rebellions and other types of armed conflicts in Mindanao.

Ferrer and Dolorfino called for a departure from a doctrine that emphasizes the application of overwhelming force in containing and clearing the rebellion with firm and high-handed military resolve and resources.

Both officers emphasized the primacy of civilian and military relations, in contrast with past and existing policies of relying almost solely on combat operations.

For Dolorfino and Ferrer, the era of massive combat

operations has already passed and its objectives accomplished in the wars of the 1970s. The condition on the ground has changed, shifting towards a post-conflict environment as evidenced by the signing of the peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and on-going peace processes with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The agreements and the peace process may still have gaps in implementation, but the era of post-conflict is definitely here. Dolorfino thinks that in a post-conflict situation, the use of combat should be very sparing. The military's role should be to help communities and the government manage residual conflicts left by the wars of the 1970s, protect the gains of the peace process, and promote social and economic development.

Dolorfino's envisioned post-conflict approach to insurgency has not been translated into a permanent policy within the AFP. However, he has managed to integrate it into the Marine commandant's vision of a corps that is "people-oriented," "institutionally strong" and "operationally effective."

Dolorfino believes that in realizing his vision, the Marines will have to be conscious of the expanse of their constitutionally mandated responsibility to the state and the people. In performing that responsibility, Dolorfino believes that the Marines should make themselves part of the solution to decades of conflicts by actively and consciously working for the promotion of political stability, socio-economic development and cultural cohesiveness.

Dolorfino argues that the promotion of political stability would be achieved if the Marines and other units of the military

take an active role in ensuring the integrity of elections, for instance. He said a step towards this direction is for military officers to reject efforts of politicians in using them and their camps in the alteration of the content of the ballots.

In socio-economic development, Dolorfino believes that the military should now be thinking and working towards achieving a post-conflict environment, rather than limiting their work and mindset to combat and assault operations. In line with the peace process, the military can take active roles in the rehabilitation of war-ravaged communities. He thinks that the military may yet contribute to cultural harmony if they themselves become part of conflict resolution processes as well as the inter-faith dialogues in communities where they are deployed.

Dolorfino did not arrive at these views easily. A veteran of the wars in the 1970s, he worked out his vision using hard-earned lessons in fighting an insurgency that does not seem to end.

Winning the Battles But Losing the People

For General Ferrer, who fought in Sulu, Basilan and Central Mindanao immediately after graduating from the Philippine Military Academy in the 1970s, the bitter lesson of the war is that the armed forces were not able to successfully quell the insurgency through the use of brute force. Instead, the more they fought using full military means, the more they were alienated from the people. Being alienated from a people whom they sought to protect is the more serious problem in counter-insurgency than fighting the rebels themselves, Ferrer said.

He noted that the military is in a position to win battles because it possesses the advantage of resources, equipment, and personnel compared to the insurgents. With such an advantage, the reality that the military has antagonized communities is the greater threat to national security.

“Civilians think that we disturb their lives and that we are the villains in this war. They think that we are prolonging the conflict so we can justify our budget and the promotion of our commanding officers. We angered the people,” Ferrer said.

Ferrer said that the people’s anger is manifested as they labeled the military “invading aliens.” This kind of thinking rather than the harm inflicted by the rebels are the ones that undermined military prestige and role as protectors of the people. “In Sulu, they call us the Christian Army, or Bisaya soldiers, or the National Army. In Luzon, we were called Hapon (as an allusion to the Japanese Imperial Army)... Clearly we are viewed as the occupying force,” Ferrer said.

The ideas presented by Dolorfino and Ferrer cast light on the long obscured military ideals of serving and protecting the people. These ideals are eroded amidst recurrent reports of abuses, and the military’s use of an inappropriate level of force in handling the protracted insurgency.

Dolorfino and Ferrer brought into their lectures about four decades of experience, frustrations, and insights in fighting armed conflicts in Mindanao. Ferrer reflected that while the

Philippine military could be proud of its wealth of experience in fighting a long-standing insurgency war, it also has to think about why it failed to end it. “General Dolorfino and I are about to retire. This problem should have been solved if indeed we had the right approach,” he said.

Ferrer said that part of the reason for the failure to end the protracted violence is the soldiers’ attitude of taking the problem “all by ourselves.”

With that mindset, their prescribed solutions were always “military.” But as the battles unfolded, the military solution itself created new sets of problems that complicated and contributed to the extension of the life of the insurgency.

Human Rights Violations: A Threat to Military Integrity

One problem created by an overwhelmingly military solution to the insurgency is the issue of rights abuses. A number of the reported abuses do not pertain to bodily harm of individual civilians, but relates to the conduct of soldiers in the field, according to Ferrer.

In the course of the military operations, there have been occasions of soldiers deliberately hitting durian trees with tanks to take its fruits, or carting off farm animals owned by civilians. Soldiers also shot down working animals like cows and carabaos to cook and eat them, in several instances. Worse, the military has systematically enforced a policy of “last man burn the house,” wherein soldiers never leave a village they overrun

without razing them. Amidst the pattern of abuses, civilians began thinking that the operations were timed during harvest seasons so that soldiers would be able to steal the fruits of the people's labor.

As the list of abuses piled up and the insurgents grew resilient, several communities came to believe that military was the problem, Ferrer said. This problematic conduct of some soldiers became imprinted in the memory of civilians, making a mockery of the goals of the Armed Forces to become the trusted protector of the people. "These (abuses) are the things that they (civilians) cannot forget about the things in the conflict. Perception has become our enemies and that is the worse thing in fighting a war," Ferrer said.

Ferrer observed that communities may temporarily cooperate with the military out of fear or as a tactic for bidding time so local armed groups can regroup and strengthen with new recruits from the village. "This was supposedly the war for the hearts and minds of the people. But often what we do is grab the balls so the heart will follow," Ferrer noted. "At the same time we are fighting, we are recruiting more enemies. This is a never ending war."

Respect for human rights is even more crucial in the Philippines, given the reality that communities are organized largely along kindred ties. In Moro areas, familial links are elaborate and kinship groups are very protective of their members. Ferrer noted that the killing of one member of a Moro family means multiplying the number of enemies five times

over.

“A Filipino enemy is always big, that is why this is always a war of hearts and mind. The battle fields are the hearts and minds of the people,” said Ferrer.

Internal War: The Problem of Doctrines

The problem is compounded by the doctrines pervading military strategy in counter insurgency. Ferrer reviewed the standard classification of conflicts from high intensity, middle intensity and low intensity. He painstakingly explained that the nature of high intensity conflicts is basically those of armed confrontations involving several nations, as was the case the first and second world wars. Conventional weapons, large-scale deployment of troops and high technology-driven weapons are required to win a high intensity war.

Middle intensity conflicts are geographically regional in nature, like that of the 1991 Gulf War. While a middle intensity warfare requires large troops and major weapons deployment, it is not fought using purely military means. Governments, Ferrer noted, also employ diplomacy, economic sanctions, and rallying multi-national support in fighting a middle intensity war.

The last type of war, the low intensity conflict, pertains to fighting that is internal to a nation-state. This is the type of war that is raging in Mindanao and other parts of the country, Ferrer explained. A low intensity conflict need not always require large-scale and heavy weapons deployment, because

these could complicate and even strengthen insurgencies, which is what happened in Vietnam and some Latin American countries.

The Philippine military has a strategy that is more fitted to high and middle intensity warfare, Ferrer said. The doctrine of using brute force in counter-insurgency is a classic American military strategy in the early years of the US colonial campaign of quelling Philippine revolutionary forces as well as the resisting communities in Moro and Visayas areas. The strategy was pursued again in Vietnam, ending in a strategic political defeat for the United States government after it faced mounting protests from within its own society. The US is continuing this policy of using force and massive deployment troops in dealing with the insurgency in Iraq.

Ferrer believes that the Philippine military cannot continue adopting the old US doctrine of counter insurgency, which he thinks is largely shaped by a dictum that anyone who is “not with us is against us.” He pointed that the Philippine military is not an alien force but is fighting its “own people.” The soldiers within its ranks may have relatives, a bosom buddy, a classmate, or a neighbor on the rebel side.

Conflict Management: A Strategy in Fighting an Internal War

To effectively fight the insurgency, Dolorfino said that the military has to recognize that the nature of the war is mainly internal. Internal wars have to be fought by carefully examining

and addressing the socio-cultural, political and economic reality that bred it, according to Dolorfino. In the lecture, Dolorfino used the metaphor of a sturdy tree to illustrate the character of an internal war. Poverty, ignorance, injustice, and diseases are the roots of the conflict. With these roots firmly on the ground, the tree bears lush leaves - to explain in a metaphoric way the multiplication of rebel groups like the MILF and the NPA, and bandits like the Abu Sayyaf.

“Shooting down two or three of the rebels is like plucking a mere two or three leaves from this sturdy tree. The problem cannot be solved by military means alone,” Dolorfino said.

The overwhelming focus on military tactics has also been costly and bloody for the military, according to Major General Ferrer. As the military establishment put aside efforts to understand the cultural, political and economic dimensions of the armed conflict, it produced officers and soldiers who were far less knowledgeable about the complex socio-cultural and political terrain of Mindanao. With this lack of knowledge, some military units drew the ire of communities for violating local sensibilities, while other units were unwittingly drawn into local feuds. Ferrer noted that several of the major debacles suffered by the military in the past 40 years stemmed from their ignorance of the cultural and local power dynamics of the area where they were deployed.

Ferrer said if the causes of the battles fought by the military were to be examined, several of these could have been won through effective conflict management. Under this

approach, the officers would have carefully analyzed the nature of the conflict, the background of their enemies, and the kinship and other cultural ties that could help defuse tensions, instead of reactively launching all-out offensives. All this knowledge would have aided the officers in plotting the right means of handling a conflict in an area.

To be effective conflict managers, both Generals Dolorfino and Ferrer believe that the officers and soldiers should be equipped not only with good military hardware but with a wide array of knowledge on the history of the conflict; the value of cultural sensitivity; and the essence of Islam and the necessity of religious tolerance.

Understanding History for Better Conflict Management

In the Basilan seminar, the Marines sat down with Prof. Rodil, who discussed the rise of the state-level principalities of Maguindanao and Sulu Sultanates, amid the onslaught of the European colonial campaign in Southeast Asia in the 16th to the 19th centuries. Rodil said that the influence of the Sultanates extended to a wide area of Mindanao. They established diplomatic ties with other principalities in Southeast Asia. Periodic assaults by Spanish and American colonialists may have eventually emasculated the political power of the Sultanates in late 19th century, but the principalities remained un-integrated with the newly ascending Filipino identity and political power in Manila.

It was only during US colonial rule that the Bangsamoro,

comprising the descendants of the people of the great Sultanates, were gradually integrated with the Filipinos, following the birth in 1945 of the Philippine Republic as a nation state covering the islands of Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, Palawan and the Sulu archipelago. The relationship of the Bangsamoro and Filipino peoples, however, has been complicated by the series of migration and land policies under the American and Filipino rules. These land policies were largely favorable to Filipino settlers, precipitating the marginalization of Moro communities and those of indigenous peoples.

After an afternoon lesson on history, several Marine officers wrote in their reflection that the inputs shared by Rodil were their first exposure to historical narrative that traced the grandeur of the Sultanates and the state structures they established in Mindanao. The dislocation of Moro and indigenous peoples, for some of the Marines, were also striking in that it provided them with a fresh view and understanding of what the rebels are fighting for, and how they as soldiers should conduct themselves in view of the historic mission of their enemies.

As history inspired the Marines to be conscious of the historical dimensions of the armed conflicts, it also made them realize that these could not be solved militarily, but through a long and arduous political process.

Marine First Lt. Noel Gallaza said he now understands that the political process of solving the conflicts is not easy, because any solution will likely be contested by the present

occupants of areas covered by the by-gone Sultanates. Gallaza thinks that since there have been changes in land ownership and distribution after the era of the Sultanates, the problem could not be settled by simply redrawing the map of Mindanao in consonance with the political authority of the sultanates. He thought these are matters that require careful thinking and negotiations by both the leaders of the government and Moro rebel groups.

Gallaza, however, said that with his newfound knowledge of the complexity of the Mindanao problem, he is more conscious that field commanders like him should strive to be very good at managing armed conflicts. “In our own way, using our own resources, we can do something—that is, to manage the conflict very well so we could have peace,” he said.

Lt. Col. Vic Pimentel, a Marine officer who supervised the conduct of the seminar, said that while knowing history is important, he is also critical of the idea of returning to old political and social arrangement as a solution to the conflict. Pimentel argued that invoking history will set forth a neverending argument on which time to reckon the period of settlement of Mindanao. If history is made a basis in solving the problem, other groups could legitimately argue that the reckoning should start before the Arabs spread Islam and the Europeans preached Christianity to the people of Mindanao.

“What I wish to say is that we do not have any control of history. When we were born, history was done,” Pimentel said, as he called on peace negotiators to balance the facts of

history and current realities in the making of a peace deal.

First Lt. Aladdin Caluza of the First Marine Battalion Landing Team said that knowledge of history would guide and remind soldiers that they also have a historic mission: not to add to the wrongs of the past. Caluza said that while “what is done is done” in history, he thinks that the Marines would have to be conscious in managing the current situation in a way that would prevent the escalation of the conflicts.

Rodil explained that the beauty of the negotiation process is that all sides have chosen not to emphasize the facts of the pre-colonial and the colonial past as means of solving the current conflict. He noted that while peace negotiators from the MILF had claimed their ancestors hold sway in several parts of Mindanao in pre-colonial and colonial periods, they also recognize that the recent history of migration has changed the demographic realities of Mindanao. The MILF, according to Rodil, no longer insist in claiming all areas their ancestors once ruled, but see greater importance in resolving the question of their status as a people in the Philippines and their right to self-determination.

Cultural Sensitivity: A Code for Modern Soldiers

Ferrer said that knowledge of history should be cultivated along with cultural sensitivity. The social and cultural environment of the Philippines is broadly diverse and therefore should be understood well by the soldiers. The beliefs, traditions, way of life, social and kinship relations among ethno-linguistic groups

in Luzon are vastly different from those of the Moro and indigenous peoples in Mindanao. The lack of training on cultural sensitivity often leads to ethnocentric views by soldiers on the cultural practices of communities where they are assigned. These attitudes often become source of tensions between communities and soldiers.

Ferrer, in his lecture, said that the lack of cultural sensitivity meant lives lost for the military. Among the most memorable was the February killing of 119 soldiers, including their commanding officers in Pata Island in Sulu, reportedly by local folks who were enraged over an alleged desecration of a mosque in the area. Dolorfino said subsequent military investigation noted that the sensibilities of local folk have been violated after a group of soldiers slaughtered a dog in a local mosque.

About a decade ago, another Army unit in Central Mindanao never experienced a day when it was not ambushed. Wherever members of the unit went, sniper attacks would follow them. The military leadership in the region was puzzled why that particular army unit was targeted. Subsequent investigation discovered that the soldiers were actually attacked not only by rebels but by armed members of a large Maguindanao family, who were retaliating against the unit for siding with another family with whom they had a longstanding feud.

Military clashes with an alliance of armed kindred were also behind the escalation of the February 2005 hostilities in Sulu, according to Ferrer. This time, what triggered the soldiers'

war with kindred groups was the failure of the soldiers to properly observe the rules of engagement. Soldiers were supposed to serve an arrest warrant on a man wanted for crimes in Indanan town in Sulu. The suspected criminal resisted arrest and shot it out with the soldiers. The soldiers retaliated with brutal force, causing the death not only of the suspected criminal, but also of his wife and child. The incident enraged the victims' relatives, who asked their kin, some of whom were members of the MNLF and other armed groups in the area, to fight the soldiers.

“In some cases, armed men were not actually fighting the government or the military as an organization, but a particular unit whom they think had done them wrong,” Ferrer said.

Complementing cultural sensitivity is the need for soldiers to understand the dynamics of local conflicts like rido, a problem discussed by Prof. Dinampo. In his lecture, he explained that rido could not be viewed and handled outside of the general malaise affecting conflict-prone areas, which is caused by economic hardship, lack of courts and appropriate justice mechanisms, and absence of effective local government administration. Dinampo heads the Sulu-based non-government organization Tulung Lupah Sug, which successfully facilitated the settlement of 15 rido cases in the area in 2007.

Dinampo explained that most of the violent rido incidents in Sulu stemmed from conflicts over the ownership and management of local resources. The soldiers' lack of knowledge

of its dynamics complicates the security situation in the area. He noted that some of the feuding families in Maimbo and Ipil in Sulu were able to use the military as part of their “assets.”

In these cases, the soldiers were effectively dragged into the feud by one of the conflicting parties, which thought that the move would place them in a more advantageous position. Soldiers who fall into such manipulation are then viewed as enemies and considered fair game by the opposing families. In the process the soldiers gain more enemy and attract more attacks. As soldiers are attacked, more soldiers are deployed, exposing the communities to greater security risks. The incidents led to massive dislocation and seriously tarnished the image of soldiers in the communities.

The intensity of the rido in some Muslim-dominated areas led some soldiers to link it to Islam, a notion rejected by Dinampo and other scholars. Dinampo explained that while rido may have stemmed from a literal interpretation of the Quoranic verse of “an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” as means of attaining justice, its causes and conduct are not in consonance with the Islamic teachings of struggling to live the way of the Prophet. Living a prophetic life is to work for harmony and peace in human relations, Dinampo noted.

Studying Islam and Religious Tolerance

Ferrer thinks that to become effective conflict managers, soldier deployed in Moro areas must study Islam as a way of respecting the religion of the community. This will also help

soldiers cultivate the values of tolerance and sensitivity to religions that is not their own.

No less than the US military has recognized the importance of understanding Islam following an incident where American soldiers were attacked by their own allies within the Iraqi police. They learned later that the Iraqi police and other armed groups were deeply offended after a US soldier used a Quoran for practice shooting. US investigators learned the soldier thought the book was merely a collection of Arabic writings with no sacred values. The attacks on that particular unit of the US military in Iraq stopped only after its commander apologized to the members of the community where they were deployed.

Military exposure to comparative religion is all the more significant given the religious and spiritual diversity of the peoples and cultures in the Philippines. While Christianity and Islam are major religions in the country, indigenous peoples, too, have an array of spiritual beliefs. Areas claimed as ancestral domain by indigenous peoples have been major sites of military operations against both Moro and communist rebels in the past 40 years. Lack of military knowledge of indigenous peoples' beliefs may complicate military actions and security situation in these territories.

The New War:

20 Percent Combat, 80 Percent Civil Military Relations

So far, the result of recent peace-building efforts in the military, while subdued, has been encouraging. Marines in Basilan have adopted a policy of scaling down to 20 percent its engagement in combat operations and scaling up to 80 percent its efforts in civilian-military relations, said Col. Rustico Guerrero, the commander of the 1st Marines Brigade in Basilan. Under such policy, combat-related operations were reserved to clearing and protecting the highways, government installations, production and populated areas, and other strategic locations from possible assaults by well-armed bandits and criminal groups.

Guerrero, who attended the opening of the peace-building and conflict management seminar in Basilan, explained that Marines would still engage with rebel units, but would be mindful of the existing ceasefire agreements with the government and of proportional use of force. In dealing with critical incidents involving local insurgent groups, they would seek to work with local government authorities, the church and other civil society groups rather than apply purely militarist means.

The Marines have been working towards a similar approach in Sulu province, the host of an earlier conflict management seminar and commanders conference which Dolorfino and Ferrer also spearheaded. These efforts appeared to have been put to the test in the kidnapping of Dinampo and the journalists. Following their release on June 12, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo ordered the Armed Forces to launch a “massive manhunt” for the kidnappers.

Ironically, the artillery fire and combat operations deployed were exactly the kind of military actions that Dolorfino and Ferrer wish to be done sparingly, as they warned that “too much” use of force and bombing raids in the past only complicated security conditions on the ground. In the eyes of civilians caught in the crossfire, these made the military the villain, rather than the rebels and the criminals.

But less than two weeks before the Sulu kidnappings and in a less celebrated incident, the Marines had held back their firepower and prevented a possible renewal of massive hostilities across Mindanao. The Marines in Basilan decided not to deploy new forces and retaliate against the wounding of 14 troopers in an early dawn assault on their detachment allegedly by members of the MILF in Unkaya Pukan town on May 24.

Guerrero decided that, instead of immediately responding with full military might, he and his commanders would quickly analyze the factors that prompted the attack based on comments from the public and data from their intelligence network. The picture they pieced together was that the attack was preceded by widespread misinformation on an internal but regular Marines policy of rotating and relieving troops deployed long enough in the field.

The channel of misinformation was a flurry of text messages that interpreted the arrival of a Marines unit relieving those in Basilan as a troop deployment in preparation for the

resumption of a large-scale military operation. The text messages indicated that the government and the MILF peace negotiations were about to collapse, hence the deployment. Dolorfino said that he had also received forwarded text messages from Ces Drilon, who asked him about the veracity of the information.

Guerrero said to counter the misinformation, they immediately sought an audience with local religious leaders and civil society groups in Basilan to explain that the text messages were false. In hindsight, Guerrero said that he had ordered the mobilization of the Marines to retaliate, the person or group that spread the false information may have succeeded in triggering the resumption of large scale hostilities and outright collapse of the peace process.

As the military begins to transform its approach to internal conflicts, Guerrero said they should expect challenges ahead, especially from groups out to spoil the peace process.

Part of the agenda of the spoilers is to deliberately provoke and manipulate the military or rebels into going on offensives, according to another senior Marines officer attending the workshop. Some spoilers, who may be members of a local armed group, have a grudge either with a rebel group or a military unit. By manipulating both forces, they are able to carry out their plans in inflicting damage to either group even without taking part in the battle.

Guerrero said they are looking at rido as a flashpoint in the manipulation of both the military and armed groups to resume armed conflicts. He noted the long list of incidents wherein the military have been dragged into a rido. Families aligned with the military had on several occasions misled soldiers into believing that the assaults were the handiwork of the rebels. Several soldiers have been killed and resources wasted in rido-related battles, according to Guerrero. "Right now, I am studying the studies on rido so we can better respond to this problem," he said.

Reflection and Realization: Diversifying the Methods of Fighting

The realization that the war in Mindanao is complex and has to be carefully examined by soldiers appears to be penetrating the mindset of the junior officers.

In focus group discussions, soldiers reflected on the case of a family feud in Tawi-Tawi and argued about the correctness of their unit's decision not to join but help in the resolution of the conflict. The feud stemmed from teenage mischief of stealing a pair of panties from a neighbor's clothesline. The angered husband killed one of the teenagers. The family of the slain teenager retaliated. At this point, the Marines intervened without siding with any group. The soldiers worked with the community in easing the tension and eventually solving the conflict.

A second group of Marines recounted a family feud in

Malabang, Lanao del Sur that was rooted in the killing of a university student in Cotabato City, who had gotten his girlfriend pregnant. The girlfriend's brother killed the student, regarding the affair and his sister's pregnancy as affronts to the family's honor. The family of the slain student immediately retaliated, but the Marines, working with the barangay officials and the police managed to mediate and defuse the conflict.

Amidst the excitement of junior officers in sharing their experiences in managing conflicts, senior officers were also quick at reminding the Marines that they should not lose sight of the broader and political dimensions of the armed conflicts. Col. Pimentel noted that feuds like rido are not likely to end despite continued Marines mediation because the problems that breed and exacerbate it continue to exist.

Pimentel said a major challenge confronting soldiers was the lack of participation from local government officials. The task and the leadership in solving rido should rest with local government leaders. The role of the Marines is to create the conditions conducive to its resolution. In reality, however, several local government officials in conflict-prone areas refuse to get involve in a rido resolution process. Some of these officials are themselves involved in rido and were resisting efforts at solving it. Pimentel thinks that there is a need to establish a mechanism that should involve various sectors to effectively manage conflicts like rido.

Captain Berman Bairulla of the First Marine Brigade suggested the need to work with and even train traditional

leaders in effectively managing conflicts. Bairulla, a Yakan and a resident of Basilan, said that the elders must be given important roles as their views are respected in the community.

Other officers were also thinking of cultivating more creative and useful roles for the Marines while they are deployed in the communities. Second Lieutenant Ruth Tagarda suggested that in areas that are without teachers, Marine officers who are education graduates can temporarily serve the community while the Department of Education secures teachers for the place. Tagarda noted they actually initiated the scheme in a remote and troubled area in Basilan where teachers dared not go. Pimentel said the Marines coordinated their efforts with DepEd, which in turn agreed to accredit the students into the first grade level of elementary education.

In a planning session that capped the peace-building and conflict management seminar, one group of Marines pledged that they will actively participate in civilian-initiated local dialogues in the barangays where they are deployed. Another group pledged that they would be more conscious in understanding and analyzing the nature of conflicts in the area before rendering judgment and drawing on their firepower to deal with it. Another group thought that they will make it a point to “socialize” with Muslims in their areas of responsibility to foster greater understanding between them and in defusing tensions in their communities.

Others pledged to get involve in peace-building initiatives, establish good rapport with community members,

and be more conscious of identifying potential threats to peace in areas where they are assigned.

Modernizing the Philippine Military: Not Hawks Not Doves

For Dolorfino, the times call for the military to engage in “non-traditional military roles.” The world’s military has a long tradition in assuming these roles. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army, for instance, referred to these roles in its doctrine of unrestricted warfare wherein the concept of engaging the enemy requires a variety of means and broader strategies. The US armed forces referred to these roles as “military operations other than war.”

These non-traditional military roles set the condition for soldiers to perform conflict management rather than confine their actions exclusively to combat operations.

The modern military is knowledgeable of the cultural, religious, economic and political environment where it is operating. These areas of knowledge should be combined with strict observance and respect of human rights. In that sense, the modern military should be culturally sensitive, tolerant of religious differences, and capable of analyzing the peculiarities of conflicts in areas where they are assigned.

Doing peace-building is not meant to denigrate the “warrior” in the military, a point emphasized by Dolorfino, Ferrer and several other speakers in the workshop. The peace-build-

ing seminars were not meant to create “doves” who would romantically view peace and require the military to entirely set aside combat operations despite the reality of armed threats faced by communities from groups like the Abu Sayyaf. But they also think that the hawkish attitude of solely relying on full military force is isolating the military from the people and has to be rejected.

Consistent with the use of birds as metaphor, Dolorfino recalled that the Chair of the GRP Peace Panel to the MILF talks, retired Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, once referred to the military as owls. Dolorfino said that a noteworthy ability of an owl, apart from seeing in the dark, is that it can turn its head 180 degrees. Owls can scan and observe the environment better than other animals. This ability is analogous to soldiers equipped with the best military hardware and substantial knowledge of the complex dimensions of Mindanao conflicts, allowing them to see in the dark and turning their heads, metaphorically speaking, 180 degrees.

Dolorfino said they expect the soldiers to continue engaging in combat operations against rebel and criminal groups, but cautious about the impact of these actions on the peace process and the painstaking effort to rebuild the trust of civilians. In a sense, the military as an owl is capable of the comprehensive and challenging task of conflict management.

Challenges: Multi-layered Conflicts and Fragile Peace

Considering the complexity and interrelatedness of the sources of conflict, the negotiating efforts of the government and MILF peace panels as well as local initiatives of the military and other groups, peace will likely remain fragile in Mindanao for a considerable period of time.

One factor is the way the media portrays the conflicts. Ferrer said that while the media may be blamed for sensationalism, the way the military gives out information can also be faulted.

Ferrer noted that in many respects the media's image of Mindanao as very troubled and areas like Sulu and Basilan as "havens of terrorists" were also fed by the military. In several instances, military spokesperson and officers provide the media with misleading and sometimes exaggerated picture of battles in their desire to score propaganda points against the insurgents. Such a way of giving out information fans the tensions and makes it difficult to advance the real picture, which is that while there are bandits, rebels, or terrorists in Mindanao, the region is not at all a haven for troublemakers.

In making good conflict managers out of the military, Ferrer said soldiers should acknowledge that they, too, are part of the problem that spawned the war in Mindanao. The military, to a great extent, stands on a threshold to becoming part of the solution by correcting the way they portray and approach the conflict.

Given the fragile nature of peace, Ferrer seeks "patience"

from the military with regard to relating with rebel groups talking peace with the government, like the MNLF and the MILF. He noted that based on his experience, the MILF's central committee and ranking officials of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) has not always been quick enough in channeling instructions down its chain of command regarding agreements in the peace panel or the joint ceasefire committees of both forces. In many instances, information of military movements coordinated by the government side with the MILF often did not trickle down to rebel field commanders. As a result, MILF ground forces interpreted these coordinated movements as assault operations. Once MILF guerrillas fire, the military would in turn interpret it as a betrayal of their agreements, resulting in renewed hostilities.

In many instances, the problem with the lack of coordination and proper channeling of information in the rebel's chain of command stemmed from lack of adequate communication facilities. "Observing ceasefire agreements and other coordinative agreements with the MILF requires a lot of patience on our part. Unlike us, MILF ground commanders do not have fax machines or fixed offices through which instructions from their peace negotiators and leaders could easily be passed on and received," Ferrer said.

Ferrer said that patience is also required in the quest of regaining the trust and confidence of the communities. Forty years of armed conflicts and allegations of rights abuses have spawned deep cleavages in civilian and military relations. Ferrer told the Marines that they must not expect trust to be regained

sooner because the pain caused by decades of war is deep and requires some means of healing.

Col. Pimentel, in debriefing the Marines after the firstday of the peace-building seminar, stressed that while they are being trained to ways of addressing the conflict other than war, it does not mean that they should become lax with their security and that of the community. On the contrary, the training is meant to improve their capability in handling the conflicts in Mindanao.

Pimentel also pointed out that because they have gone through training, the more that they should be very alert. He reminded the troops that there will always be third parties out to spoil their peace-building efforts as a way of undermining the progress of the peace process.

The Sulu kidnapping and the military response to it perhaps highlights not only the fragile nature of the peace process, but also the problems confronting the peace-building initiatives being started out by Dolorfino, Ferrer and other like-minded officers in the military. Intense military operations, if not handled very carefully and sensitively in accordance with the local conditions, can worsen already simmering tensions on the ground.

Perhaps, an even bigger challenge and cause of the fragility of peace is the military establishment itself. Dolorfino acknowledged that there is criticism from fellow ranking military officers that the idea they espouse might weaken the military. There are also calls for the government to use its forces more fully to

defeat the insurgency.

The policies presented by Dolorfino and Ferrer were confined to their respective commands and have not been adopted by the whole of the Armed Forces, even though they enjoy a good level of support from the Chief of Staff. Dolorfino said that while there is potential in transforming over-all military strategy to armed conflicts, there is no assurance that it can be done immediately at the highest levels of the military.

Dolorfino said that in firming up the idea of peace-building and conflict management roles for the military in internal conflicts, they will have to start with the training of junior officers. He hopes that as these officers climb the chain of command, they can effect a more coherent conflict management approach to internal conflicts for the Armed Forces.

To some extent, listening to Dolorfino and Ferrer is like listening to a forum of social activists. Like social activists, the heart of military mission is service to and protection of the people. And like social activists, they too struggle to embed their views and policies into that of the military establishment. Like social activists, officers seeking change in military strategy is not likely to succeed if they do it alone. They need the affirmation and support from broader segments of society.

“Peace is so fragile, and so structures and mechanisms have to be built while we work through people’s minds and hearts,” Ferrer said in the lecture.

Dolorfino, though recognizing the hard task ahead, thinks that his vision for the Marines is “simple.” He sums it up, thus: “My vision is for the Marines to be aware that we exist for the people.”

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Harnessing New Thinking in the Philippine Military

Ayesah Abubakar

Harnessing New Thinking In The Philippine Military

Concept of Command

“We are the few, the proud, the Marines... the best in soldiery!” goes the slogan of the Philippine Marine Corps. It speaks of the elite unit’s heritage of integrity, which it has zealously guarded in more than half a century since its founding in 1950.

But the reputation of the corps is now under threat by recent cases of alleged mutiny among its members. Marine Major General Ben Dolorfino cites the negative impact on the Marine Corp of the coup attempt of 1989, the Oakwood mutiny of July 27, 2003, and the misadventure of 24-25 February 2006. Serious doubts about its image as “protectors of the people” have also arisen due to alleged involvement of some Marine soldiers in the abuse of human rights in Basilan on July 10, 2007 and August 18, 2007.

It is against this context of organizational challenges and the reality of complex security issues in Mindanao that MGen. Dolorfino assumed office as Commandant of the Marine Corps on January 7, 2008. In his Concept of Command speech, he articulated a vision of a Marine Corps that is “people-oriented, institutionally strong, and effective.” Apart from its constitutional mandate (of protecting the people, upholding the sovereignty of the state, and defending the territorial integrity of the country), the definition of “people-oriented” hinges on the soldiers’ independence from political interests and on their role to protect

diverse communities regardless of ethnic groupings and religion. The quality of being “people-oriented” also speaks of the practice of “bridging leadership” and its mission of working together with civil society groups. This new outlook carries many opportunities for the Philippine military to mend its relationship with the civilian population.

MGen. Dolorfino emphasizes that this new Concept of Command is relevant and timely in supporting the “Whole of Government Approach” in resolving the country’s internal security problems. More specifically, this Concept upholds the “Primacy of the Peace Process.” The Marine Corp’s area of responsibility includes Western Mindanao (Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga, Sibugay, and Palawan), and so it is confronted with self-determination movements, clan conflicts, political conflicts, and other sources of violence from various armed elements.

Thus, the Marine Corps takes the approach of strengthening its Civil Military Operations (CMO) as the point of engagement with local communities. Under this approach, the corps organizes a training program that aims to equip soldiers with the tools not only to become better warriors in combat, but also to become more open and broad-minded men with the determination to find and develop their roles in the search for long lasting peace in Mindanao.

A New Training Program

The new leadership of the Marine Corps finds natural partners with the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG), Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc. (BMFI), and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) as all four believe that the Armed Forces of the Philippines plays a very significant role in making any peace-building programming in the conflict areas of Mindanao more successful. As a sign of “opening up” to civil society, the Marine Corps cooperates with the three institutions in a series of training on conflict management and peace-building for its officers. The training aims not only to introduce them to this new framework of peace-building, but also hopes to gauge their evolving capacity for their new role.

The first training program, held on May 23-26, 2008 at Notre Dame College in Jolo, Sulu, was attended by 77 officers and non-commissioned officers of the Marine Battalion from Tawi Tawi and Sulu Provinces. Their years of service ranged from six to 26 years. Half of them were college graduates; the other half completed high school. Four out of ten originated from the Luzon areas, 39% from the Visayas, and 16% from the Mindanao region. Some 86% of them were Roman Catholics, 5% Muslim, 4% Iglesia ni Cristo, 3% Born Again Christian, and 1% Protestant and Seventh Day Adventist. An initial and quick survey showed that the participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the training program. Their expectations included understanding the conflict situation and peace efforts in Mindanao, learning skills on conflict manage-

ment and peace-building, and building a platform for sharing experiences among fellow soldiers.

The training program comprised a good balance of seminars, discussions, and workshop exercises. It was divided into four themes, namely, Understanding the Mindanao Situation, The Soldier as Peace-builder, Understanding Conflict and Peace, and Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. Invited lecturers and facilitators came from the academe, civil society groups, and government agencies based in Mindanao. They contributed not only knowledge and skills, but also their rich experiences in peace-building work.

In some discussions, the speakers and participants found themselves in a dialogue session confronting the misperceptions between the military and the civilians. Among the misperceptions was the notion that the Marines' arrival in Mindanao is a sign of looming armed hostilities. It was also apparent that there is a great interest on the part of the participants to understand the human rights issues. They expressed the need for a legal component within their battalions to help improve their adherence to the laws that protect the community and themselves as government enforcers.

Many of the participants recognized their lack of awareness of the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the people of Sulu. Thus, the sessions on the Origin of the Mindanao Conflict, Dynamics of Pagbanta (Rido), and Community Peace-building proved to be very useful. Prof. Octavio Dinampo, one of the speakers and a well-known peace-builder

in Sulu, provided a list of reminders to the Marine Corps to help them succeed in community peace-building. These are as follows:

1. In any attempt at community peace-building, there should not be any discrimination about who will be involved. It is their participation that is of utmost importance.
2. Any intervention in the community must have the component of justice.
3. Programs to be implemented must show economic equity and progress.
4. The people should be assured of their security; in Mindanao, prejudice or selective security can be particularly a challenge.
5. The Marine Corps should act as the soldiers of the Tausug.
6. Intervention should have the cooperation of the local government.
7. Community peace-building should be holistic and extensive, encompassing conflict management, resolution, and transformation.
8. Peace-building includes all actors and their perspectives, especially that of the marginalized sectors.

The training participants raised some interesting questions and issues. “Do the rebels and other enemies of the state have rights?” and in the same way of dealing with human rights issues with the rebels, “Doesn’t the government have rights too?” “Why do civil society groups hesitate to engage with the military?” Further reflection prodded the participants to question “Why are we not empowering the Philippine National Police (PNP), so we can concentrate on our mandate in securing our

territorial waters?” “In many cases, the local politicians are the ones responsible for the conflicts. How then can we make peace-building work in this case?” “Why are we implementing this kind of peace-building program only now?”

A conflict-mapping exercise among groups of participants showed that they have a good understanding of the dynamics of the local conflicts in their area of responsibility. Most of these are clan conflicts or “pagbanta” or “rido.” These same tools (conflict map, chronology of events, and linear chart of conflict dynamics) can be more useful if updated regularly in their conflict analysis and strategizing for peace-building. Also, it is at this point that the re-entry plans, drawn by the participants, can be linked as part of integrative peace-building planning.

Interviews with key players

Various stakeholders in Mindanao are champions in promoting the agenda of peace, but there maybe some differences in their vision and ways of achieving it. While there is a wide perception that the Philippine military maintains its focus on the use of force and coercive measures to achieve peace, there is also a growing consciousness among its ranks that this has not brought them any closer to that vision. This changing world view has emerged after revisiting their experiences embroiled in a seemingly endless cycle of conflict and violence in Mindanao. The following are some of the views of the participants expressed during the training and in personal interviews on the role of the military in peace-building.

Col. Natalio C. Ecarma III PN(M)
Battalion Commander,
Patikul, SuluPhilippine Marine Corps

During the 1980s, Col. Ecarma's experience in pursuing communist rebels in the Davao areas triggered a change in his viewpoint about attaining peace. Today, he believes that the military solution further alienates the people, and therefore, leads to failure. He shares many insights about his recent service as a battalion commander in Patikul, Sulu. The armed conflict and violence, he explains, started in the Martial Law years (1972-1980). Since then, the Tausugs have always felt like they are treated as second class citizens by the government and outsiders from the Luzon areas, most especially.

Col. Ecarma and his battalion have put much work in their CMO projects in the Patikul area. Some of the projects are: repair of school classrooms, carpentry of school chairs, construction of water wells, and building of a Gawad Kalinga (GK) Village. The project implementation was done together with the recipient local community and with direct cooperation from the town mayor. Donor funds were sourced from NGOs, private organizations, and individuals keen on helping Sulu.

Col. Ecarma says the integrity of the Marines remains intact in Sulu despite the recent escalation of violence there. During a mass rally in Jolo, civil society groups were made fully aware that the Marine Corps was not involved in the massacre of civilians at Ipil last February 4, 2008. It has helped that the intensified CMO activities have paved the way to im-

proved relationship with the Tausugs. On one occasion, one member of the local community provided important information of an offensive by some armed elements that saved the lives of the Marine soldiers. With these experiences, Col. Ecarma and his soldiers have learned to value the practice of dialogue with the communities. He also asserts three elements required in working on a multi-stakeholder process: sincerity, humility, and empathy or SHE. These traits of SHE are important for the Marines if they want to make a meaningful difference while serving in Sulu.

In 2003, there were 23 Marine soldiers who were killed by rogue members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). This case is being pursued in court. Col. Ecarma reminds the Marines that in such cases, they would have to learn how to let go of past experiences in order for them to continue to carry out their mission. The threat of revenge killings may simply escalate the conflict. The challenge for them is to shed the notion that the Marines are also a source of the cyclical violence in Sulu.

Although CMO activities prove to have had a great impact on the local communities, they have also resulted in a strong perception that CMO is a counter-insurgency tactic. However, the present leadership does not take this as a weakness, considering that the counter-insurgency operations are clearly directed at the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and other lawless elements. Thus, the MNLF and MILF groups are not regarded as insurgents because of the official peace process being observed.

Mgen. Raymundo Ferrer AFP
Commanding General
6th Infantry Division Philippine Army

MGen. Raymundo Ferrer is a champion for peace from the Philippine Army. He exudes an attitude of boldness in discussing the problems that confront the peace agenda within the military environment. He acknowledges that local communities in Mindanao continue to look at the military in the same way as during the Martial Law years. This came about because the leadership at that time showed discrimination and instructed soldiers “to go to Mindanao and fight the Muslims.” The “divide and conquer” strategy employed with the Muslims also resulted in a negative outcome and gave rise to more conflict parties.

In some incidents, military abuses are not physical in nature, but the result of the negative image of soldiers among the communities. Examples of these stories are: soldiers intentionally hitting a durian tree with the military vehicle to harvest its fruits; soldiers conducting their offensive operations during the harvest season, therefore making the communities lose their produce and income; and during armed conflict evacuations of IDPs, a commander purchased cattle at a very low price. This is why it is very important for soldiers to understand and respect the way of life of the Muslims.

Mgen. Ferrer emphasizes that the initial transformation should emanate within the military itself. They need to internalize cultural sensitivity and practice trust-building with the people.

By undertaking regular dialogues between the military and civil society, a habit of consultation can be institutionalized. It is only by working with the other sectors of the society that the military can find themselves playing a better role as part of peace-building. He reminds the training participants that at all times the military should be regarded as a neutral personality with no personal interest in the area. He adds: “We should look at ourselves not as Christians but as bridging leaders in Mindanao.”

After many years in Basilan as a young soldier, MGen. Ferrer recently returned and found the place still the same. The people are still poor, and worse, they have an impression that the armed conflict is being prolonged by the Philippine military to advance the self interest of commanders (quick promotions, bigger budgets etc.). This reality is slowly being changed by peace champions within the organization through a new kind of training like the one in May. A good understanding by soldiers of the dynamics of conflict and peace process in Mindanao should help maintain the ceasefire and allow peace talks to take its course. MGen Ferrer admits that there are “peace spoilers” and that some politicians may want to see the conflict continue because of their various interests. However, the military would have to realize that a ceasefire is critical in providing a conducive environment to more development work in the conflict areas.

This in turn may decrease the motivation among the rebels to continue fighting.

One of the training participants asked: “Are the MNLF

and MILF serious in talking to the government?” To this, MGen. Ferrer replied: “We should also ask ourselves, if we, the government and the military, are sincere and serious with the peace talks. We should take note that until this day, many soldiers continue to define peace simply as the ‘mere absence of armed conflict.’

While it is true that the armed violence comes from different parties and factions in society, MGen. Ferrer also reminded the participants that it is still the government that has the most powerful military strength, which may sometimes be susceptible to the proliferation of violence itself. He encouraged the participants to give their full support to the peace process. In the GRP-MILF peace process, the International Monitoring Team (IMT) was initiated to show the government’s sincerity in the peace process. Upholding the ceasefire and working with the IMT paved the way for the peace talks to progress. Therefore, these mechanisms should be welcomed and supported by the AFP.

Lt. Col. Victoriano G Pimentel PN(M)

***AC of S for Civil Military Operations and Environment
Management Philippine Marine Corps***

Col. Pimentel has memorable experiences in CMO operations. In 2004, while assigned in Patikul, Sulu, he and his battalion implemented an adult literacy program for the Badjaus. Classes were held during Saturdays and Sundays. The 89 students were taught basic reading and writing, and numeracy skills for three months. This CMO program became successful

with the support of the Department of Education and the Vice-Governor of Sulu. Most of all, it was the enthusiasm among the soldiers to teach the Badjaus, and the Badjaus' receptiveness to the program, that made it very worthwhile.

In spite of the view that the CMO is "plain counter-insurgency" operations, it has to be recognized that some programs have made good contributions to the community, not least because they positively influenced the mindset and behavior of Marine soldiers. Contrary to the usual image of a strong militarist attitude, there is a deeper understanding among them of the roots of the conflict and peace situation in Mindanao. Col. Pimentel's experiences in Mindanao have brought him new perspectives as a person and as a military officer. Further, he gives an opinion that it is only through an autonomous political arrangement (not necessarily the present government set-up) that the complexity of the conflict in Mindanao can be fully addressed in the long term.

A Path in Peacebuilding

Within the ranks of the peace movement in Mindanao, it was not a very long time ago that the Philippine military was mostly known as "hawks." With their increased awareness of the activities of the civil society peace movement, it is a welcome development that some in the military leadership have "opened up" and engaged in this arena of peace-building. The military looks at CMO as their point of engagement in community peace-building. While others view it as pure counter-insurgency, it is a good start nevertheless.

There are, however, several issues that require some re-thinking in the way CMO programs are conducted and the effectiveness of education within the military structure. These are enumerated below in the hope of making the Philippine military's peace-building initiatives more acceptable to civil society.

1. The simple definition of "peace as the absence of armed conflict" remains as the norm within the military organization. This needs to be clarified in order for the soldiers to have a deeper appreciation of the issues of human rights and community peace-building. They should be made to understand that "in times of peace" they, too, have many roles to play as government authorities and "protectors of the people."

2. It is understandable that peace education has only touched the military quite recently. Thus, the mindset and language of the soldiers are still in the "adversarial" mode. In spite of a movement towards peace-building, words like "kaaway ng gobyerno" or "kalaban" are still unconsciously used. The language of cultural sensitivity should also help the military find acceptance among the multi-ethnic groupings in Mindanao. An example is that the people in Jolo should not be called as Joloanos, but as Tausugs or Moros.

3. CMO programs could very well be regarded as pure counter-insurgency tools, especially when these have not been linked to the existing mechanisms with the MNLF and the MILF (both groups maintain official coordinating mechanisms with the government). In this case, despite the cooperation of the

local communities in the military's CMO, this could also be a source of conflict among those who support the two groups. The CMO programs thus run the risk of courting non-cooperation and even sabotage.

4. CMO activities can be viewed negatively as competing with NGOs and the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA). The latter is crucial to peace-building, since it has been given the mandate by both the government and the MILF to conduct the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development of the conflict affected areas.

5. While CMO programming directly contributes to the welfare of local communities, especially given the lack, or sometimes absence, of government resources and leadership in the area, it may also create the unintended effect of dependency on the part of the recipients. Therefore, it is very important that any CMO program should include a good exit strategy and successfully transfer ownership to the communities.

6. Military soldiers have to be very conscious and sensitive in preventing themselves to become too dominant in the conduct of their CMO program with the communities. Otherwise, the people may tend to lose their sense of participation and ownership of the projects.

7. Soldiers should be highly commended for trying their very best in undertaking CMO work. However, they should not lose track of their limitations. They are neither professional social workers nor development workers. Nor should they try to replace the local leadership. They are in the communities

because they are serving the people as soldiers in times of insecurity and chaos.

8. While it is through CMO work that soldiers get valuable and useful security information from the community, they would have be very conscious of how they can uphold good ethics in their dealings with the people. Many years of work in trustbuilding can easily be broken by one case of deception and ill-feeling.

9. The strong presence of the military in some areas of Mindanao, and the impact of their CMO activities, can also unintentionally decrease the social and political capital of the local leadership and politicians in the area. In the long run, the successful CMO program cannot replace good governance by an elected Mayor or Governor. The military should make local officials part of the multi-stakeholder process, in the hope they will be the ones who will carry out the responsibilities of delivering services to their constituencies.

It is not just the soldiers who need a reality check. The peace constituency needs to do some re-thinking as well and find counterpoint arguments on the military perspective that the idea of transforming soldiers from warriors to peace-builders is unacceptable. Atty. Benedicto Bacani of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) puts forward the view that “we do not have to change the military role as warriors; instead we are putting their role in perspective on how they can be part of the path towards peace in Mindanao.” Training programs such as the Notre Dame of Jolo event should be de-

signed as important additional steps for the Philippine military to find its way towards “opening up” and fulfilling everyone’s goal of a viable and durable peace not only in Mindanao, but in the country.

Participants Feedback and Comments

The participants evaluated the training program most favorably—in terms of relevance of the topic, methods of the lecture, knowledge and skills of the resource person/facilitator, and their ability to respond to questions and sensitivity to the participants’ needs. For almost all of them, it was the first time that they had attended this kind of training. They have nothing but good words in being allowed to participate in the program because they realize how much of the new learning is important to their work. A list of suggestion pertains to the improvement of the training program and on how this can be sustained. These are as follow:

1. This training program should be extended to other junior officers and staff in the organization. It should be included as part of the basic and advanced officers training.
2. The program should include a longer session on studying the culture and traditions of the local communities to improve the participants’ conflict-management skills. A topic on risk management can be a good addition.
3. The program should be extended to allow more time for workshops and practical exercises.

4. Similar training should be conducted among civilians, especially barangay officials, politicians, NGOs, police enforcers, and other government agencies.

5. The government should fully support this program and allocate resources to implement it on a regular basis. This is a good means to attain peace in Mindanao.

6. Increased interaction with the local communities should be practiced by the military. They should initiate more information drives and education on the value of peace-building in their area of operation.

7. The battalion commander should be informed of the importance of training and continuous education among its members. The battalion should be fully equipped with these peace-building skills and reference materials on the subject.

8. A regular dialogue among troop members should be held to help sustain this new learning.

9. Books and other materials (e.g. newsletter, website) can be provided to further the education of the participants.

10. The MNLF and MILF should also have similar programs.

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**Healing Wounds, Sustaining Peace:
Exploring Role of Soldiers as
Builders of Peace**

Criselda Yabes

Healing Wounds, Sustaining Peace: Exploring Role of Soldiers as Builders of Peace

Introduction

For more than three decades, the Philippine Armed Forces has been fighting communists and separatists. It is still at war with both, but with the added complication of terrorism as a new front. The AFP is said to be battle-fatigued and under-equipped, and yet it has mainly taken the upper hand despite some setbacks, usually caused by the failure of political will to follow through on military victory.

In Mindanao, the current peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the MILF, appears to be losing steam, but this may have inadvertently given military commanders on the ground time to re-assess strategy, taking stock of the situation from a wider and historical perspective to learn from past failures and start shifting mindsets.

Early this year the Army was made the dominant territorial force in mainland Mindanao, covering rebel problem areas from Lanao to Cotabato to Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani. The Marines, meanwhile, have taken over the islands of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi- Tawi as part of what is conceived to be a Fleet Marine doctrine, where these islands have become, metaphorically, the naval vessels from which they operate.

Changing Role

The training on conflict-management and peace-building for mostly senior and mid-level officers of the Philippine Marine Corps held on 20-23 June, 2008, in Zamboanga City, reflects changes in the soldier's role, no longer just a fighter but also a keeper of peace – and how much of this trend soldiers themselves understand, given the broad and often chaotic dynamics of Philippine society.

The insurgencies have held back the country's economic development. It is clear that the greatest increase in the incidence of poverty took place in conflict areas, according to Titon Mitra, Minister Counsellor of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which funded the training organized by the Cotabato City-based Institute for Autonomy and Governance.

Working with the military has a huge bearing on peace, unlike in the old martial law days when the man in uniform was seen as an abusive power. “If you look at the modern military today they have to serve dual functions – fight and be able to keep peace. Much as it is important to train in battle, the military should also be able to train in peace,” said Mitra in his opening remarks.

Here lies the difficult transition. The Marines, for example, are known as warriors. They strive to live up to that image; indeed, they see themselves as superior to their Army counterparts who, on the other hand, tend to regard the Marines

as a mindless fighting machine. Ironically, one of the key lecturers was an Army commander, Maj. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer of the 6th Infantry Division based in Cotabato, who previously served as brigade commander in Basilan.

The atmosphere was open and cordial. An animated Ferrer provided concrete examples of how he and his men dealt with different sectors of civil society in the field.

First, the general acknowledged that Mindanao, as a whole, is no longer informed simply by black-and-white animosity between Christians and Muslims as in the past. Today, each province has its own dynamics among key groups, politicians and tribes, and how the military performs its mandate of protecting the people will depend on how it handles these dynamics.

From his travels around mainland Mindanao, Ferrer saw that much of the conflict areas were in idle lands – a raw landscape of beauty dotted with small pastel mosques from Cotabato down to Sarangani – that could not be cultivated because of the situation. Given a chance to develop with the resumption of peace, the country’s third largest island could once again be the land of promise. The same is true of the former Sulu Archipelago, where the Marines are now exerting more effort to implement civil-military operations (CMO).

The Thinking Marine

In this training seminar, some senior Marine officers

showed that perhaps there was a bit of a myth in the popular perception about their culture. What they do is not just learn to target the enemy and pull the trigger. The commandant himself, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Dolorfino, talked about the “Thinking Marine,” who should think out of the box and involve himself in conflict management, as well as build a strong and people-oriented Marine Corps.

Dolorfino had just returned from a trip to the United States for a gathering of Marine commandants around the world. The consensus was that the battlefield is now in the hearts and minds of the people. A modern Marine, he said, is neither a hawk nor a dove, but somewhere in between – perhaps an ‘owl,’ he said, with its extraordinary capabilities.

“This will not diminish our warrior culture,” he reassured the officers, but he reminded them that the use of too much military force in the past had added to the problem. Civilians were killed and displaced as collateral damage. “Before, our war was scorched-earth policy – burn everything to the last man, burn everything in the way.” That was in the 1970s. Those wounds have yet to heal, especially among the people of Mindanao.

The new century now offers a way to peace in which, in Dolorfino’s view, a trinity of the military, the government, and the people, supporting one another, can make everything possible in the conduct of war.

It is a matter of sustaining the momentum in civil-military

operations that will make a difference in Internal Security Operations (the military aspect of the anti-insurgency policy), he stressed. And this is where peace-building would take hold in what he called the five lines of cooperation: promotion of human security, good governance, economic well-being, cultural cohesiveness, and sound environmental judgment.

“We are involved in low-intensity conflict,” Dolorfino said in outlining the three levels of war situations. “Enemy forces can capitalize on our weaknesses to attack our legitimacy.” To prevent this from happening, he pointed out the crucial responsibility of each and every Marine to respect human rights. “We should be legally upright. We should be on a high moral ground at all times.”

Transforming Mindsets

Col. Natalio Ecarma, former commander of the 3 Marine Brigade in Sulu, saw no struggle or conflict of roles in being both a fighter and a peacemaker. “I believe as military men, our instinct is peace. The reason we go to a place is because there is conflict, and therefore there is need to de-conflict. We will never solve the conflict through war, and in an insurgency, we tell the people: ‘We are not soldiers of Manila; we are not Christian soldiers; we are your soldiers.’ I don’t think there’s a change in paradigm. It’s a complementary paradigm.”

The idea of managing conflict towards the end-goal of peace, as a major step to the country’s progress, may seem a huge task. Recent history also shows that it may have already

been imprinted in the minds of the soldiers: finding a solution throughout these years of wars and conflict has made them aware of political realities, and this is not so unfamiliar to them.

But it is the transformation of mindsets that is challenging them to take the distance, going further into unknown territory, such as understanding culture and history, analyzing human behavior, using sound judgment when it comes to tribal wars or ‘rido,’ learning to practice empathy and communication, and erasing biases. This calls for more than just a military strategy to put an end to the Mindanao conflict. Ferrer stressed an important factor: that victims of war have been carrying “baggages” against the military for something they vaguely remember. They include stories “recycled” from the martial law days – how soldiers would ram down trees with an armored personnel carrier to get their fruits, how commanders would launch an operation as pretext to take away the villagers’ livestock and sell them for their own benefit, how mean they look at checkpoints, ready to pull their trigger at the slightest provocation.

“What I am saying,” he told the Marine officers, “is that the hatred is still there. Although we have signed a peace agreement [with the major Muslim separatist faction Moro National Liberation Front in 1996], they still feel we are their enemy, not their protector. The wounds of conflict are still in their heart.”

This writer observes that soldiers, too, have had their biases, mostly from how the Muslims have been portrayed in

all those years they fought against the Spanish colonizers and then the Americans. Just as in the turn of the 20th century, when Americans became heroes for winning battles against Muslims, a Filipino officer getting a field assignment in Mindanao saw it as a badge of honor, a plus factor in his service record.

The training on conflict management has the potential of teaching them to break from old and failed patterns. Winning the war under present-day conditions means making people trust soldiers. It begins here, before anything else. To lay the structure for building bridges, so to speak, and before it could even plan the groundwork for its CMO, the military will have to convince the people that the man in uniform is their ally. Going to the village is not about making the commander look good for scoring points.

Ecarma elaborated on his mission while serving as brigade commander in Sulu for over a year, using the acronym SHE, which stands for Sincerity, Humility, and Empathy. “It’s simply respecting the people,” he said. “If you don’t study the local situation, sometimes it worsens.”

He formed a core group in the town of Patikul, not far from the capital of Jolo, which was once a powerful royal seat during the time of the sultanate and now known to be a lair of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group that occasionally shifts locations from Basilan to Sulu. Among his projects were housing by the Gawad Kalinga group and an ID system he attempted to implement in its pilot stage, but was met with opposition from some politicians who saw it as a scheme for militarization of

the province.

“They [the people of Patikul] wanted to go back to their farms and the ID was a guarantee of a safe-conduct pass. They insisted on it, they were imposing it on me. The seal of the Marines [on the ID] was like an anting-anting with a message, ‘kilala ako ni Col. Ecarma.’”

The ID system on a limited scale in Patikul seemed positive to the townspeople, who wanted to establish their security and social participation, but the idea drew criticism when the governor wanted it done for the entire province too fast, too soon. Some say the seal of the Philippine Marine Corps also raised concerns.

How can people overcome the trauma they had of soldiers from years past? How can soldiers make people shed their fears? They would only know when they enter a village: have they come to look for the enemy? Or, are they here to help? When trust is built, a transformation takes place, and most often the rest follows.

In Ferrer’s words, this is putting a “human face to the conflict”.

A Bridge for the People

That the seminar was sponsored by a non-government organization (NGO) shows that the military is bringing itself closer to civil society, helping lessen suspicions among some in

the armed forces that NGOs are disguised left-leaning groups. In the absence of good governance and strong local government units (LGUs) in most provinces, the military is left with one avenue: to help reinforce a growing civil society, whose aim is to empower the people in a scenario where everyone involved becomes a “stakeholder.”

Ferrer recounted his experience in Basilan, first as a battalion commander, then returning as brigade commander in 2004. He saw the island province – just half an hour by ferry from Zamboanga City, a bastion of Spanish-era civilization in the Philippines and base of colonial soldiers in their attacks against Muslims – change from a god-forsaken place into a slowly transforming economy under the stimulation of development work by local NGOs and foreign aid agencies.

Once a military-NGO partnership is formed, it was easier to see that taking a pure hard-pounding military approach is not always the answer. “We can’t annihilate the enemy but we can isolate them,” he said. That said, he felt that in the two years and seven months that he served in Basilan, it wasn’t always easy to get people to be closer to the military, despite better roads and more schools built there than ever before.

Both Ferrer and Dolorfino combined their ideas and efforts when they participated in a bridging leadership seminar sponsored by the Asian Institute of Management. They would like to spread this approach down to the level of non-commissioned officers and the CAFGU (Civilian Armed Geographical Unit) militia arm of the military. (The Army had first

crack at it with lecture trainings sponsored by the Balay Mindanao Foundation in northern Mindanao.)

There were questions about how far the military should cross over to the responsibility of the LGU, which should bear the shoulder of implementing the national peace plan down to the grassroots, as they are the representatives of the national government.

The chief of operations of the Marine Corps, Col. Alvyn Pareno feared that in the long run the military would not be as effective if all other agencies fail to do their part, saying, “we are not given that much power, we might be stepping on other authority,” and therefore suggested that an oversight committee should be organized.

From this writer’s point of view, this is where lines can be blurred. With the government counting on the military to defeat the insurgency problem in two years’ time, the strategy is so wide and holistic in scope that ground commanders are left to set the parameters for their mandate, harnessing resources and capabilities with what they know of the situation on the ground. At the same time, however, a commander can no longer call the shots following his own inclinations. Being a professional officer means conforming to national policy and seeing the implication of his tactical action.

It has to be emphasized that conflict begins at the community level – and this is where the military commander must be astute enough to gauge the relationships of various groups

and factions, usually among warring clans. As in all relationships, peace is a process and understanding the needs of the people within a local area is a good start, rather than being overwhelmed by the bigger picture of resolving issues to its perfection.

The military cannot abandon this particular responsibility. If it does, more conflicts can arise. Most case studies show that the mark of a village, town, or province comes from a strong LGU; without it, people are left to rely on NGOs or the military or both.

Getting things done means seeing the short-term, immediate needs of a particular place under a CMO where the relationship with the people is one of “ownership.” Everyone takes responsibility in forging a solid community that will evolve socially and economically. Ecarma said that studying relationships and engaging with the people is like being a “servant leader.”

Under these circumstances, waiting for high-level decisions before making local moves would be a waste of time. “There’s no lack of donors and funds,” said Ecarma. “In fact donors are in a state of low morale waiting for people to give them project proposals. We [as marine commanders] are the bridge. We don’t have to think of this as ‘pogi points’” – meaning actions that make the commander look good. “Our job,” he added, “is to push” for the development projects to be implemented.

Peace Talks

The Muslim-dominated provinces of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are among the poorest in the country, with most people living below the poverty line – a far cry from the pre-colonial past, when trade and commerce flourished in the major sultanates of Sulu, Maguindanao and Lanao.

Professor Rudy Rodil gave a broad and passionate history of the Muslims in the Philippines, from the establishment of Islam in the 14th century to the impact of Spanish and American colonization, when the Muslims and other indigenous tribes lost tracts of lands to Christian settlers. Agricultural colonies were created in the early 1900s in the Cotabato Valley and upper Lanao – and it is easy to see today how much of these lands were cultivated by homesteaders, giving wealth and prominence to Christian families, but leaving Muslims to settle for the remaining marshlands of their ancestral domain.

Homesteaders were allowed to have 16 to 24 hectares of land, while others described as “non-Christian” could only retain four to 10 hectares. Corporations could have more than 1,000 hectares. Muslims “became a minority in their own place,” said Rodil, citing this as the core impetus that gave rise to the Muslim rebellions in the 1970s and such horrific events as the ‘Jabidah Massacre’ and the burning of Jolo.

“It was a push to hasten the uprisings” that saw traditional Muslim leaders and the idealistic youth combine forces, said

Rodil. The military played a crucial part when it was given all the necessary means to break the backs of the Muslims. About 120,000 people were killed in the separatist rebellion, which has cost the government 73 billion pesos, according to Rodil, who sits on the government's negotiating panel in peace talks with the MILF, which started in 2001.

The major issue of ancestral domain continues to present an impasse on the negotiating table. Although territories have been defined, the mechanics have yet to be put into fineprint under a constitutional framework that should not, according to Rodil, put the presidency in peril of impeachment. The country, unfortunately, has had to grapple with weak institutions and a divided society.

Atty. Jose Manuel Mamauag of the Commission on Human Rights in the southern region enumerated four points that both the government and the MILF have agreed to: 1) cessation of hostilities, 2) relief and rehabilitation of victims of the ongoing conflict, 3) the creation of the Bangsamoro Development Agency, which foreign aid agencies pledged to help when an agreement has been signed, and 4) handing over rights of ancestral domain.

“The truth of the matter,” said Undersecretary Ernesto Carolina of the Department of National Defense, “is that the small obstacles are done and over; the rest requires structure and constitutional changes.”

Rido Mediator

In the cases mentioned by the officers, the scope of internal security operations appeared to have taken the shape of ‘police work,’ where the soldiers had to prevent possible rebel encroachments and settle potential clashes involving mostly land disputes. If left unattended, the clashes could turn into a vicious cycle of vengeance, a violent round of retaliation and counter-retaliation known as ‘rido.’

Because there is absence of governance, not to say a robust system of justice, military commanders often have to take on the task of being a mediator. Even with a ceasefire in place, rido remains a serious threat. The situations can be so delicate that officers need to have all information at hand and knowledge of Islamic laws as well.

“One good thing about mediation,” said Professor Abhoud Syed Lingga, executive director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, “is that it can be anything as long as it is acceptable to both parties.”

Still there are limitations on what commanders can do. When trying to help settle a rido, soldiers can also be placed at risk. Col. Rustico Guerrero, commander of the 1st Marine Brigade in Basilan, wondered if LGUs could come up with a mechanism to help settle a rido, when their turn comes to address the issue.

“When we were at the negotiating table, some LGUs couldn’t

meet the demands of contending parties [in a rido] because it takes some amount of money,” Guerrero recounted one of incidents he had to deal with. “And that time nobody was going to stop them [the warring factions]. Some were holding off, but others were not because there was no settlement.”

Human Security Act

The latter part of the training seminar looked at the Human Security Act safety nets for civilians and laws applied to the military, both changing in dimension in the face of the current global threat of terrorism.

Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor of the Department of Justice cited the Philippines as having the second highest number of fatalities related to terrorism in the world, higher than Indonesia, England, and Spain: 859 people killed and about 1,300 others injured.

“The war on terrorism can be done with due observance of human rights,” he told the officers, noting that some changes in the law can help them track down suspects with surveillance and getting evidence. He said, however, that there are only four provisions against terrorists in the country’s anti-terror law, as compared with 22 against law enforcers.

Praising the military for keeping democracy alive, he said that in the more than 200 terrorism-related cases filed in court, not a single one has brought complaints of human rights violations against any unit of the anti-terrorism task force.

“Please follow the procedure and you cannot go wrong,” Blancaflor told the officers, one of whom voiced concerns that some civil society organizations might be acting as watchdogs against the military – showing still some amount of mutual distrust.

This led to a short discussion on human rights education that “people don’t actually understand, since it is not even taken up in schools and must be brought to the communities,” said Atty. Raizza Jajurie of a legal NGO network. She presented figures on cases of human rights abuses monitored from January 2003 to December 2006, where victims are mostly Muslims in Mindanao, adding that there could be more but are prevented from being filed by a court system that is “detached from the ordinary lives of the people.”

On the subject of human awareness and cultural sensitivities, the officers appeared drawn to the theosophical teachings of Saturnina Rodil and Jose Victor Penaranda. They explored the subject of emotional intelligence, communication and inter-personal relationships, and how to handle negative energy. They even went into a deep breathing exercise.

Their talk did not only cover how officers can relate to people in their environment and family, but also to themselves most importantly – being aware in the present moment, treating pain as a friend, healing in listening. The message was that changes within themselves could lead to bigger changes, and how they see themselves as military men in today’s world could make a difference in the quest for peace.

When asked what the basic strategy is, defense undersecretary Carolina, at the end of the four-day seminar, said it simply but clearly: “It is to make sure that there is a future.”

- Criselda Yabes

Freelance journalist and writer. Authored five books including “The Boys from the Barracks”, a narrative account of the attempted military coups in the 1980s.

She is currently working on a book on the military’s latest approaches in countering terrorism in Mindanao

Rethinking Military Role In Building Peace

Prof. Abhoud Syed M. Linga

Rethinking Military Role In Building Peace

Introduction

From June 26 to 29, 2008, Philippine Marine and Navy officers attended a four-day training on Conflict Management and Peace-Building in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. This was the fourth batch of training conducted by the Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) and Balay Mindanao Foundation, Inc. for the Philippine Marine Corps. Similar trainings were conducted earlier in Jolo, Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga City. The initiative was supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).

The purpose of the training, according to the Marine Commandant, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Dolorfino, is to make a better warrior out of the participants in order to realize the vision of a “Marine Corps that is people-oriented, institutionally strong and operationally effective.”

The four training modules covered the following topics: (1) Understanding the Mindanaw Situation; (2) The Soldier as Peace-Builder; (3) Understanding Conflict; and (4) Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

The initiative of broadening and deepening the mindset of the military officers is essential because the military is confronted by conflicts not between and among states, but conflicts that are taking place within and across the territorial bound-

aries of the Philippines. But the difficulty of the military in addressing these conflicts is compounded by perceptions that “the military is part of the problem,” according to Maj. Gen. Raymundo B. Ferrer, Commander of the 6th Infantry Division of the Philippine Army. The military, which is tasked by the Constitution to protect the people and the state, needs new tools to manage these internal conflicts.

Changing Nature of Conflict

In the past, armed conflicts were between and among states. Wars were fought. The enemies were clear – the military forces of a hostile country. But in recent years, most violent conflicts taking place originated at the domestic level within the state. These conflicts are in the form of civil wars, armed insurrections, armed secessionist movements, and other domestic warfare. During the period from 1989 to 1996, 95 of 101 conflicts worldwide took place within the boundaries of existing states. Only six were inter-states conflicts. In the Philippines after World War II, no war was fought against another country, but for decades, the national government was confronted by a communist insurgency and the armed struggle of the Bangsamoro for self determination.

The magnitude of human sufferings brought about by intra-state conflicts is staggering. “During World War One, just five per cent of casualties were civilians; by World War Two the figure had risen to around 50 per cent. But in the 1990s, the proportion of civilian war casualties has soared to around 80 per cent.” For a period of 26 years from 1970, the Mindanao

conflict caused the death of more than 100,000 persons, according to then Cong. Eduardo Ermita. In 1992, around 17 million refugees crossed international borders and around 20 million were internally displaced. In Mindanao, the World Bank estimates that the number of people displaced by the conflict has reached more than two million.

Internal conflicts are complex, persistent and intractable. The people the military is fighting are not foreign nationals but citizens of the state, people who the military is bound to protect. What makes these conflicts persistent is the fact that they are mostly identity-driven and emotionally charged. The issues of the disputes “go right to the heart of what gives people their sense of themselves, defining a person’s bond with her or his community and defining the source of satisfaction for her or his need for identity.” Intra-state conflicts may last for long periods, alternating between latent phases and sustained violence that can go on for years.

This probably explains why the communist insurgency, which started in 1930, remains a national problem. The movement waned in the early 1950s, but later gained vigor when the Communist Party of the Philippines was organized on December 26, 1968. In Mindanao, the Kamlon and Tawantawan rebellions were contained, but a more organized and armed Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was organized. After the MNLF signed an agreement with the government, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rose to prominence.

New Tools

The fact that conflicts are still festering in the national life of the Philippines shows that the traditional anti-insurgency approaches to conflicts are ineffective. Even in other countries, the containment-oriented strategies of coercion have been found arthritic and inflexible.

To determine the right approach to the different conflicts in Mindanao, it is necessary first to understand the nature of the different conflicts. The conflict between government and the MNLF/MILF is about competition on sovereign rights over a territory, while that of government and the communist insurgents is about ideological differences. Both are politically charged conflicts. The government is a party because it is the authority of government that is being challenged. There are conflicts between clans (rido), and conflicts between indigenous communities and business interests involved different sectors of society, but the government is not a party to these.

A useful tool in approaching politically oriented conflicts, like that with the MNLF, MILF and CPP/NPA, is negotiation. The decision to negotiate, or not to negotiate, with the insurgents is a political decision. The role of the military is to support the political leadership in the use of this conflict management tool. Once a decision is made, the military has to show full support for negotiations and rein in the spoilers in its ranks.

Patience is necessary in negotiating settlement of deep-rooted conflicts because they touch on choices or restructur-

ing of democratic institutions, such as a power-sharing arrangement between the central government and the regions, electoral system design, legislative bodies, judicial structures, and so on. But even if the negotiations drag on for a long time, it is still useful to encourage the parties to keep talking peace.

For clan conflicts and resource-based conflicts between private business entities and indigenous communities, the useful tools military officers in the area can use include mediation and arbitration. Most people involved in feuds prefer arbitration or mediation because these methods dispense justice quickly, and promote peace and harmony in the community. They are less socially disruptive than the formal legal system.

Mediation is a negotiation between the parties involved in the rido assisted by independent and impartial “third party” mediators. The role of the mediator is not to pass judgment or impose a solution, but to assist the parties in understanding their interests and positions as well as the interests and positions of the other parties. The mediator assists the parties involved in exploring and evaluating potential agreements.

Arbitration is a voluntary procedure whereby a neutral person is chosen by the opposing parties to settle their dispute. In arbitration, the disputants or parties with conflicting claims or interests submit their case for settlement by a third party with whom they repose the authority to mediate or arbitrate between them and that they agree that the decision of such arbitrator or arbiter shall be binding upon them.

Understanding the Constitutional Mandate

The tasks of resolving conflicts through pacific means are in accordance with the mandate of the Philippine Constitution. Article 2 (Sec.2) provides that “ To be an effective protector of the people, the military must be able to understand their religion, culture, history and aspirations. Without this basic understanding, the best intentions of the military might be understood or interpreted as anti-people just because sensitivities of the local people are not taken into consideration. Philippines renounces war as an instrument of national policy, adopts the generally accepted principles of international law as part of the law of the land and adheres to the policy of peace, equality, justice, freedom, cooperation, and amity with all nations.” If government is mandated to observe these policies in its relations with other nations, so also, if not more so, is it obligated to adhere to them in its dealings with Filipino citizens. A peaceful approach to manage internal conflicts is not only desirable as a matter of strategy, but a must to implement the peace policy of the Constitution.

The Armed Forces, according to the Constitution, “is the protector of the people and the State.” Even if they are fighting the government, the insurgents are still citizens of the country and as such the military is still under obligation to protect them. How would the military be able to protect the people who are fighting them? Observance of international humanitarian law and human rights standards is the means to do it. In so doing, abuses will be prevented and the image of the military as being feared and seen as an occupying force will be changed to that of a partner in nation building.

Understanding the Muslim Communities and Conflict

“To be an effective protector of the people, the military must be able to understand their religion, culture, history and aspirations. Without this basic understanding, the best intentions of the military might be understood or interpreted as anti-people just because sensitivities of the local people are not taken into consideration”.

This is particularly true in Muslim communities in Mindanao. In most cases, military officers and men assigned in conflict-affected areas are from Luzon and the Visayas and are not familiar with the Muslim way of life. Their lack of cultural sensitivities can contribute to the alienation of the population, who have pre-conceived mistrust of outsiders to begin with.

Without understanding the political and social dynamics in the locality, the military can get embroiled in conflicts that have nothing to do with it. The military officers and men in the field must have the understanding of the dynamics of local conflicts, especially rido, so they can properly respond.

Recommendations

1. For the military to support the peace process, the political leadership has to regularly update military officers, particularly those in the field, on the progress of the negotiations. It is also necessary for them to know the terms and conditions of whatever agreements are reached, like ceasefire agreement, to avoid violation of terms and conditions that might undermine the peace process.

2. It will be useful if military officers and men are exposed to different perspectives on the nature of different con-

flicts in Mindanao, their causes and dynamics. This will broaden their understanding of their role in managing these conflicts.

3. It will be useful if the military officers and men assigned in conflict-affected areas undertake education that will lead to their understanding of Islam and the Muslims in the Philippines. Knowing the religion, culture, history and aspirations of Muslim communities will help sensitize the military to the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of these communities.

4. It is necessary for military officers assigned in Mindanao to acquire skills in mediation and arbitration for them to effectively address conflicts involving clans and resource-based conflicts. The skills should include the traditional ways of settling conflicts.

5. The present efforts of educating the Philippine Marine officers on conflict management has to be extended to other units of the Armed Forces, like the Philippine Army, Air Force, Navy and the Police. The modules have to be improved and move away from the perspective of conflict resolution towards the more pragmatic approach of conflict management: how to deal with conflict in a constructive way; how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process; and how to design a practical, achievable and cooperative system for constructive management of differences.

Prof. Abhoud Syed Lingga

*Executive Director of the Institute
for Bangsamoro Studies*

End Notes:

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CASE STUDIES ON PEACE-BUILDING

**FORGING THE PEACE IN BULIOK:
COLONEL BEN DEOCAMPO DOLORFINO
AND THE 2ND MARINE BRIGADE**

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**FORGING THE PEACE IN BULIOK:
COLONEL BEN DEOCAMPO DOLORFINO
AND THE 2ND MARINE BRIGADE**

*To lead successfully, a person must demonstrate two
active interrelated traits: expertise and empathy.
~ William G. Pagonis in Leadership in a Combat Zone ~*

Introduction

Dark heavy clouds marred the sky as military trucks transporting the soldiers and equipment of the 2nd Marine Brigade (2MBDE) traversed the highway from Cotabato City to Pikit, North Cotabato. At the head of the convoy were military tanks and howitzers. It was the summer of 2003 and the brigade had just been pulled out of Tawi-Tawi and relocated to North Cotabato to maintain peace and order in the barangays (villages) bordering the 3,000-hectare Liguasan Marsh, the stronghold of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Before the arrival of the 2MBDE, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the MILF had been engaged in battle at the Buliok Complex in the last three months. The armed conflict was triggered by several bombing incidents in different metropolises in Southern Philippines and by the brazen kidnapping of teachers and students in Basilan by the Pentagon Gang 1 in 2002. Government troops conducted offensive pursuit operations in Basilan to rescue the victims and capture the kidnapers. Unfortunately, the leaders of the group escaped the dragnet of the military. A few months after, on January 2003, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo approved the deployment of troops to Central Mindanao to pursue members

of the Pentagon Gang, which the government believed to have sought shelter in the 200-hectare Buliok Complex. Among those being pursued were Pentagon Gang leader, Tahir Alonto, and commanders only known by their first names as Rambo and Gary, both suspects in the bombings in Kidapawan and Shariff Aguak in 2002. Just days after the President's pronouncement, the AFP deployed a 2,000 strong military contingent to Central Mindanao to "neutralize and pursue lawless elements" in the area. According to General Senga, then chief of the Sixth Infantry Division, the military's missions in North Cotabato were to:

- ◆ deny the use of the sanctuaries in Central Mindanao by criminal groups;
- ◆ physically eliminate criminal groups; and,
- ◆ secure the Buliok Complex.

The MILF protested against the government's declaration of combat operations in Buliok Complex, but at the same massed up in preparation for the government troops' attack. Tension gripped the area and civilians trooped en masse to evacuation centers as government troops prepared for battle. On February 11, 2003, intense fighting between government troops and the MILF broke out. For two weeks, the combating groups fought it out, displacing people and destroying properties in the Buliok Complex and surrounding communities. Air Force bombers and gun ships pounded the Buliok Complex, forcing more than 1,000 MILF members to split into smaller groups. Media reported that some of the MILF groups took civilian hostages as human shields against military troops who were

hot on their trail. The large-scale attacks caused the evacuation of up to 91,000 people from Pikit and the neighboring villages.

After several weeks of intense fighting, government troops took control of the Buliok Complex and other MILF-controlled villages such as Kabasalan, Rajamuda and Pikit. The military reported that 145 MILF and Pentagon members were killed in battle. Government troops also recovered voluminous intelligence documents of the MILF, ammunitions for rocket-propelled guns (RPGs), M16 and M14 rifles, and communications equipment. Different units of the AFP and Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) established detachments in Pikit and neighboring municipalities to stop the MILF from re-occupying their former camps and to protect the government projects under the Mindanao National Initiatives (Mindanao Natin) being put up in Buliok. Three months after the height of the battle in Buliok, the 2MBDE and other peacekeeping forces were redeployed to Pikit.

The 2MBDE general mission was to maintain peace and order by containing the MILF in agreed-upon areas in the Pikit side of the Buliok Complex. These areas consisted of Barangays Gli-gli, Bulod, Bagoinged, Buliok, Barungis and Kabasalan. The 2MBDE's immediate task, however, was to convince the evacuees that it was safe to return to their respective barangays. This task was made more urgent by the fact that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and non-government organizations (NGOs) could no longer sustain relief operations in the evacuation centers.

For every day that passed, medical and food supplies could not cope with the spread of disease and the increasing number of deaths, especially among the old and the very young. Aid workers and volunteers, desperate and weary themselves, were eager to go home. Most of the remaining 40,000 evacuees, however, were not ready to return to their villages.

The residents worried about being caught in the crossfire since there were military detachments inside their villages. Another immediate and serious threat to the returning evacuees were the life-threatening residues of the combat operations, among them unexploded bombs, land mines, ordnance and booby traps in the communities. Hadji Faisal, Intelligence Officer of the 105th Base Command of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) revealed in an assessment mission that there were unexploded .105 mm., 81 mm. shells and bombs dropped from OV-10 Bronco air force planes in Kudal, Pagalungan; and in barangays Bagoinged and Kabasalan, both in the Pikit and the Pagalungan sides. As such, he advised that these communities be scoured for unexploded bombs and landmines before allowing civilians back to their homes. His report was backed up by various incidences involving civilians accidentally triggering leftover war implements such as unexploded howitzer shells and booby traps in barangays Talitay and Kabasalan in Pikit.

Other than these immediate dangers, MILF leader Hadji Murad also advised the villagers not to return to their communities just yet because there were members of armed lawless groups (ALGs) suspected to be roaming the area,

waiting for an opportunity to destabilize the ongoing ceasefire negotiations.

Tension mounted in the evacuation centers as the Pikit local government increased the pressure on the evacuees to return to their villages. In interviews with media, residents claimed that the government was employing a host of strategies just to force them to go home. These included promises of continuous aid, to threats of stopping relief supply in the evacuation centers, to bulldozing the centers, the non-provision of core shelters and even physical harm. Unfortunately, despite their best efforts, more than half of the 91,000 evacuees remained in evacuation centers. They rationalized that their chances of survival were stronger if they stayed in the evacuation centers where they ate at least once a day, rather than if they returned to their villages, some of which were razed by fire. This situation was the first tough challenge for Col. Ben Dolorfino, a veteran of the Mindanao conflict.

Personal background: Col. Ben Deocampo Dolorfin

Ben Deocampo Dolorfino was born on 10 November 1954 in Dumangas, Iloilo. His parents, Agustin Dolorfino and Amalia Deocampo, were elementary school teachers who later on retired as district supervisors. His father, Agustin, wanted to join the military but did not qualify due to physical impediments. When his sons were of age, Agustin tried to convince his eldest son to enroll in the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) rather than in medicine, but he was unsuccessful. Ben, being next in line, pitied his brother who was

being cajoled into joining the military. To resolve the dilemma, Ben volunteered to take the entrance examinations for the PMA. In preparation for the exams, he enrolled for one semester in an engineering course. He was later on accepted to the PMA.

His experiences inside the PMA were tough and challenging. After the summer camp training, his parents visited him in the PMA campus but failed to recognize him. “I was already standing in front of them but they just passed by me. I called out to my mother and when she turned around she was so surprised at my appearance that tears fell down her cheeks.” Because of the rigid schedule and tough exercises, Ben had lost a lot of weight and was almost as brown as dark chocolate. “My mother wanted me to resign right there and then. I was very thin and was coughing a lot. I thought to myself, ‘But isn’t this what my father wanted?’ I refused to resign and carried on with my training.” Over the years, Ben rebelled against his parents’ wishes for him to resign. “I was determined to see it through.”

In 1976, he graduated with the Philippine Military Academy “Magilas” Class and started his fieldcareer as Mess and Supply Officer of RPS Datu Kalantiaw (PS-76), Naval Defense Forces in 1977. Colonel Dolorfinorecounted:

My parents gave me strict instructions not to join any other unit other than the Philippine Navy. At that time, the Philippine Constabulary was mired in corruption charges and so my mother did not want me to join that unit. She also did not want

me to join the army and air force because she thought that their assignments were too dangerous. So she said “You can only join the navy.” While I was in the navy, my superiors recommended me for flight training in the Naval Air Group. I only told my mother about it when I graduated from the training and became First Pilot. That was in 1977 and it was the height of the armed rebellion in Mindanao. As a pilot for the naval air group, I flew the helicopter for the marines in Mindanao. My group’s task was to evacuate the marine casualties and to bring food and supplies to wherever they were assigned.

He moved on to be the Administrative Officer of Headquarters and the Headquarters Support Squadron, Naval Air Group in 1978 after being on an official flying status for a year. In 1979, while on an assignment in Zamboanga, Colonel Dolorfino met and became engaged to a Muslim woman by the name of Ann, whose lineage was part Chinese and part Tausug. To be able to marry her, Ann’s mother required that Colonel Dolorfino convert to Islam.

In 1981, Colonel Dolorfinowas promoted from First Pilot to Senior Pilot of the BO-105 helicopter. Thereafter he assumed various administrative and operational duties in the Philippine Navy. Since he was doing well in his career, he proposed to his fiancéand got married in the same year. The couple was blessed with three (3) sons: Abraham, Jan Michael and Marvin. In 1985, he was invited to transfer to the Philippine Marines.

As a pilot for the Marines, Colonel Dolorfino received several awards including the Distinguished Service Star (DSS); the Distinguished Aviation Cross; the Bronze Cross; the Silver Wing Medal; the Military Merit Medal; the Military Commendation Medal and Military Civic Action Medals; the CBT Badge “Kagitingan”(bravery); and the Senior Naval Aviator’s Badge. He received one of his awards for the skill he exhibited in flying a helicopter while on a rescue mission in Corregidor. A boat had capsized because of stormy weather but some civilians were able to swim to the shore and cling to a cliff wall. Colonel Dolorfino flew the helicopter as near as possible to the civilians so that a rope could be lowered to them and to steady the helicopter against the storm so as not to crash into the cliff while the rescuers assisted the civilians in going up the rope. From 1985, he climbed up the military career ladder, serving in various capacities in the Philippine Marine Corps. He excelled in many of his assignments. At one time, he was assigned to Infanta, Quezon where the main problem was illegal logging. In just one and a half months, Colonel Dolorfino was able to fill the battalion headquarters and the compound of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with confiscated logs. He accomplished this feat by putting up checkpoints near the three sawmills in the area such that loggers had no choice but to undergo inspection. Some illegal loggers tried to bribe him with P500,000 plus an undisclosed amount as monthly stipend, but he refused their offer. “I told them the good name of the Philippine Marine Corps was not for sale and cannot be bought,” narrated Colonel Dolorfino. Because of his unit’s excellent performance, the DENR awarded it P50,000 which

he turned over to the battalion commander who came to replace him.

In his next assignment, Colonel Dolorfino was assigned to Palawan as the commander of the 6th Marine Battalion. When he arrived, the battalion was on the verge of mounting a mutiny against their commanding officer. He recalled:

Their camp was overrun with weeds, the personnel were no longer wearing their military uniforms during office hours, and everybody was disgruntled. I gave them a challenge. I told them that their unit's personal mission was to win as best battalion in a year's time.

The battalion failed to get the top award in their first attempt, but was first runner-up. In the next two years after their initial attempt, the battalion was recognized as the best battalion nationwide out of 10 Philippine Marine battalions. This feat did not come easy because there were no combat operations in Palawan. Normally a battalion was awarded the top prize when it performed well in a combat operation. But Colonel Dolorfino and his unit did not let this hamper them. Instead, they focused on stopping illegal logging activities in their area of responsibility in Palawan and it was for this effort that they received the "Kahusayan" (best) Award from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) for two consecutive years.

On September 11, 2002, Col. Dolorfino was promoted to the rank of brigade commander.

Being Muslim

Colonel Dolorfino's path to Islam began when he was very young. It was then that he sensed the prevalent prejudice against Muslims.

I was growing up in Iloilo. Maranaos roamed around our town selling mats and blankets. Every time they would pass our street, my parents would call us to go inside the house to hide. This was a common occurrence because even my classmates did this. I asked my parents for the rationale behind their fear and suspicion against the Maranaos. They told me that when they were young some Muslim tribes raided their village and burned down houses. From then on, my parents associated Muslims with violence.

Non-Muslim parents even used their prejudice against the Muslims to make errant children behave: "They would tell us that if we do not behave the Moros will come and get us."

When he was already in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Colonel Dolorfino noticed that even the officers and common soldiers were very prejudiced against the Muslims.

Christian Filipinos are brought up hating Muslims or, at the very least, having so many biases against them. So you cannot expect a Chris-

tian military officer with ingrained biases against Muslims to behave decently once they are assigned in Mindanao because in their mind, all Muslims are traitors because they were conditioned to think in that manner.

When he converted in order to be allowed to marry his Muslim girlfriend, Colonel Dolorfino did not automatically adjust to the requirements of his newfound religion. “At first I was not a practicing Muslim. I converted because I just had to. I did not even know how to pray their prayers even though the Muslim chaplain of the AFP had already indoctrinated me.”

It was in the United States, on a scholarship grant, that he learned how to practice the principles of Islam.

I had a lot of Muslim classmates from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. They taught me the principles and practices of Islam. It was there that I first learned how to fast and pray. When I got back, my wife was very surprised but happy. I started observing the Islam practice of praying five times a day. In 2002, I was able to go to Mecca as a pilgrim.

From a mere requirement, his faith became a way of life. When he became Commandant of Cadets at the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), Colonel Dolorfino planned to build a mosque and library on Islam inside the PMA to expose and educate the future officers of the AFP about Islam beliefs and

culture. He solicited some funds for a professorial chair on Islamic studies for the PMA academe to educate the future officers of the AFP on the real teachings of Islam so that they would understand that a real and devoted Islam was peace-loving and that only fundamentalists tended to exploit the teachings of Islam to sow violence and terror. Colonel Dolorfino was convinced that the mosque construction project was one way to acculturate the cadets to Islam so that once they were assigned to Mindanao or any other Muslim territory, they would not feel so out of place and would be able to better communicate with the local residents.

Many of the cadets will be stationed in Mindanao and many of them do not know or understand the Muslim culture and faith. The mosque, which will include a library, will help them gain understanding. It will provide the cadets a socio-cultural awareness that would make their adjustment easier once they are stationed in Mindanao.

He gave an example of an unfortunate event that happened in the 1980s as a result of ignorance of Islam culture.

If you remember, some army men were massacred in Pata Island in Sulu during the 1980s because they disrespected Islam. They slept in the mosque and slaughtered dogs. When they marched, they shouted Allahu Akbar (Allah is Great) without knowing why. Eventually, they were killed

*by the residents themselves.*⁷

The Muslim cadets enrolled in the PMA shared Colonel Dolorfino's vision and welcomed the project. First Class Cadet Samsudin Lintongan, one of the ten Muslim cadets, said: "The mosque will greatly enhance everything that we are and do. It will help create awareness in the other cadets with regard to their Muslim brothers and sisters."⁸

The project, however, did not push through even though an Arab philanthropist had allocated funds for the project and the PMA had already set aside a 400-meter lot inside the campus where the Islam facilities could be situated. Colonel Dolorfino surmised:

The project was shut down by somebody at the top of the AFP's hierarchy. I find this strange because most of them have been assigned in Mindanao and could already judge for themselves which among their prejudices were true or false. I think it is a matter of being enlightened. We cannot hold the country hostage because of our personal prejudices against Muslims. We have to break down the walls of prejudice built over centuries in order to achieve a degree of peace in Southern Mindanao. The PMA could have been a very good starting point for that.

Civil Military Operations: Beyond Propaganda

“Winning back the hearts and minds of the people as the way to lasting peace”

His understanding and empathy for the plight of Muslim Filipinos made Colonel Dolorfino look at civil-military operations in a different manner. Instead of looking at civil-military operations as being merely a military strategy to placate civilians, Colonel Dolorfino looked at them as an opportunity to address the psychosocial aspect of the internal conflict in the hope of reaching a more sustainable solution to the problems of the community. This was the very same approach he used in the town of Pikit. Using the Comprehensive Approach framework (CLEAR-HOLD-CONSOLIDATE-DEVELOP) of the AFP (see Exhibit 2), Colonel Dolorfino and the 2MBDE served as a bridge and a catalyst for meaningful change in the conflict-ridden communities of Pikit, North Cotabato and Pagalungan, Maguindanao.

Getting settled: CLEAR-HOLD

Upon its arrival in Cotabato City, the 2MBDE established its headquarters inside Fort Pikit in Pikit, North Cotabato. The marine headquarters (HQ) was an old Spanish fort overlooking the entire town of Pikit. The Marine Brigade Landing Team (MBLT)-3 was deployed in Kabasalan, replacing elements of 40th Infantry Brigade (IB) of the PA; while the MBLT-6 took responsibility for the rest of the barangays, replacing elements of the 40th and 6th IB of the PA. The combat support units were stationed in Sitio Niñol, Gli-Gli. The unit’s watercraft assets

were co-located with the patrol base in Bagoinged. Other than establishing their HQ and detachments, the brigade launched OPLAN (mission) OMEGA to subdue the remaining elements of the MILF and other ALGs. This move resulted to three armed encounters with suspected MILF remnant groups in Kabasalan.

After securing their AOR, the next task of the brigade was to help return the evacuees to their respective barangays. Colonel Dolorfino convened a meeting with Pikit's mayor, Farida Malingco, and with the barangay chairmen of the seven war-affected villages of Pikit.⁹ The barangay chairmen were aloof and uncooperative. "Some of them would not even meet my gaze," described Colonel Dolorfino. But Brgy. Chairman Edres Modale explained that their aloofness stemmed from fear. "When the marines first arrived here in Pikit, we were very scared because the marines are known for their fighting skill and we were convinced that the armed hostilities in Pikit would resume," Edres explained.

Colonel Dolorfino opened the meeting with an explanation of their mission in Pikit. He then attempted to draw out from the village leaders what their villagers needed to be able to move back to their communities. At first nobody spoke but later on each of the barangay chairmen voiced out their frustrations with the series of armed hostilities over a span of three years. The statement of Barangay Chairman Jon Malinco of Bagoinged represented the sentiments of the group. He said:

The people are very tired. We just want to be able to continue with our lives without the constant threat of war. Our children have stopped going to school because there are no schools to go to and there are very few teachers who are willing to teach in these areas. Our homes have been razed by fire. Our farm implements have been stolen. When will these trials end?

The discussion dragged on for two hours without reaching any kind of agreement. Colonel Dolorfino remembered:

The discussion kept on going back to the issue of military's total pullout from the Buliok Complex and the surrounding villages. They told us that they were afraid of the military. First, they demanded that the military detachments should be at least 200 meters away from the main villages. Later on, they would change their demand to total military pullout from the area. They did not even want to entertain the idea of us helping them move back.

Later in the afternoon, Colonel Dolorfino and his officers conducted an ocular inspection of their area of responsibility (AOR). The first barangay they visited was Gli-gli. Lieutenant Colonel Fetalvero described Gli-gli as an "MILF-infested area where support for the group was strong since almost everybody in the village had an MILF family member. The people there were die-hard MILF supporters."

Colonel Dolorfino, on the other hand, described the events that transpired in their visit to Gli-gli thus:

I went to Gli-gli to construct a detachment in the area. When we arrived there, the few people who were left approached us and pleaded with us to allow them to evacuate before we conduct combat operations. I told them that we were not there for battle but the people were frantic. They did not believe us. Some of them even tried to physically stop us from entering their village. I immediately looked for a way to defuse the situation and one of the things that caught my attention was their mosque. It was overrun by cogon grass and in general disrepair. I asked them why they allowed their mosque to fall apart. The residents replied that they were afraid of the soldiers that used to man the detachment because every time they held prayers in the mosque, the soldiers would fire bullets in the air. Upon closer inspection, I saw that the soldiers had built foxholes inside the mosque. Hollow blocks were scattered everywhere and the ceiling had been torn down. The residents disclosed that the soldiers used the ceiling for firewood when they cooked inside the mosque.

To defuse the situation, I told my soldiers and the residents that we would clean up the mosque.

Colonel Dolorfino's statement caught the villagers off-guard. But he and his men were determined. They went inside the mosque and began to clean the debris. They inspected the repairs that had to be done inside the mosque. Since it was dark by then, Colonel Dolorfino decided to return to headquarters. Early the next day, he and his soldiers returned with plywood and other construction materials to repair the mosque. Col. Dolorfino recalled:

We spent the whole day cleaning up the mosque and repairing the ceiling and the holes in the walls. Even the women and children came to help with the clean-up. Fortuitously, it was a Friday and so I invited the residents to pray. I introduced myself as an Islam convert. Everybody was surprised. They could not believe that a Muslim could be a marine colonel in the AFP. We concluded the day's activities with evening prayers.

The next day, Colonel Dolorfino and the marine soldiers went back to construct a marine detachment. They were surprised because the men of the village approached them with their machetes. For a moment, Colonel Dolorfino and his men thought that the residents had had a change of heart.

But the tension was defused when Brgy. Chairman Casimiro Guerrero approached Colonel Dolorfino and said that they wanted to help the soldiers clear the area where the detachment was to be constructed. For the whole week, the residents and soldiers worked side by side. The soldiers were

in uniform, but did not carry any arms. Oftentimes, they shared food and jokes to lighten the mood. By word of mouth, other evacuees heard about the soldiers' good deeds in Gli-gli. Mayor Malingco summoned Colonel Dolorfino and congratulated him for his work in Gli-gli. He said that the people were saying good things about the colonel and his men. After the incident, most of the residents of Gli-gli decided to return to their village. Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Fetalvero, who was in-charge of the marine detachment in that area, called for a meeting with the residents and explained to them the purpose of the military's presence in the area. They likewise explained the terms of the temporary truce and the rules that everybody had to abide by to maintain peace in the area.

Narrated one of the barangay chairmen, "Because of the good things we heard in Gli-gli, our fears slowly dissipated and were replaced by hope. " Colonel Dolorfino took advantage of the goodwill established in Gli-gli and organized a meeting with Mayor Malingco and the barangay chairmen. Once again, he explained the mission of the 2MBDE in Pikit and conferred with them with regard to the immediate needs of their villagers in moving out of the evacuation centers. This time the barangay chairmen were more responsive to the colonel's queries. "We discussed how we could harvest our crops and resuscitate our livelihoods. We also talked of ways to systematically transport the evacuees and their belongings," narrated Brgy. Bagoinged Chairman Jun Malinco. The response was the same in all the villages. They asked for the immediate cessation of all combat operations and for the replacement of destroyed property such as homes, farm animals, and liveli-

hood implements. They likewise appealed for livelihood assistance, the resumption of classes and health services.

Mayor Malingco and Colonel Dolorfino expressed that they would explore all avenues to provide the needs of the evacuees. In addition, Colonel Dolorfino reassured the barangay chairmen that it was now safe to go back to their villages contrary to what the MILF leaders had conveyed. The 2MBDE issued Identification Certificates to assure the residents of safe passage in checkpoints of the unit. The 2MBDE also provided 4x4 trucks to transport evacuees back and forth to their villages and the evacuation centers. This provision allowed the evacuees to return to their homes to harvest their crops and clean their surroundings in preparation for their eventual return.

As further assistance to the evacuees, Colonel Dolorfino organized and conducted a weekly Community Service Day, which the unit had implemented successfully in Tawi-Tawi, another conflict-affected area in Southern Mindanao. Colonel Dolorfino and the marines in every detachment devoted their Saturday mornings working with the people in the nearest community on any activity that would improve the lives of the people. Colonel Dolorfino likewise called on other organizations such as LGU officials, NGOs/Peoples Organizations, and other AFP/PNP units to join in its cleanliness and beautification drives. Through the program, Colonel Dolorfino sought to develop the spirit of community service and to impress in the community that the security and development of their areas depended primarily on the villagers' efforts and not on that of outsiders.

This program was also intended as a psychosocial approach to promote harmony and understanding between the troops and civilians, in particular, and between the Christians and Muslims, in general. Moreover, Colonel Dolorfino wanted the other government agencies such as the Mayor's Office, representatives of national government agencies (NGAs), NGOs and peoples organizations (POs) to have a chance to interact closely with the evacuees to facilitate the succeeding rehabilitation efforts. Assisting the Office of the Mayor in relief and rehabilitation efforts were international and local NGOs and POs such as:

- Balik Kalipay and the Pikit Parish Church under the leadership of Fr. Bert Layson;
- BALAY, which was involved in feeding and psychosocial in-tervention programs;
- OXFAM, a British NGO that was involved in providing potable water and other sanitation projects;
- Tabang Mindanao – livelihood projects;
- Handicap International – ran programs for the handicapped;
- Community and Family Services and the United Youth of the Philipines – youth development programs;
- Bangsa Moro Development Authority – implemented

development programs for the MILF and their families; and

- Philippine Business for Social Progress – for livelihood assistance and micro-credit.¹⁰

Other international NGOs in Pikit were the Italian NGO Movimondo, the Philippine Development Assistance Program (PDAP), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).¹¹

The Community Service Day proved very effective in building good relations between the troops and the civilians. Within four weeks from the 2MBDE's arrival, 3,695 families with 18,475 dependents staying at 33 Pikit emergency shelters returned to their villages.¹² Secretary Dinky Soliman of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was surprised at the speed by which Colonel Dolorfino was able to convince the residents to move out of the evacuation centers. In turn, she maintained constant communication with Colonel Dolorfino with regard to any assistance that the DSWD could render to the former evacuees.

Long-term strategy: CONSOLIDATE-DEVELOP

On 19 July 2003, the Philippine government and the MILF peace panels entered into a ceasefire agreement. From an offensive strategy, the 2MBDE shifted to an active defense posture in compliance with the ceasefire agreement. It maintained the relentless conduct of security patrols to prevent MILF incursions and other ALGs, and to secure the various

government rehabilitation projects in Pikit and Pagalungan. Colonel Dolorfino regularly visited the barangays under his jurisdiction. The security situation became less volatile and skirmishes with the MILF or ALGs no longer occurred. The community leaders and villagers attributed the success of the temporary truce to the respect gained by Colonel Dolorfino and the 2MBDE. People felt comfortable about approaching Colonel Dolorfino to tell him their problems and needs. “This was something very new to us. Imagine before the highest military official we could talk to was a sergeant. Now we could talk directly to a brigade commander,” said one resident.

Gaining respect and trust-building

It took some time before Colonel Dolorfino and his men gained the trust and respect of the people. Over the years, the villagers had undergone many unfortunate experiences with other military and police units which they enumerated to Colonel Dolorfino in one of the Community Service Day activities of the 2MBDE thus:

- Pointing of rifles to civilians when talking to them;
- Not paying for items (e.g., household items, crops, or fish) taken from them;
- Butchering of farm animals;
- Random reconnaissance by fire of military detachments;

- Firing of firearms in nearby detachment when they are praying in the Mosque;
- Burning of their houses during military operations;
- Looting of mosques and houses for construction materials; and
- Using of mosques as shelter.¹³

Thus aware, Colonel Dolorfino shared this information with the rest of the officers and together, they formulated strategies to counter the negative experiences. On August 14, 2004, Colonel Dolorfino and his officers organized the Pikit Area Coordination Center (ACC) to coordinate and integrate the efforts of government and NGO in addressing the problems of the people. One of the first programs initiated by the Pikit ACC was the holding of People's Day in the villages of Pikit. "I first encountered the concept of People's Day when I was assigned in Malacañang.¹⁴ Long tables were assembled at the Palace grounds, then ordinary people came in droves to seek assistance from representatives of different government agencies," narrated Colonel Dolorfino. He first tested the activity when the 2MBDE was deployed in Maluso and Sumisip, Basilan, Southern Mindanao. "People in conflict areas only sense the presence of government when there are government troops in their area. So their perception of government is not positive since soldiers are usually deployed for war. Worse, some of them commit abuses against the citizenry. I implemented the People's Day concept so that people would have a positive

perception of government,” shared Colonel Dolorfino.

The objective of the People’s Day was to bring together civilians and officials of national and local government agencies and NGOs in one venue so that they could discuss the problems of the community and arrive at solutions. “By design, this is an effective strategy because it saves both parties a lot of trouble in having to coordinate separately. In this way, the agencies and NGOs could already decide among themselves how to allocate meager resources for rehabilitation. It avoids duplication of services and ensures that the resources are equally distributed among the war-affected communities,” rationalized Colonel Dolorfino.

The People’s Day was usually conducted simultaneously with a medical/dental civic action (CIVAC) to entice the people to attend the activity. Before the target date, Colonel Dolorfino and his officers would personally pay a visit to the offices of the target government agencies and NGOs to explain to them the objectives of the activity and the target results. As the target day drew near, the CMO officer would follow up the invitation with a phone call.

The first two People’s Day in Gli-gli and Kabasalan were successful. Representatives from the mayor’s office, national government agencies such as the DSWD and DepEd, NGOs and POs attended the consultative meeting to dialogue with the residents concerning their needs. Colonel Dolorfino continued to organize a People’s Day for the rest of the affected barangays but these did not go too well. Many of the agencies and organizations lost interest and failed to send rep-

representatives to organizational meetings. Colonel Dolorfino attributed their absence to indifference and lack of resources. Two more People's Day were conducted in Buliok and Barungis before the program was discontinued altogether. Colonel Dolorfino had this to say about the failure of the People's Day in Pikit: Oftentimes, government agencies and local government units think that once evacuees have returned to their villages, they will be able to fend for themselves. But this is far from reality and that is the reason why I applied the Peoples' Day concept here in Pikit. In the beginning, the program worked well but because of the ningas cogon mentality, one by one, the representatives no longer attended the assembly.

Colonel Dolorfino abandoned the People's Day idea, which had worked successfully in Tawi-Tawi and Basilan, and instead resorted to coordinating directly with local government offices, NGAs, GOCCs, NGOs and private individuals residing outside Pikit. What made things more difficult was the expansion of their AOR with the redeployment of the 1MBDE to Lanao del Sur on August 5, 2003. The 2MBDE unit took over the 1MBDE's AOR at the Pagalungan side of the Buliok Complex covering barangay Talitay in Datu Montawal, Maguindanao and barangays Bagoinged, Buliok and Kalbugan in Pagalungan, Maguindanao.

In the 2MBDE's expanded AOR, the unit continued its civil-military activities to win the "hearts and minds of the people." As many evacuees were afraid to return to their homes in the Pagalungan side of Buliok Complex, to coax them to return, Colonel Dolorfino implemented the concept of the Com-

munity Service Day in the barangays of Datu Montawal and Pagalungan.

Based on his experience in other provinces in Southern Mindanao, Colonel Dolorfino knew that it was not enough to establish detachments and patrol the villages to maintain peace. He had this to say about the problem in Mindanao:

The war in Mindanao has gone on for more than 30 years but no long-term solution has been formulated. Most of the solutions could be likened to giving an analgesic to a person with brain tumor. You are merely providing a temporary solution to the symptom, in this case a headache, but you are not addressing the root, or the cause, which is the brain tumor.

The causes of insurgency in Mindanao, whether it be the Abu Sayyaf group, the MILF or the New Peoples Army (NPA), are all the same. They all boil down to four serious interrelated problems, which are poverty, ignorance due to lack of access to education, injustice and disease.

If you analyze it, the rebels have been successful in getting support from the people because they promised to liberate them from these problems. For decades, they have retained their mass support because the people lacked the ability to discern the truthfulness and viability of the so-

lutions offered by these rebels. Their desperate circumstances and lack of education makes them easy prey for anybody with a cause against the government, especially because they feel abandoned by the government.

It's like a tree. If we are going to use militarization in solving the problem, maybe we can solve temporarily the problem on the MILF, the Abu Sanyaf and communist rebels. But later, another generation of rebels will come out. However, if we prioritize solving the four roots of the problems I mentioned, it would be of great help in bringing peace to Mindanao.

If we are to solve the problems in Mindanao we need to address the psychosocial aspect and not only the political, economic and security aspects of the problem.

Guided by his personal beliefs and the AFP's doctrine on Comprehensive Approach, Colonel Dolorfino and his officers actively consulted the people with regard to their needs. Most times, the peoples' needs were easy to discern and Colonel Dolorfino and the 2MBDE immediately acted on them. The psychosocial strategies they proposed focused on alleviating poverty, ignorance due to lack of access to education, injustice and disease.

Mosque rehabilitation. One after the other, the 2MBDE repaired the community mosques in Sitio Niñol, Gli-gli, Pikit Cotabato; Sitio Sapakan, Buliok, Pagalungan; and Sitio Balungis in Kalbugan, Pagalungan. In addition, Colonel Dolorfno and his officers were able to solicit some funds from private individuals in neighboring municipalities for the acquisition of important items for the conduct of Islamic worship such as the Qu'ran, linoleum flooring materials, and sound systems. In addition, they performed the following activities:

- In June 2004, the 2MBDE donated and installed five Jetmatic pumps in Sitio Kalbugan, Barungis; Barangay Buliok; and Sitio Balibut, Bulol all in Pikit, Cotabato. The Muslim community appreciated the gesture because it became convenient to practice cleansing before entering their mosques to pray.
- In July 2004, the Brigade donated five culverts for the Mosque renovation project in Sitio Niñol, Gli-gli, Pikit.
- On 07 August 2004, the unit conducted a thanksgiving prayer for the newly renovated mosque at Sitio Ninol, Gli-gli, Pikit. A medical/dental CIVAC hosted by MBLT-3 was conducted together with this activity. GMA Kapuso Foundation, Inc. provided 18 boxes of assorted medicines for the CIVAC.

Shelter. Shelter was one of the evacuees' immediate needs. Colonel Alinas shared that after the DSWD compared the core shelters built by the local government and the military, the DSWD chose to give the remaining funds to the military because the shelters the military built were a little bigger and

had a toilet, unlike the LGU-built houses which had none. Local residents were tapped for to provide labor, while the brigade took charge of hauling the supplies and materials to the construction sites, and of supervising the construction activities. This strategy proved effective in winning the confidence of the people since there was constant interaction. Moreover, they saw the military engaged in the construction rather than the destruction of property. The women and children were excited about having have a place to reside in, while the men were happy because they were compensated for their efforts and had money with which to buy food for the table.

School rehabilitation. The education sector suffered greatly from the constant hostilities between government troops and the MILF. Very few schools were operational and fourteen barangays had no elementary schools. Very few children were attending classes as they were either in the evacuation centers or their parents chose not to enroll them anymore in order to save money because classes were constantly being disrupted anyway. Some families transferred to other municipalities in order for their children to continue schooling without disruptions.

Schools in Pikit, especially in Pagalungan, were far from the ideal. Teachers were forced to hold classes under the shade of trees because there were not enough classrooms. From 2001 to 2005, Pikit lacked 17 school buildings or 51 classrooms as each school building normally housed three classrooms. Scarcer than classrooms were blackboards. Moreover, children sat on the ground because there were not enough chairs. There were

also very few schools with functional toilet facilities, resulting in the illness of teachers and children such as urinary tract infection.

Luckily, the 2MBDE found an education champion in GMA Foundation⁷ which solicited the 2MBDE's assistance in a Christmas gift-giving activity in December 2003. The Foundation was then looking for a partner that could help them distribute gifts to children in conflict areas. Menchie Silvestre, Operations Manager of the GMA Foundation, shared:

It all started during the distribution activity of the Unang Hakbang sa Kinabukasan 2003 (First Step towards the Future) Project. The primary objective of this project was to encourage children to stay in school, and so we distributed school kits to incoming grade one pupils in the most depressed public schools nationwide. For 2003, we targeted the public schools in conflict areas in Central Mindanao. In our trips, we noticed that some schools were dilapidated and most students were displaced and forced to enroll in other schools.

In December 2003, we had another gift distribution project where, once again, we saw the state of school buildings in conflict areas in Mindanao. This was when we decided to expand the concept of the program to include school rehabilitation.

The Give-a-Gift project of the GMA Foundation with the assistance of the 2MBDE had a huge impact on the communities in Pikit and Pagalungan. Silvestre explained further:

We consciously targeted children in conflict areas to bring them some joy during Christmas time. Even though we knew that Muslims do not celebrate Christmas, the spirit of Christmas is sharing and we wanted them to be a part of our celebration.

For 2003, our target was a camp in one of the conflict areas. We specifically wanted to involve the military in the gift-giving project because we thought that it would help dispel the civilians' fear of the military.

With children in tow, around 500 Muslim parents flocked to Barangay Bagoinged, Pikit to attend the Christmas party organized by the GMA Foundation and the 2MBDE in December 3, 2003. Menchie Silvestre recalled the fun during the party:

I was the emcee and we were playing the 'Bring me' game. You could not play the game in the traditional manner because the community did not have many possessions so you had to be creative in asking them what to bring you. At one point, I was feeling naughty and I wanted to liven up the game, so I asked the children to bring me a soldier's boot. It was a risk because I was not sure how the soldiers would react to being mobbed by children and adults alike. To my surprise, the children did

not exhibit any hesitation but instead, readily grabbed the leg of the nearest soldier to remove his boots. The soldiers, themselves, were laughing hard because of the ruckus the children created. It was then that we, in the Foundation, realized that the 2MBDE would be a good partner for the next phase of our project because of their good rapport with the community. After the program, I was waiting for Colonel Dolorfino to scold me because I broke decorum when I asked for a soldier's boot; but he was a good sport and was very gracious.

The same kind of gift-giving activity was held in Barangay Buliok, Pagalungan and in Sitio Ninol, Brgy. Gli-gli, Pikit. A total of 1,600 children received assorted gifts amounting to P650,000.00. The gift packages included canned goods, milk, toothpaste, toothbrush, bath soaps, crayons, pencils and a coloring book. Older children got shoes.

In a conference at Davao City on December 30, 2003, the GMA Kapuso Foundation Inc. and the 2MBDE forged another partnership by embarking on a lofty project: the rehabilitation of the war-damaged school buildings in Pikit, Pagalungan and inside the Buliok Complex. Both parties believed that poverty and ignorance had been fueling insurgency in the area and the people could only be emancipated from these problems through education. In pursuit of the joint project, GMA Kapuso Foundation hosted the “Unang Hakbang sa Kinabukasan” (First Step for the Future) Fun Run in Manila on February 29, 2004 in order to raise the necessary funds for

the School Rehabilitation Project. With its purpose widely advertised in media, the fundraising activity received wide support from sponsors and runners. It netted P2.4 million.

On 21 May 2004, the partnership of the Marine Brigade and the GMA Kapuso Foundation implemented the School Rehabilitation Project. It utilized local laborers and the unit's personnel. Personnel of the 548th Engineering Construction Battalion, PA provided technical supervision over the project. Project implementation was simultaneously conducted with the Barangay Immersion/Special Advocacy on Literacy/Livelihood and Advancement for Muslims (SALA'AM) operations of SALA'AM students so that the impact of both activities would complement one another.

The project was completed and inaugurated on 21 June 2004. It resulted in the rehabilitation of nine schools for a total of 25 classrooms and the establishment of nine mini-libraries and seven playgrounds. The surplus construction materials were used to renovate the war-damaged mosque in Sitio Niñol, Gli-Gli, Pikit.

Literacy Program. A common problem in conflict-afflicted areas was the absence or lack of teachers because no teacher wanted to be assigned to an embattled area. Thus, the teacher-student ratio in Pikit was 1:50.20. Such was the problem of Mrs. Calima Balabadan, the Department of Education (DepEd) District Supervisor for Pikit, which she shared with Colonel Dolorfino. In turn, Colonel Dolorfino asked the battalion assigned in Bulol if they had personnel with a background

in Education. MBLT-3 responded by assigning four marines who graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education to teach at the Bulol Primary School. The DepEd gave them support by providing the volunteer teachers with lesson plans and reference textbooks.

Aside from becoming involved in teaching, the 2MBDE likewise conducted a feeding program for the children. The volunteer Marine teachers noticed that most of the children were listless and inattentive, traits they attributed to hunger and malnutrition. Colonel Dolorfino was able to solicit 100 sacks of rice from a multi-purpose cooperative outside of Pikit for distribution to the evacuees. Some of the rice went to the volunteer teacher's feeding program, which volunteer parents supported by cooking and serving food daily to the students. The rest of the donated rice was repacked by the 2MBDE into five-kilobags which were distributed to the families in the three barangays of Pikit and Pagalungan.

On September 22, 2004 MBLT-3 capped its literacy program in Bulol Primary School by donating 50 armchairs.

Impact. Every time Colonel Dolorfino visited a village, he brought two sacks filled with snacks that children craved for. The soldier tasked to distribute the snacks was always in complete uniform with bullet rounds strung across his body. "I did this to dispel the children's apprehensions of the military," disclosed Colonel Dolorfino.

Menchie Silvestre, GMA Foundation Operations Man-

ager, noticed a marked difference in the children in the course of her trips in the area. She shared:

The activities and conduct of the 2MBDE had a huge impact on the children. If you go to Brgy. Bulod, you will see the children running to the shore to wave at the soldiers. We felt like we were in a tourist resort rather than a battlefield. They even traded stories and jokes with the Marines who taught them the latest hit songs that showbiz personalities danced to because the people there had no television sets.

Imam Piang shared that when Colonel Dolorfino noticed that a school had no blackboard, he immediately instructed his people to make one and to deliver it as soon as possible to the school. For schools without chairs, Colonel Dolorfino instructed his men to make simple benches for the students to sit on. The 2MBDE, likewise, provided a tent for a school's graduation ceremony because the school had no serviceable building. Imam Piang articulated,

The soldiers respond very quickly. It doesn't take them more than two days to respond to such requests. Their action had a huge impact on the children who slowly identified the soldiers with positive things like new blackboards, rehabilitated schools, playground equipment, etc. When people hear that the schools in their community have been rehabilitated, it entices them to move

out of the evacuation centers and back to their villages. Parents are usually concerned about their children's education and parents in conflict-afflicted areas are no different. It is one of the major factors that influence the direction of their lives.

Health. For the health care of the former evacuees, the unit conducted a series of medical and dental CIVACs utilizing medicines solicited from NGOs, drug companies and private individuals. One of the sites of these medical CIVACs was in Kalbugan, Pagalungan, where 934 local residents and 350 residents of Barungis, Pikit were served by military doctors and civilian medical volunteers.²¹ United Laboratory Incorporated donated P56,194 worth of medicines. Other than medicines, the team distributed 130 bags of rice, eyeglasses for elderly people, and toys for children.

To be more responsive to the actual health needs of the people and to extend the limited supply of medicines, the 2MBDE activated four “Libreng Botika sa Detachment” (Free Pharmacy at the Detachment). As compared to the conduct of the usual medical CIVAC where the supply of medicines was consumed or haphazardly distributed in one session, the program extended the utilization of the medicines by only giving them out as needed. For example, the P50,000 worth of medicines Col. Dolorfino solicited from the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) lasted for four months instead of just a few weeks because of this program.

The medics in each detachment (Islamic Center, Buliok, Pagalungan and Barangays Buliok and Gli-gli) provided free consultation and medicines on a 24-hour basis. Most of the consultations arose from accidents involving farm implements (e.g. cuts and wounds), respiratory diseases, and common colds and fevers. Sometimes residents would request the soldiers to drive them to a hospital in emergency situations.

The “Libreng Botika sa Detachment” had a huge impact on the communities that rarely saw a medical practitioner in their lifetime. It added to their sense of security. A resident of Buliok I shared:

If anybody got sick and needed to be brought to the hospital, all you had to do was go to the detachment. No matter what time it was, the 2MBDE would wake up and would drive you to the hospital. They were unlike the soldiers before them whom we did not dare to wake up for any reason because most of the time they were drunk and we were afraid to get shot.

Livelihood. Upon their return from the evacuation camps in March 2004, the people of Buliok Complex were faced with the problem of picking up the pieces of what was left of their livelihoods. For the farmers, the biggest problems were the lack of capital to buy corn seeds and missing or stolen farm animals and implements. After they approached Colonel Dolorfino with their dilemma, he sought the assistance of the municipal government; but the mayor said that her office did

not have the resources to help them. Colonel Dolorfino then approached the provincial government of North Cotabato, prompting Governor Piñol to provide twenty-two tractors and 1,000 sacks of corn seeds on a “plow/plant now, pay later” arrangement. In just a few months, Buliok was transformed from a barren marshland to fields of green corn stalks. Colonel Dolorfino said:

All they wanted was to have better livelihood opportunities so that they could start their lives all over again and live peacefully as productive citizens in their villages in the periphery of the Buliok Complex.²²

Colonel Dolorfino made further representations with Governor Piñol for the repair of Buliok-Bagoinged and Bagoinged-Buliok roads in March 2004. According to the governor, although the repair of these barangay roads was not the responsibility of the provincial government, he funded the repair works for the sake of the development of the war-torn areas.

The Cotabato Provincial Government likewise donated five piglets. Two of the piglets were given to families in Barangay Inug-ug by the MBLT-3, while three families from Barangay Poblacion Pikit, Gli-gli, and Ginatilan got one piglet each.

In the same manner, Colonel Dolorfino assisted the fishermen whose main problem was where to sell their daily catch. He thought that it would be helpful if the people had a nearby market to go to instead of having to commute to the

town center. He instructed his men to build a row of market stalls in Brgy. Kudal, Pagalungan, situated at the shoreline of the Pulangi River.

Colonel Dolorfino regularly visited the different barangays to check on the situation on the ground. Whenever the people saw him, they did not hesitate to share their concerns with him. One of the residents of Buliok 2 mentioned:

One time during one of his regular visits, Colonel Dolorfino asked us what type of livelihood assistance we needed so that we would not be tempted to turn to criminal activities such as stealing or kidnapping for survival. We told him that we need ed fishnets. Not long after, he gave our barangay chairman P10,000 for the purchase of 20 fishnets priced at P500 each.²³

Col. Dolorfino recalled this incident and shared:

I gave the money directly to the chairman instead of us buying the fishnets ourselves because I wanted them to know that I trusted them. I was also curious as to how they would distribute the nets. I was happy to find out that they maximized the money by bargaining hard with a vendor in Cotabato City. Instead of just 20 fishnets, their barangay chairman came back with 30 fishnets and equitably distributed these to the communities. I feel happy

because I proved that their leaders could be trusted with resources and that the men I spoke with did not hoard the nets for their own use. Presently, one of the local residents, whose father is a middleman, buys the bulk of the fishermen's catch and then sells these to fish traders in Davao. I heard that their business is doing well.

Security breaches

Despite the good relations between the 2MBDE and the former evacuees, some incidents of security breaches occurred. In Kabasalan, one male teenager was arrested by the military after he was caught carrying a rocket-propelled gun (RPG). The barangay chairman, at that time, narrated the incident:

In our experience, once the military catches a lawbreaker, that person is good as dead. The father of the teenager went to my house weeping. He wanted me to accompany him to the headquarters to get his son's body so he could give it a proper burial. Everybody was so tense as we rode a jeep going to the Marine HQ. When we got there, the soldiers respectfully ushered us in and to our surprise we saw the boy alive, eating supper. He looked okay and had no bruises on his body. Once again, the son's father wept, but this time, out of joy.

Two factors for success: Leadership and discipline

The leadership style of Colonel Dolorfino and the discipline shown by the soldiers of the 2MBDE were two of the most critical factors that contributed to peace and order in Pikit. Below are some of the stakeholders' testimonies with regard to Colonel Dolorfinos leadership style.

Testimony 1: MILF Commander

He really cares for the civilians. He does everything to ensure that hostilities in the area do not commence again. He is a genuine person, not only to the civilians but even to the MILF. He listens to the side of the MILF, he gives them the chance to explain. He relayed the MILF's message to the government. During the negotiation process, Colonel Dolorfino attended the meeting inside the Buliok Complex together with the rest of the negotiators without a gun nor military escort. He trusted that the MILF would not harm him inside Buliok. In return for his trust, the MILF became more cooperative with the military and the negotiating panel. If he were a different commanding officer, he would not have joined the meeting without a military escort.

What we notice about him is that he is not afraid to take risks as long as it would help the civilians. His risk-taking has earned him our trust and

respect. Every time he puts his life at risk for us, it is as though he is saying that we are worth dying for. When he entered Buliok without his escorts, it was like saying here I am, I am all yours. You cannot help but respect him for his sincerity and bravery.

Testimony 2: A resident of Brgy. Inug-og

The MBDE that was assigned in Pikit is well-disciplined. I observed that they do not carry arms unless they are in uniform. This made people less afraid of them and it lessened the tension in the air.

Testimony 3: A resident of Brgy. Bagoinged

Colonel Dolorfino, together with his officers, came to our barangay regularly to coordinate with our leaders. Most of the time they were able to provide or assist in our needs. It is a big deal that they do not bring guns with them when they come here because the people really feel nervous when they see guns. It is almost like they get traumatized. Presently, I think our place is one of the most peaceful places in Cotabato. You will not hear of any crimes compared to other places. I attribute this to the presence of marines.

Testimony 4: Imam Abdurahman Datu Piang, Grand Imam

of Pikit

Colonel Dolorfino is well-respected in our community because he shows respect to other people. He is very approachable. When the children run to him, he ruffles their hair or pats them on the head. No matter whom he is talking to, even if the person is the lowliest in the community, he treats them with respect and courtesy. We have never seen him get angry nor have we heard him raise his voice on anybody. As a result, people feel comfortable sharing their concerns and problems with him. You won't feel as if you will be snubbed if you approach him.

His decision to repair the mosques had a huge impact on the people. It symbolized hope. It gave people the courage to start all over again. He does the same for Christians and their churches. Dolorfino saved a lot of money from bullets because he had no enemies in Pikit.

Testimony 5: A resident of Brgy. Gli-gli

When the 2MBDE soldiers ask us to do something like, for example, clean up our community, they join us in the clean-up. Even Colonel Dolorfino holds a machete and cuts the cogon grass side by side with the residents. If the 2MBDE soldiers need anything from the barangay,

whether it just be a plank of wood or a wooden bench, they first look for the barangay captain or any other village official to ask for permission to borrow the object. Then they return it promptly and in the condition they borrowed it. Unlike other soldiers who just get anything without permission. In the past, soldiers would ask for some of our fish when we passed by the detachment or when they went to our market. The 2MBDE is different because not only do they buy the fish from us, they also do not ask for discount.

I salute them.

Father Bert Layson traced the maintenance of peace in Pikit and Pagalungan during Colonel Dolorfino's leadership to several factors.

First, the Marines addressed the other root causes of the problem aside from just thinking in terms of a rebellion, while the other units just addressed the threat through armed force, purely from a national security framework. They did not engage with the people, while the marines approached them from a human development framework. They addressed the community's problems and needs that could not be solved through military operations.

When I attended the briefing/meetings in

barangays, I constantly heard them say that “We are not enemies. Our enemies are poverty, injustice, disease and illiteracy.”

Another thing is that marines walk their talk. They do not abuse their power.

A barangay chairman shared Fr. Layson’s observation:

In the past, if you were an MILF, even if you were not doing anything wrong or there was no evidence against you, as long as it was known by the military that you were an MILF, you would surely be arrested and beaten up. Colonel Dolorfino and his men are different because as long as you have not violated any rule, they just leave you alone. The marines are very disciplined and we admire and respect them for that.

The barangay chairman likewise explained why peace was maintained in the 2MBDE’s AOR:

When people have gainful livelihoods, their minds are engaged on how to further improve their livelihoods and not on how to disrupt the peace. The people, themselves, will protect the peace if they have much at stake.

On August 5, 2004, higher headquarters re-deployed

the 2MBDE to Lanao del Norte. “The Philippine government has pulled out its troops in accordance with an agreement reached with the MILF during the 5th Exploratory Talks held in Malaysia last February,” said General Senga. On September 20, 2004, the 2MBDE completed its pullout from Pikit, North, Cotabato and Pagalungan, Maguindanao. The pullout was one of the conditions that the MILF laid down before it would resume negotiations with the Philippine government.

The pullout of the 2MBDE came as a surprise to many of the residents. Most of them heard about it only a week before the complete pullout. Datu Imam Piang disclosed the sentiments of the people:

When the residents heard that Colonel Dolorfino and his brigade were being transferred to Lanao, many cried. The mothers were worried with regard to how their children would fare if there were nobody there to help them solicit food and medicines.

The people wondered why Colonel Dolorfino and the 2MBDE had to be pulled out of Buliok when they have done so much to help the evacuees. The people said that it did not make sense and complained that the government did not want them to have improved living conditions. I admonished them not to complain. I explained that Colonel Dolorfino was just following the President’s directives and the AFP command. He

cannot do anything about their transfer.

The people feared that once Colonel Dolorfino went away, nobody would be around to help them coordinate with the government. When we approach the government by ourselves, they do not mind us. The government does not listen to us.

Dolorfino showed us how to be a real Muslim. I remember telling him when they were just new here, “The brotherhood in faith is stronger than the brotherhood by blood.” Even if it was no longer their job, the 2MBDE walked an extra mile just to help us. For what they have done, we salute them.

Future plans

Part of Colonel Dolorfino’s future plans was to continue doing his share in resolving the conflict in Mindanao and to help alleviate the desperate conditions of the poor in Mindanao, whether they be Muslim or Christian. He explained:

In Islam, we are taught to take care of our fellowmen. It is an obligation especially if you are in a position to help. This is what motivates me. I am not only a Muslim, I am a military man as well. So my awareness and understanding of the problem in Muslim Mindanao is more thor-

ough than others. I believe that war is not the solution. Unless we address poverty, ignorance, injustice, lack of livelihood opportunities and the worsening health conditions of the people in Mindanao, the security threats in that region will never be resolved. As a Muslim and a military man, if I am able to help reach a peaceful solution in Mindanao, then I do not only help my fellow Muslims, but the Christians as well: peace in Mindanao means progress for the Philippines.

Epilogue

After their pullout from North Cotabato, Colonel Dolorfino was tasked to lead Joint Task Force Lanao which took charge of security threats and the maintenance of peace and order in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, and the cities of Iligan and Marawi. Under his command were two marine brigades, one engineering battalion and 34 CAFGU companies.

On November 9, 2004, just two months after being redeployed to Lanao del Norte, Colonel Dolorfino was immediately faced with a challenge. Kauswagan-based bandits kidnapped Andrea Cianferoni, an Italian aid worker of MOVIMONDO24, and Delabayan barangay chairman Kamlon Moner, a former MILF commander in Kauswagan town, Lanao del Norte. Colonel Dolorfino was part of the team that negotiated with the bandits for the victims' immediate release. Other members of the team were the mayor of Tagoloan town near Kauswagan, Maminta Dimakuta, and re-

ligious leaders who met with the gang led by Acmad Limbo and Ali Maute. Because of the cooperation of major stakeholders, the victims were released unharmed in 24 hours. Colonel Dolorfino disclosed that the negotiators' work was made easier by the help of MILF guerrillas who blocked the kidnapers' escape route. In recognition of his peacekeeping accomplishments, the Sultan of Ditsaan Ramin, Lanao del Sur conferred on Colonel Dolorfino the royal title of Datu Sri Romapenet (peacemaker) on December 29, 2004. Just a few days after, on January 9, 2005, Colonel Dolorfino was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General.

End Notes:

¹The military claimed that the Pentagon Gang was a breakaway faction of the separatist 12,000 MILF which was waging a 27-year armed rebellion for the establishment of an independent Islamic state in Southern Philippines. The Pentagon Gang first gained notoriety on October 17, 2001 when it abducted Italian Guissepe Pierrantoni who was saying mass in Dimatali town, Zamboanga del Sur. From that time on, the Gang has been implicated in over 50 kidnapping cases in Mindanao.

² The military viewed the complex as an "MILF camp hosting criminal elements, a communications center and a training ground for various criminal activities." Before his death in 2003, it was the base of MILF Chairman Udstadz Hashim Salamat.

³The Mindanao National Initiatives (Mindanao Natin) Program was launched by President Macapagal-Arroyo during the Closing Ceremonies of the First Muslim Summit on 24 April 2003 to ad-

dress the continuing peace and order problem in Mindanao. It provides assistance for the rehabilitation of Muslim Mindanao, specifically to the conflict-affected and potential conflict areas. The Office of the Presidential Adviser for Peace Process (OPAPP) serves as the oversight agency and provides overall policy guidance/strategic directions for the implementation of the Program, while the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCo) Secretariat serves as the secretariat for the Program. The projects included in this comprehensive program include infrastructure, livelihood, immunization for children and values formation for MILF rebel returnees. In Barangay Talitay, Pikit, a returnee named Tatuan Mamadra was injured when a 105 mm. howitzer shell exploded in his farm. Mamadra was burning dried grass to clear his farm for replanting when the blaze apparently set off the shell embedded on the ground. In Sitio Butilen, Kabasalan, Pikit, three civilians- Budsal Sambalang, Nards Maulana and an unidentified resident of Butilen-- were injured when they accidentally stepped on booby traps (likely punji sticks) placed near a Marine camp.

⁴Tausug, which means “people of the current”, was a Philippine ethnic group which lived in the northern part of the Sulu province. One of their distinctive characteristics as a people was that they preferred to live near the sea with their houses on stilts. The Tausugs were known for their carvings, metalworks, woodworks, tapestry and embroidery, mat making and basketry, textile and fashion, pottery and other minor arts. <http://www.pinoyfarmer.com/dti/people_tausug.html>

⁵ Moros was the derogatory term used by the Spaniards for the un-

subjugated Muslim peoples of the southern sultanates in Mindanao. It was a label previously bestowed on Spain's Muslim enemies from Mauritania and Morocco, "Moros" (Moors). They applied the term later on all Muslim communities, paying little attention to linguistic or political distinctions among various Muslim societies. The Americans adopted the same label when they colonized the Philippines after Spain. They eventually subdued the Muslims in the early 20th century and persisted in the usage of "Moro." By then, the term had become a moniker among Catholic Filipinos to mean "savages" and "pirates." (Malou Mangahas. 2005. "Peace in the Philippines and that Mindless 'Muslim' label." in www.bangsamoro.com. Accessed March 2005)

⁶Frank Cimat, "Mosque to be built inside PMA," (2002), <<http://www.cyberdyaryo.com/features>>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹Initially, the 2MBDE's area of responsibility was limited to seven villages in Pikit namely Barangays Gli-gli, Bulod, Bulol, Bagoinged, Buliok, Barungis and Kabasalan (see Exhibit 1 for map of Pikit).

¹⁰Roland M. Detabali, "Pikit: The Struggle Towards Freedom. A Development Strategy for Pikit, Cotabato," Asian Institute of Management: Management Research Report, 2004, 62.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹²Philippine Information Agency, June 12, 2003 press releases, "18,475

evacuees re-turned home.” <<http://www.pia.gov.ph/press/p030613.htm>> (accessed November 2004).

¹³ 2nd Marine Brigade, Philippine Marine Corps, After Deployment Report.

¹⁴ Malacañang Palace is the main office of the President of the Philippines in Manila, thenational capital of the Philippines.

¹⁵ Detabali, 40.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ This was the philanthropic unit of one of the country’s biggest television networks, GMA-Channel 7.

¹⁸ A game where the emcee would ask the players to bring her or him a particular object.

¹⁹ SALA’AM literally means “peace” in Islam.

²⁰ Detabali, 40.

²¹ Jeffrey B. Maitem et al., “After medical mission village folk say they want soldiers to stay,” Mindanews. September 16, 2003. <http://www.mindanews.com/2003/09/15nws-mission.html> (accessed October 2004).

²² Sol. Jose Vanzi, 2003. “Special Action Forces to be deployed in Buliok Complex,” Philippine Headline News Online, <http://www.newsflash.org/>

2004/02/ht/ht004185.htm> (accessed November 2004).

²³Funding was sourced from the livelihood component of the Mindanao National Initiatives Program of the national government.

²⁴MOVIMONDO was a non-government organization based in Rome. Funded by donations from the European Union, the Italian government, the United Nations and wealthy benefactors, MOVIMONDO implemented programs in poverty-stricken areas in 23 countries. These programs focused on health care, humanitarian aid, job creation and skills training.

The Sulu Roadmap for Peace and General Benjamin Dolorfino

This case study was written by Prof. Michael Joseph U. Juan under the supervision of Prof. Jacinto C Gavino Jr., DPA of the Asian Institute of Management.

THE SULU ROADMAP FOR PEACE AND GENERAL BENJAMIN DOLORFINO

Introduction

On 27 October 2007, General Benjamin Dolorfino and Professor Ernesto Garilao organized a Sulu Roadmap Closure Workshop to re-convene the stakeholders of the Sulu Roadmap for Peace, a multi-stakeholder effort for peace in the province of Sulu. This process lasting over a year spanned a series of meetings between stakeholders in the province and brought together the different sectors involved in the complex issue of peace in the province.

The objectives of the workshop were two-fold: (1) to reflect on the events that had happened during the roadmap process so as to distill insight; and (2) to revisit the vision of the roadmap to discern the value of continuing the process.

Many things had transpired since the process began in January 2006 and, at the very least, the workshop provided an opportunity to learn from the effort already exerted. Going into the workshop, neither General Dolorfino or Professor Garilao knew if the relationships in the group were strong enough to be worth pursuing further. Both men were eager to find out.

The Province of Sulu

Sulu, an island province of the Philippines, was located

in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The province whose capital was Jolo occupied the middle group of islands of the Sulu Archipelago. Situated between Basilan and Tawi-Tawi, it had been the site of the deadliest clashes between the Moro rebels and the Government forces for decades. Despite several attempts of international agencies, the national government and non-governmental organizations to solve the problem, Sulu remained one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines.

The lack of infrastructure, access to basic services and poor governance contributed to the poverty and underdevelopment of the province. Although hostilities between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) officially ceased when the 1996 Peace Agreement was signed, the economic, political and security conditions of the province did not improve. A major factor was the inability of the Regional Autonomous Government, where the mainstreaming of the leadership of the MNLF had been attempted, to deliver the requisites to a better quality of life. Tension between the military and the MNLF persisted and was sometimes coupled with armed clashes. In almost every armed encounter between the two groups, people were compelled to leave their homes and livelihood.

Violence initiated by lawless elements such as alleged terrorist groups associated with Jama'ah Islamiya and Abu Sayyaf, occasional skirmishes between the MNLF and the AFP/PNP, and local clan wars deepened the already wide social divides and problems. Problems included the lack of

livelihood opportunities, the inadequacy of health services, the poor quality of education and environmental deterioration. These problems, in true cyclical fashion, were blamed for the series of armed conflicts plaguing the province. Thus was the situation of Sulu when General Dolorfino, a veteran of Mindanao conflict, arrived.

General Benjamin Dolorfino¹

Ben Deocampo Dolorfino was born on 10 November 1954 in Dumangas, Iloilo. His parents, Agustin Dolorfino and Amalia Deocampo, were elementary school teachers who later on retired as district supervisors. Agustin had wanted to join the military but did not qualify due to physical impediments. Thus, when his sons came of age, he tried to convince the older one to enroll in the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) rather than in medicine, but for naught. Ben, being next in line, pitied his brother who was being cajoled into joining the military. To resolve the dilemma, Ben volunteered to take the entrance examinations for the PMA. In preparation for the exams, he enrolled for one semester in an engineering course. He was later on accepted to the PMA.

At the PMA, his experiences were tough and challenging. After the summer camp training, he was visited by his parents who failed to recognize him. According to Ben, “I was already standing in front of them but they just passed by me. I called out to my mother and when she turned around she was so surprised at my appearance that tears streamed

down her cheeks.”

Because of the rigid schedule and tough exercises, Ben had lost a lot of weight and grown darker. “My mother wanted me to resign right there and then. I was very thin and was coughing a lot. I thought to myself, ‘But isn’t this what my father wanted?’ I refused to resign and carried on with my training.” Over the years, Ben rebelled against his parents’ wishes for him to resign. “I was determined to see it through.”

In 1976, he graduated with the Philippine Military Academy “Magilas” Class. He started his field career as Mess and Supply Officer of RPS Datu Kalantiaw (PS-76), Naval Defense Forces in 1977. General Dolorfino recounted:

My parents gave me strict instructions not to join any unit other than the Philippine Navy. At that time, the Philippine Constabulary was mired in corruption charges, which was why my mother did not want me to join the PC. She also did not want me to join the army and air force because she thought that their assignments were too dangerous. So she said “You may only join the navy.”

At the navy, my superiors recommended me for flight training in the Naval Air Group. I only told my mother about it after I graduated from the training and became First Pilot. That was in 1977, at the height of the armed rebellion in Mindanao. As a pilot for the naval air group, I flew the helicopter for the marines in Mindanao. My group’s tasks were to evacuate the marine casualties and bring food and supplies

to wherever they were assigned”.

He moved on to be the Administrative Officer of Headquarters and the Headquarters Support Squadron, Naval Air Group in 1978, after a year of being on an official flying status. In 1979, while assigned in Zamboanga, General Dolorfin met and became engaged to Ann, a Muslim whose lineage was part Chinese and part Tausug². Ann’s mother required that General Dolorfino convert to Islam.

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As pilot for the Marines, General Dolorfino received several awards including the Distinguished Service Star; the Distinguished Aviation Cross; the Bronze Cross; the Silver Wing Medal; the Military Merit Medal; the Military Commendation Medal and Military Civic Action Medals; the CBT Badge “Kagitingan” (bravery); and the Senior Naval Aviator’s Badge. One of these was in recognition of his skill in flying a helicopter while on a rescue mission in Corregidor. A boat had capsized because of stormy weather, but some civilians were able to swim to the shore and cling to a cliff wall. General Dolorfino flew the helicopter as near as possible to the civilians so that a rope could be lowered to them.

He also had kept the helicopter steady so that it would not crash into the cliff while the rescuers assisted the civilians in going up the rope amidst the stormy weather.

From 1985 onwards, his military career surged ahead, as he assumed various positions in the Philippine Marine Corps. He excelled in many of his assignments. For example, while he was assigned to Infanta, Quezon, he had to contend with illegal logging. After just one and a half months, General Dolorfino was able to fill the battalion headquarters and the compound of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with confiscated logs. He accomplished this feat by putting up checkpoints near the three sawmills in the area such that loggers had no choice but to undergo inspection. Some illegal loggers tried to bribe him with P500,000 plus an undisclosed amount as monthly stipend, but “I told them the good name of the Philippine Marine Corps was not for sale and cannot be bought,” narrated General Dolorfino. Because of his unit’s excellent performance, the DENR awarded it P50,000, which he turned over to the battalion commander who replaced him.

One of the toughest challenges of his career was when he was a Brigade Commander. After being assigned to Lanao del Sur, he and the 2nd Marine Brigade (2MBDE) were transferred to Pikit, North Cotabato to maintain peace and order after a recently concluded war between the military and the MNLF in the area. They were also tasked to convince the evacuees that it was safe to return to their respective barangays. However, this proved difficult because of the civilians distrust

of the military.

To diffuse the tension, the first things that General Dolorfino and the 2MBDE did were to clean and renovate the mosque of Barangay Gli-gli in Pikit. This act produced the desired effect such that when the 2MBDE returned to the barangay to build a detachment the next day, the residents offered to help them. Thereafter, the General launched the Community Service Day whereby every Saturday, the 2MBDE would go to the barangay to help the residents clean the area, build or fix infrastructure, undertake a medical mission or provide other forms of assistance. He likewise called on other individuals and organizations such as the local government officials, NGOs/People's Organizations, and other AFP/PNP units to help in the program. The Community Service Day proved effective in fostering good relations between the soldiers and the civilians. Within four weeks from the 2MBDE's arrival, most of the families in evacuation centers returned to their villages.

It was during his command at Pikit that Ben Dolorfino first came across the Bridging Leadership Framework. He had then accompanied General Senga who was his Division Commander to a Bridging Leadership Workshop organized by the AIM-Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides for the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) in Davao. Ben Dolorfino and General Senga were invited to represent the AFP in the communities that they were trying to develop. It was during this three-day workshop that they honed their skills

in multi-stakeholder engagement and interacted with their actual stakeholders in the security of their areas of responsibility.

After noticing how most LGU officials were not visible in their respective jurisdictions, he thought of organizing a People's Day that would bring together civilians and officials of national and local government agencies and NGOs in one venue so that they could discuss the problems of the community and arrive at solutions. Such discussions would also help avoid the duplication of services offered by various parties and ensure the equitable distribution of resources across communities. The first People's Day, which was held in Barangay Gli-gli, was successful. Representatives from the mayor's office, national government agencies such as the DSWD and DepEd, NGOs and POs attended the consultative meeting to dialogue with the residents about their needs.

After a few months in North Cotabato, General Dolorfino was redeployed to Lanao del Norte and tasked to lead the Joint Task Force Lanao, which focused on addressing security threats and the maintenance of peace and order in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, and the cities of Iligan and Marawi. A few days after he was conferred the royal title of Datu Sri Romapenet (peacemaker) by the Sultan of Ditsaan Ramain, Lanao del Sur in recognition of his peacemaking accomplishments, General Dolorfino (then Colonel) was promoted to Brigadier General. He worked for the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPPAP) and started his immersion in the peace process.

The First Step Towards Peace

After General Dolorfin'os assignment to Lanao del Sur, he became involved in the peace process as the Chairman of the GRP Ad Hoc Joint Action Group. Although the peace process meant to focus solely on the MILF, the Group thought it also necessary to re-engage the MNLF. The General recounted:

“We thought of re-engaging the MNLF in the peace process because we saw that, assuming they would have a disagreement with the MILF, peace in Mindanao would not be assured. So our objective in re-engaging the MNLF was to promote responsibility and power sharing between the MILF and the MNLF.”³

To start the talks between the GRP and the MNLF, General Dolorfino approached the Chief of Staff of the Bangsamoro Armed Forces, Hadji Jolhambri Misuari, who was Nur Misuari's nephew. General Dolorfino asked him why his group remained in the hills despite the peace agreement.

Misuari cited two reasons to explain their position: the arrest and detention of Chairman Nur Misuari, and the inadequate implementation of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. Thus apprised, the General offered to reopen the discussion of the two issues, on the condition that the MNLF would cooperate in the peace and development projects of the government. Misuari agreed to Dolorfino's condition and

set forth his own: that government would give the MNLF socio-economic assistance.

After settling matters with the Chairman's nephew, General Dolorfino delivered the good news to Nur Misuari. In their conversation, Chairman Misuari expressed his concern over the insincerity of the government. He later agreed to General Dolorfino's proposal, provided that bloodshed would be avoided in the pursuit of the criminal groups.

After talking with Chairman Misuari, General Dolorfino sat down with Director Ryan Sullivan of the OPAPP. Together they drafted the MNLF roadmap on how to achieve peace in Sulu. General Dolorfino noted the necessity of a roadmap that would complement the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. In an interview he said, "A peace agreement cannot promote lasting peace. It is merely a departure point to solve the real problems on the ground. The society should be involved in creating new realities because the present realities are the causes of the conflict in Sulu. The agreement is useless if the society itself does not promote these things." In less than a month, the president approved the roadmap and preparatory moves to implement it immediately began.

Even after the roadmap was approved, General Dolorfino had to contend with implementation problems. It was highly possible that his group would be unable to gather enough support from the people of Sulu for the initiative. As the possibility of failure hung in the balance, he thought of ways to engage all the groups in Sulu, however daunting the

process appeared.

Fortunately, two years ago, he was able to attend a seminar on Bridging Leadership in Davao, which focuses on a multi-stakeholder process to resolve conflict. He thought of the best possible way to engage all the stakeholders in Sulu and ensure the full implementation of the roadmap. Coincidentally, Professor Ernesto Garilao, the executive director of the AIM-Mirant Center for Bridging Societal Divides, talked to General Senga about the possibility of conducting training on Bridging Leadership for the AFP. Their conversation eventually paved the way for the integration of Bridging Leadership in applicable courses in the AFP.

Upon hearing this, General Dolorfino proposed to Professor Garilao and General Senga that Sulu be taken as the laboratory case where the Armed Forces and the stakeholders would be trained on Bridging Leadership. Both agreed with his proposal so that the roadmap created by General Dolorfino became the centerpiece of the discussion during the seminar.

Pre-workshop Activities

General Dolorfino and Professor Garilao knew that the Bridging Leadership Workshop scheduled for March would not be a regular workshop. They knew that for the workshop to succeed, the participants and the facilitators should be prepared for the dialogue. A series of activities was thus conducted to prepare both groups.

1. First Stakeholder's Consultation

There were two consultations prior to the workshop. The 1st Consultative Meeting took place in Zamboanga on February 26, 2006. Present were representatives of the MNLF named by Misuari, the CSOs, and the military. The Governor and some mayors from Sulu came later.

General Dolorfino explained the objectives of the workshop. After the presentations, the group talked about their assessment of the situation in Sulu. Different conceptual maps helped facilitate the discussion.

Different concerns were raised, such as the need for room to vent one's anger, which was seen as crucial to building effective relationships between key stakeholders. There were also discussions regarding other individuals or groups that should be invited to the workshop, among them the other Islamic leaders and mayors who were unlikely to come but should still be invited. An interesting realization dawned on the groups: "There is [an] agreement that we are working for peace and development, and the implementation of the peace agreement; we just have to define the process to bring people together." The stakeholders whom General Dolorfino wanted to convene were:

- The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). This office which directly reported to the President of the Republic of the Philippines was involved in seeking peace agreements between the

Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the different insurgent groups, notably the following: the Communist Party of the Philippines – New People’s Army (CPP-NPA), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the military rebels. OPAPP was seeking an agreement with the MNLF regarding the Misuari breakaway group. General Dolorfino headed the coordinating task force. Aside from General Dolorfino, the OPAPP team was made up of people from the Program Implementation and Monitoring Office headed by Susan Marcaida. This group was active in the writing and the development of the roadmap but it was really General Dolorfino that was driving the process.

- The Military. The military in Sulu was composed of contingents from the Marines and the Army. The overall on-the-ground commander was General Albert Aleo, who reported to the head of the Southern Command, General Habacon. The deputy of the Southern Command was General Dolorfino. There were two brigades in Sulu and their commanders were (then) Colonel Juancho Sabban of the Marines and General Nehemias Pajarito of the Army who reported to Gen Aleo. Each brigade commander had four battalions under him.

Even if General Dolorfino was the deputy commander of the Southern Command and technically held a higher rank than the commanders in Sulu, the Sulu ground commanders did not report directly to him. General Aleo did not openly oppose the process proposed by General Dolorfino but was also not very supportive. He was often unavailable for the

pre-work leading up to the first workshop. General Pajarito was also not very involved because he was already transitioning into a new post outside of Sulu. He would not be very involved in the whole roadmap process. On the other hand, Colonel Sabban openly opposed the initiatives of General Dolorfino mainly because of his belief that there was already an existing peace agreement with the MNLF and further roadmaps were unnecessary. More information would surface when the stakeholder interviews were done about the positions in the Military.

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The CSO group encompassed the entire spectrum of civil society organizations in Sulu. The Pagtabangan Basulta 4 convenors were the most involved but other organizations were brought in as well. There were generally two perspectives of the civil society in Sulu. One perspective was borne by the Pagtabangan Basulta convenors and their allies. These groups were open to the dialogue process with other stakeholders and were willing to improve their capacity to undertake development projects for communities in Sulu. Prominent leaders within this group were Fr. Jose Ante of the Social Action Center of the Archdiocese of the Vicariate of Jolo, Dr. Hanbal Barra, a professor at the Mindanao State University – Jolo, and Abdulsali Ahalul, a businessman and member of the Sulu Chamber of Commerce. The other group consisted of advocacy-based civil society organizations that mostly worked on improving community awareness of what they believed to be the growing militarization of Sulu. Notable leaders from this point of view were Cocoy Tulawie and Atty.

Ulka Ulama, both from a group called the Concerned Citizens of Jolo.

An inclusive process was undertaken such that presentations were made to all the CSOs interested in the process. Efforts were exerted to ensure that the CSO group included those normally outside the network of Pagtabangan Basulta as well as those that, in the past, expressed negative views of the military or some other stakeholder. Once the process was agreed upon, the groups decided who should represent the CSO group.

- The Local Government Units (LGUs). The elected officials of the province and the municipalities of Sulu constituted an important stakeholder. Recognized as important personalities in the area, they decided on how local government funds should be spent. Although invitations were sent to the Governor and all the mayors of the 18 municipalities of Sulu, invitations to the mayors of the municipalities with an identified MNLF presence were prioritized. Funding support for this initiative was provided by the Governor of Sulu, Hon. Benjamin Loong. Gov. Loong had known Prof. Garilao since the latter was in the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP). The other supportive local elected officials were Mayor Salip Aloy Jainal of Indanan and Mayor Al Kramier Izquierdo of Jolo.
- The Philippine National Police (PNP). Many of the issues in Sulu dealt with the maintenance of law and order, which was generally viewed as a police function. Each municipality in Sulu had a police contingent tasked to work

with the municipal governments to maintain order in the areas. The PNP Provincial Director, Col. Ahiron Ajirin was involved in the process as well as Col. Sajiran Sakilan, the Patikul Chief of Police, and Col. Usman Pingay, the Indanan Chief of Police. These municipalities were identified because they were the areas with the strongest MNLF presence. Their presence was secured because of the directives issued by the governor and by General Dolorfino.

- The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The standing peace agreement between the MNLF and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) signed in 1996 stopped hostilities for many years. In Sulu, however, there remained a group of combatants in the hinterlands commonly called the Misuari group which, led by former Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Governor Nur Misuari, resumed the armed struggle against government in November 2001. While Nur Misuari had already been captured, the group still maintained armed camps in Sulu and had engaged in numerous armed encounters with the Military over the years.

The notable commanders of the MNLF in Sulu are Chairman Khaid Adjibon and Ustadz Habier Malik. It would, however, be impossible to conduct a dialogue with them because there are issued warrants of arrest for them. The dialogue involved MNLF leaders who were not engaged in the armed conflict. A number of former political officers of the MNLF remained within the bounds of society to continue advocating for the implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement and the release of Nur Misuari. This group included among them im-

portant members of Sulu society like Dr. Samsula Adju, a professor at the Mindanao State University – Sulu and Engr. Joselito Jilhano who was connected to the Jolo Water District. Gen. Dolorfino also met with Nur Misuari and sought the latter’s blessing for this initiative. Misuari recommended Kong Jamasali to be included in the dialogue who was immediately contacted and invited. These leaders did not have authority over the MNLF commanders but had open communications with the armed groups.

2. Generative Interviews

After the first consultation was done, generative interviews were conducted from 1 to 10 March 2006 with select respondents from the different groups. The questions operated on different levels. They ran from “Would you mind if I asked you a personal question?” to “What about the situation in the province of Sulu, do you think it will improve or do you believe that things will get worse?” Topics ranged from the personal (experiences, convictions and roles performed) to the social (current reality, predicted future) realities of the respondent. Experiences recounted at the personal level concretized the theoretical reality usually passed down as filtered, “censored” data.

The interviews gave the facilitators a unique chance to share in the reality of the people in Sulu. Dialogue Interview questions were prepared and the information was collated and given to the facilitators. The specific representatives per sector that were interviewed were the following:

There were many varied answers in the generative interviews. A respondent from the PNP said, “I would really be happy if military operations ceased, so that my family won’t have to evacuate from time to time.” Someone from the AFP said, “I hope to see Jolo de-militarized...If de-militarization is not possible, then even just a reduction of forces will do.” A

Sector	Name	Designation / Office
Military	Gen. Alberto Aleo	Commanding General, Task Force Comet
Military	Gen. Nehemias Pajarito	Commander, Philippine Army Brigade
Military	Col. Juanco Sabban	Commander, Marine Brigade
Police	Col. Ahiron Adjirim	PNP Provincial Director
Police	Col. Sajiran Sakilan	Chief of Police, Municipality of Patikul
Police	Col Usman Pingay	Chief of Police, Municipality of Indanan
MNLF	Dr. Samsula Adju	
MNLF	Joselito Jilhano	
MNLF	Asjad Muksin	
Local Government	Hon. Salip Aloy Jainal	Mayor, Municipality of Indanan
Local Government	Hon. Tambrin Tulawie	Mayor, Municipality of Talipao
Local Government	Hon. Al-Kramier Izquierdo	Mayor, Municipality of Jolo
Civil Society	Luis Go, Jr,	President, Sulu Chamber of Commerce
Civil Society	Atty. Ulka Ulama	Concerned Citizens of Sulu
Civil Society	Ustadz Habier Mohammad	Sulu Ulama Council

CSO respondent declared: “We will have to achieve peace first before we can see progress.” “Who would not like to have a peaceful life? Everybody knows by experience that war destroys, while peace builds. Only fools would want war and poverty...” an MNLF respondent said. Apparently, peace was a running theme in their answers.

Despite several efforts, however, peace remained elusive except for certain sectors in the government. Many respondents pointed out how Sulu remained in the dark. For instance, an MNLF respondent remarked, “Since when did we become better off? We did not experience that because it is not allowed to happen to us Muslims by the Christian government.” A CSO representative said, “Everybody wants a decent and honest living. But how can you make it in an environment like this...?” But they also agreed, “If left alone, things will get worse...”

Amidst all the gloom, little sparks of hope remained in these people. Sincerity and honesty in service were two virtues identified by some respondents as key to improving their situation. And an important insight was best expressed by another respondent who said, “If I’d be [given] the chance, I will talk with the leaders in Sulu. I will persuade them that it is time for us to think about the future of the next generation. We only have one life to live, we should make the most of it by living it well.” The comments struck Professor Garilao because, according to him, “The interviews captured their hope and dreams, fears and inadequacies, and most importantly their goals and direction.”

Divides among the sectors were most apparent, as were their differing perspectives on the same issue. For example, who should claim credit for improvements in the area: the military or government? There were tensions too between the national military and the local police in terms of discrepancies, of situation and roles. It was the general sentiment of some in the Military that they were taking on what should be the function of the police when they would conduct operations to stabilize the local peace and order situation. On the other hand, the police believed that they were not equipped to deal with local criminals and armed groups and that it was the Military that should handle these groups since they have the larger force and were better equipped. The MNLF and CSOs were pessimistic, while government was optimistic. One thing was certain, however: they would share the same future.

The people were similarly aware of the discrepancies between the current reality of Sulu and what they dreamed it could be, and it was this dissatisfaction that pushed them to act in the only way they knew how. The problem lay in the development of the process and how to get everybody to agree to follow it.

3. Second Stakeholder's Consultations

With the design finally in place, it was now important to give the stakeholders the final draft of the design, the objectives, processes and expectations. Professor Garilao went to Sulu and first spoke with the CSOs leaders assembled by the Pagtabangan Sulu and the Peace and Unity Task Force. The

group then went over the design. Most of those who raised objections were unfamiliar with the BL process. That they viewed or interpreted terminologies in the same manner could not be presumed. Some of the issues raised during the consultation were:

- *“Why do I have to co-own the problem? The problem was created by outsiders; why do I have to own it?”*
- *“The Americans have to get out of Sulu. Will this be discussed? Americans could be out of the picture.”*
- *“Will the senior military officers be there?”*

Professor Garilao clarified that the workshop would be an opportunity to thresh out matters because the senior military officers would be present. He also assured the CSO leaders that the local government officials, particularly the mayors, had been invited. Professor Garilao mentioned that the two MNLF representatives he met looked forward to the meeting.

The last session was done with the military. General Aleo was not available but the brigade commanders of both the army and the marines were present. As soon as Professor Garilao started presenting the design he could sense the restlessness of the participants. Apparently, while discussions and agreements were made with the top commanders, this did not necessarily mean that the ground commanders were in agreement. Professor Garilao recounted the conversation with the battalion

commanders:

“Why talk peace with the MNLF? Aren’t they finished? Are we going to revive them? Why not just concentrate on development?”

Why were we not consulted for this road map? We should get our act together. General Dolorfino is not from Sulu. He does not know the conditions here.

We bore the brunt of the fighting here. The people go to us since the local government officials are not in the stations most of the time. Only the military is around.

Why are we talking about the release of Misuari when he is guilty of corruption and many crimes? He was given his chance and he had nothing to show for it. Why are we soft on Misuari when we are tough with the military offenders? Why not make him pay for his crimes?

Professor Garilao reflected

The resistance was obvious. I could sense why they were actually saying what they did. First was the lack of consultation. They had not been previously consulted and I could see that they could not pick up the idea that they were part of the process in coming up with the final roadmap.

Second, they were in pain. Their complaints against the police and the local mayors had not been acted upon and yet they were being asked to put their lives in danger on a daily basis.

I could also sense marine politics between Sabban, the highest ranking Marine commander in Sulu, and Dolorfino with regard to [other issues]. I would later also find out that both Sabban and Dolorfino were front-runners for the Marine Commandant position as soon as it became vacant.

After the exchange with the officers, Professor Garilao thought it futile to continue the consultations. He thought that the group was stuck and was not open to further discussion, although he did tell them that he would communicate their concerns to General Dolorfino. He also recommended that General Dolorfino should meet with them before the training.

Professor Garilao immediately called General Dolorfino in Zamboanga to report his recommendations. He asked if the attendance of the military officers could be made optional, but General Dolorfino said that there was no such thing as ‘optional’ in the military. Professor Garilao further conveyed his concern that the military officers might walk out of the workshop given their issues; but General Dolorfino assured him that the officers would not walk out and that the workshop should proceed as planned.

Following the conversation, Professor Garilao decided to modify the plan. As early as Day 1, the workshop would gather all the stakeholders so that the military would immediately face the police and the MNLF; the Sulu Peace road map would be tackled on the fourth day. It was also agreed that the General Dolorfin would meet the different officers prior to the workshop and he did, one day before the workshop. General Dolorfino recounted how it went:

The military clearly did not like the idea to include MNLF in the discussions. They had two major armed clashes in the last year, and wondered why they had to include them. I understood their sentiments. They had just fought; and now they were going to be involved in a discussion about the problem.

I ended the consultation by telling the military that they were hiding in their box, like hermits. They had to get out of the box and dialogue with other stakeholders and come with a collaborative assessment. I said the Sulu situation was a complex problem. If you are going to change society without their concurrence, you will have to use force and if you use force, there will be resistance.

You have to get out of your box, I said, interact with the other stakeholders, dialogue with them, learn more about the problems that you are confronting so that they will have co-ownership of the problem and will collaborate in coming up with solutions toward creating new realities. The present realities are the results of the present problems,

I said. I then showed them how the problems are multi-dimensional and inter-dimensional: the problems have many dimensions, not just the military.

In that meeting the military admitted that they were all part of the problem. That was the beauty of the meeting; they admitted to their role. They said, “We are also contributing to the problem. We use too much force. Because of the bombing and shelling, civilians get displaced. In the process, there are military abuses, human rights abuses and insensitivity to the local culture.” I replied and said “Great! During the seminar I will say this: that you reported that you are part of the problem.” In the end, they softened up and their resistance to participating was less.”

The Bridging Leadership Seminar

During the first day of the seminar, a lot of problems began to manifest themselves. Sectors began forming their own groups and the way the participants were talking was highly intimidating. Interactions across sectors always ended up in debate. Professor Garilao eased the tension by saying, “You cannot achieve anything by debating. You can only dissect the problem if you will dialogue. This involves actively listening to the one talking and seeing the problem in his eyes or having empathy for the speaker.” Eventually the atmosphere changed and the military and the MNLF started to talk rather than debate.

Another problem encountered came in the form of a group of foreigners who wanted to join the seminar. One of the foreigners was a representative of the American forces, while another belonged to the GRP-MNLF Peace Working Group, which an NGO called the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) had put up⁵. Civil society did not want any foreigners around during the seminar. The one participant who spoke for civil society explained:

“We, as a group, decided not to allow the foreigners to attend the seminar because they are not stakeholders in this issue. They cannot be one because they have their own programs and agenda in going to Sulu.”

Consequently, the foreigners were not allowed to attend the seminar, which fact led to the GRP-MNLF Peace Working Group’s feeling threatened. They then allegedly started to spread malicious text messages about General Dolorfino and the seminar. As soon as the General found out, he talked to the group and explained why they were not allowed to join the seminar. One, civil society did not feel comfortable with foreigners present in the seminar. Second, the 1996 Final Peace Agreement was a sensitive issue. It was a tripartite peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines, the MNLF and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Involvement in security and political matters by other groups would violate the agreement. General Dolorfino did offer them the option of participating in future meetings as a socio-economic working group. Until December 2006, CHD had not decided whether they would.

The aforementioned was not to be the most serious problem encountered during the seminar. At about 2 p.m. of the same day, a bomb exploded in the Notre Dame of Jolo Cooperative Store in downtown Jolo, killing eight people and wounding many others. A Marine officer near the vicinity of the explosion became suspect because he was found carrying a plastic bag with wires⁶. Rumors about the involvement of the military in the bombing immediately circulated, thereby disrupting the seminar as some Marine participants left to “rescue” their man from the police. Other military officers also went to the scene for support. Still other participants left to secure their families, fearing that the military and the police might have an armed encounter because of the arrest. The following day, the military participants explained why there was tension after the bombing. Everyone was reassured that it was just a matter of miscommunication between the two parties.

Sulu Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group and the Sulu Roadmap for Peace

The seminar succeeded in opening lines of communication and establishing relationships between the stakeholders. After the seminar, some of the groups convened on their own. Aware that sustainability would be an issue based on his experience⁷, General Dolorfino organized the group that attended the seminar and called it the “Sulu Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group”. Instead of the usual organization consisting of a president, vice-president, etc., a convener for each sector was assigned. Then committees were created to focus on each dimension and implement the necessary projects.

During the seminar, the roadmap that General Dolorfino and Director Sullivan made was presented. Originally containing three components namely, security, socio-economic, and political, it was modified by the participants to include two more: cultural and environmental. It was also agreed upon at the seminar that the group would make its own roadmap, which would thus be a localized roadmap. Given the time constraints, however, it was agreed that the Manila-based members of the advocacy group would take care of reformulating the roadmap and would present this to the whole group later on.

General Dolorfino did not have an easy time drafting the roadmap in Manila. “Our first meeting was a failure. We weren’t able to write anything because there were so many different ideas. So I thought, I would write it out first, then present it to the Manila group,” General Dolorfino recalled. It was in the second meeting that the Manila group was able to finish the roadmap which was then presented to the other members in Sulu.

Although the initial roadmap was created under the auspices of the OPAPP, the final roadmap would later become localized, with all the members of the Sulu Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group contributing their respective outputs. It was then decided that the adopted roadmap would be implemented by the area coordinating center of Sulu.

Roadblocks to Peace

Not all members of the military welcomed the opening

of communication lines and the forging of new relationships between the military and the MNLF. Not everyone was ready to break out of their shells, as clearly illustrated during the visit of the OIC to pave the way for the resumption of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.

General Dolorfino, in accordance with the Sulu Roadmap and in coordination with the MNLF representatives of the Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group, had organized the OIC's visit to the Philippines. This was to serve as a fact-finding mission to determine the problems in Sulu and which provisions in the agreement had not yet been implemented in preparation for the meeting of the tripartite council three months later.

In order to facilitate the meeting of the MNLF with the OIC, the GRP decided to implement a Suspension of Military Operations (SUMO). Kilometer 4 in Jolo was set as the assembly area but the AFP provided some conditions to ensure the security of the OIC: Kilometer 4 was designated as a strictly no-firearms zone. Two holding areas (Timbangan for the Panamao group and Buansa for the Indanan side - see map in Exhibit 5) were put up two kilometers away from Kilometer 4 in order to ensure that the order was strictly implemented.

The MNLF requested that they be allowed to carry at least five guns, a request the general in charge initially granted. Later on, however, the general changed his mind because it would indicate a show of force. General Dolorfino personally thought, however, that the military should not attempt to hide

the issue of having a show of force because this was specifically what the meeting was about. He met with the Indanan group who no longer wanted to go to the assembly area any longer because they were afraid. They said, “General, if you want to go to Buansa, ask for some security from the Marines.” Failing to do that and despite the risk, he went ahead to Buansa with the wife of the leader of the Indanan group. The other MNLF members did not want to join him.

On the second day, at two in the afternoon, he talked with another general. This general accused General Dolorfino of working for the MNLF. The general’s unit had heard the radio transmission of the MNLF saying that the MNLF troops were waiting for General Dolorfino before making their move. General Dolorfino explained that he was going there merely to fetch the MNLF to ensure that they were going to comply with the terms set by the military. After a lengthy explanation and some clarifications, the other general reluctantly believed General Dolorfino.

It was late in the afternoon and General Dolorfino still had not eaten. He had to go back to Panamao, which was an hour away, to see the other MNLF group. He told the other general to advise his detachment in Timbangan to let the MNLF pass and the general agreed. However, on the way to Timbangan, he saw a 6x6 truck barricading the road near the Headquarters of the 51st Infantry Battalion of the Army in barangay Bayug in Timbangan. When he spoke to the soldiers guarding the area, they said that their general’s instruction was to not let the MNLF pass. He tried calling the general’s cellphone but it was not accessible. He then called the Southern

Command of the AFP and asked if they could contact the general through the military line. They did and the general said that he had changed his mind and would let the MNLF through the next day.

However, the next day would be too late for the MNLF to go Timbangan. The other general offered to call General Dolorfino by radio but the call never came. General Dolorfino grew alarmed because it was getting dark and the MNLF would not be able to go anywhere as it would be too dangerous. There was also the threat of a mis-encounter. Adding to his worries was the embarrassment that the GRP would be subject to if the MNLF failed to attend the meeting the next day.

So General Dolorfino called the commander of the AFP Southern Command to explain the situation. The commander called the general who had not wanted the MNLF to pass. That general said he would call General Dolorfino and instruct his men to let the MNLF pass. It was five in the afternoon by then and still the general had not called. So General Dolorfino decided to resume his trip to the Panamao group. Along the way, when he passed another military detachment, he hoped that the instruction had already been relayed by the general. It had not.

By the time he arrived in Mt. Bitan-ag where the Panamao group was, the latter's vehicles had already made a U-turn because they had been waiting an entire day. He talked to the leader of the group, Ustadz Malik, who said, "It is apparent that the military does not want us to pass. We know

that there is a 6x6 truck blocking the road. We are ready for peace. We have our wives and children with us and of course, our guns for our security. Our wives are even wearing make-up and are wearing native dresses. We are ready for peace, but if the military does not want us to pass, then we'll just see each other in war. But you are not included there General, you are the exception."

General Dolorfino returned to Jolo, arriving at seven in the evening. There he learned that the Indanan group found out about what had happened to the Panamao group, and to sympathize with them, they decided not to attend the meeting.

General Dolorfino tried to iron out the situation that night by calling and text messaging various personalities. Due to the low capacity of cellular sites in Sulu, however, he failed to reach anybody. General Dolorfino said, "I wasn't able to sleep that night because I thought of all the things that I had done and how they were possibly wasted in just one day. I even thought of not doing anything so that the two generals would take the blame, but I could not do it."

At five in the morning the next day, he was able to contact the commander of the AFP Southern Command. He explained the situation and proposed a remedy. Thinking it too late to reorganize the entire visit of the MNLF, he decided that the OIC representatives should be the ones to go to the MNLF camps.

The commander agreed with General Dolorfino and the

plan was immediately put to action. At that time, the other general who had refused access to the MNLF was panicking because he realized the implications of his actions. He instantly became accommodating to General Dolorfino but rather than lecture him, Gen Dolorfino merely accepted their cooperation.

The OIC first went to Buansa for the Indanan group after which the group joined the OIC on their trip to Bitan-ag where the Panamao group was. The military could not do anything at this point because of the presence of the OIC representatives. In Bitan-ag the military, the OIC, government representatives and the MNLF converged in a scene never before seen. It was quite a sight to behold: the military and the MNLF, both carrying machine guns, walking beside each other toward the MNLF camp. During the program in Bitan-ag, all commanders and General Dolorfino spoke. After the program, all the commanders, government representatives and the OIC representatives gathered for a meeting to talk about the situation in Sulu. Secretary Jesus Dureza of the OPAPP said it was about time for a cessation of hostilities in the province.

It was decided then that the military would extend the SUMO indefinitely. An informal tripartite agreement was passed to end the hostilities in the province. The meeting proved to be a success because the OIC gained an appreciation of the real problems. They saw the rationale behind the hesitation of the military to allow the MNLF through the other day. Somehow, the cancellation of the initial meeting became a blessing in disguise.

After the OIC visit, some people in OPAPP urged General Dolorfino to have the two generals relieved in Jolo so that he would be able to proceed with his work unimpeded. To the surprise of many, General Dolorfino turned down the suggestion. He reasoned that it was better to have officials who had learned their lesson rather than a new set of commanders who might possibly give him the same problem.

Through the Bitan-ag visit, the first objective of the security component of the roadmap to promote ground stability was achieved. The informal tripartite agreement to cease hostilities was similar to the ceasefire mechanism of the GRP-MNLF. In terms of implementation, however, it was somehow different. Per the new agreement, the civil society would be part of the local monitoring team. A team was also organized to facilitate military operations in or near the MNLF area to prevent armed confrontations between the military and the MNLF. This team was necessary because armed encounters between the two groups often occurred whenever the military went after the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the latter hastened to the MNLF camp or near the camp. In the process, the MNLF became involved because the military encroached on their territory. So this team would facilitate the operation of the military near or in the camp of the MNLF and prevent armed confrontations between the two forces.

Continuing the Dialogue

On 1 May 2006, about 90 percent of the original participants met again in Jolo, and was presented the roadmaps.

Prof. Garilao presented the Sulu Roadmap crafted during the training. A refresher course on the key concepts and theories discussed during the training followed. General Dolorfino came next to present the proposed Sulu Roadmap that the BL group members in Manila had revised. He gave extensive details on each of the components of the new roadmap which used the framework of the Final Peace Agreement in 1996.

General Dolorfino admitted that he used to believe that military action was the solution to the Sulu problem. Seeing how the same problem still existed after thirty years, however, he acknowledged the need for a different approach. An open forum was conducted to deal with the concerns of the other participants, to clarify certain concepts, incorporate suggestions and continue the ownership of the stakeholders of the roadmap.

The group saw that it wanted to go ahead and establish itself as a link between sectors. To better improve the organizations, they organized themselves into the BL Advocacy Group Organization in the hope that this would facilitate future meetings between the sectors. The BL Advocacy Group Organization initially had a hierarchical structure (a president and other officers) but eventually it was decided that a convener/representative structure with the groups taking turns at becoming the secretariat be installed. The secretariat staff of Pagtabangan Sulu, another project of the AIM-Mirant Center, was assigned as the lead secretariat whose role was to train the other secretariats.

The group discussed the mechanisms to bring forward

the intended results. There were plans to form joint groups between the GRP, the MNLF and the CSO that would serve as the local monitoring and coordination mechanism for the cessation of hostilities between the MNLF and the AFP. Incidents such as kidnappings would be addressed by the Joint Task Force Unit (AFP/PNP/CSO) and the Joint Action Group (MNLF/GRP).

Having groups monitor the resources for development interventions, such as the joint planning and oversight by the AFP and PNP of the funds given to the other sectoral groups to ensure their proper use, would promote multi-sectoral participation and transparency in the transactions. There were other concerns raised such as the inclusion of education in the socio-economic program, crimes against Christians in the area, and others, which were discussed in the dialogues of the different parties. After this, the groups formally adopted the Sulu Roadmap.

Days after the general meeting, the pace at which Bridging Leaders set their vision to reality accelerated. On 2 May 2006, the Area Coordination Council for Sulu approved and adopted the Sulu roadmap, and the members of the committee for the ACC who were elected mostly came from the Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group. After the workshop, General Dolorfino met separately with some of the committees to help them develop their plans and programs. These plans and programs were finalized when the group met again on July 29, 2006.

Agreements on Security

The security arrangements made to minimize the collateral damage of military operations were deemed one of the notable results of the work of the dialogue group around the Roadmap document. These arrangements were designed around the operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). In the process of catching the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu, one of the problems encountered by the military was the tendency of the ASG to move closer to the MNLF camps whenever the Military would mount operations against them. Consequently it would seem like the Military were moving against the MNLF positions, thereby almost always resulting in a mis-encounter⁸ between the Military and the MNLF. This would leave openings for the ASG to escape and would displace residents who fled from the fighting.

The security committee had members affiliated with the political arm of the MNLF. While they were not the commanders of the armed MNLF forces, they had open lines of communications with those commanders. General Dolorfino used these connections to broker an agreement with the MNLF commanders around a large military operation called Oplan Ultimatum. The agreement was that, during the operation, the MNLF forces would withdraw to three designated areas prior to launching the operation. It was also agreed that the MNLF forces would drive away any ASG elements that would try to get into their areas. The Military agreed to not go into the MNLF areas but were free to hunt the ASG outside those designated areas without a threat of any mis-encounter.

The agreements were put in force when ‘Oplan Ultimatum’ was launched on 1 September 2006. There were some difficulties in coordination but, for the most part, the agreements held. During the initial months of the operation, it was reported that there was better coordination in the operations to catch the ASG and there were fewer skirmishes with the MNLF. As a consequence, too, the incidence of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the areas went down.

Dialogue on Military Operations during Ramadan

Military operations began in September 2006 but continued up to October, the beginning of the month of Ramadan⁹. Led by their Muslim religious leaders, the communities affected by the ongoing hostilities had two issues regarding the continued fighting. The first issue was connected to the religious significance of the month of Ramadan. Saying that no blood should be spilled during this month, the leaders openly advocated the cessation of all operations during Ramadan.

The second issue was connected to the preparation for Eid’l Fitr, the Muslim celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan. Being one of the most important Muslim celebrations, it was customary to have a large celebration on this occasion. Many people who had farms within or close to the areas where Military operations might occur were scared to go to their farms lest they be identified by the Military as members of the ASG and be shot. On the other hand, the Military purposely discouraged entry into areas where military action was likely because they wanted to minimize the possibility

of collateral loss of lives. However, the people needed to go to their farms to harvest their produce in preparation for the Eid'1 Fitr.

A meeting was organized on September 15, 2006 to monitor the progress of the dialogue group and, more importantly, undertake a dialogue between the communities, the military, and some members of the MNLF concerning the different issues surrounding military operations. General Dolorfino was able to schedule the attendance of General Allaga who was then Area Commander for the Southern Command, which included the military forces in Sulu.

At the meeting, Professor Garilao reviewed the different concepts of dialogue and bridging leadership, especially for the participants who were not part of the original workshop. Then the community leaders, religious leaders, and MNLF leaders began voicing their positions relative to the issues surrounding the ongoing military operations. Most of the people asked if the military operations could be suspended during Ramadan. On the other hand, the military officials stressed the importance of the ongoing military operations to the long-term security of the Philippines, as the operations were targeting top terrorist personalities wanted internationally. The different sectors spoke honestly and passionately while Professor Garilao had to occasionally clarify points and make sure people understood the different positions of the stakeholders in the dialogue.

As the dialogue proceeded, General Dolorfino tried to

summarize the different opinions by framing the statements as the sacrifices that each stakeholder group was making to achieve peace in Sulu. The Military, for example, was making sacrifices in terms of the lives of its men. The MNLF was making sacrifices in terms of having to curtail its movements and remain within the agreed containment zones. The civil society and local governments were also making sacrifices in continuing to live in a situation of armed conflict. He reiterated that this was in the pursuit of a long-term peace, free from bandit groups like the ASG. The dialogue noticeably improved after this reframing.

In the end, the group agreed on certain points. Civil society and the religious leaders agreed with the Military that there was a need for continuing operations even during the month of Ramadan. For its part, the Military agreed to allow people into the areas of military operations as long as there was prior coordination with the military units involved. The military agreed to refrain from using aerial bombing and heavy artillery to limit the encounter areas and the effect on civilian communities during Ramadan. These agreements were approved by General Allaga and were published in a news article the next day.

The Dialogue Process Breaks Down

The group was convened again in December 2006 and February 2007 to continue the work and follow up on the group agreements and plans. However, the facilitators found that many of the plans were not being done and that there was

a noticeable decrease in the enthusiasm of the group.

Looking back, Professor Garilao and the other facilitators saw a few things that had to do with the Military. For one, General Dolorfino was reassigned as the commanding general of the NCR Command. While he had permission from his superiors to continue his work in the Mindanao peace process, his new responsibilities did not allow him to spend the same amount of time he used to with the local groups in Sulu. Aside from the decreased presence of General Dolorfino, many of the brigade commanders had finished their tours of duty in the area and, as was the normal practice in the Military, these commanders were transferred to other commands. This meant civil society and the MNLF members of the group had to deal with new commanders who were unfamiliar with the discussions and processes that had transpired during their predecessors' time.

The facilitators also noticed an increase in the number of "mis-encounters" between the Military and the MNLF forces. This they also attributed to the change in the leadership of the AFP battalions, which meant that the new heads were not part of the original group that had made the arrangements with the MNLF.

The bigger number of encounters with the MNLF required that General Dolorfino spend time mediating and coordinating between the MNLF commanders and the government to keep the peace. One such encounter happened in January 2007, where more than 10 MNLF fighters were killed.

The scale of the encounter was so large that it had to be mediated using the ‘blood money’ principle¹⁰.

Another point of tension between the groups was the tripartite meeting between the MNLF, the GRP, and the OIC. Agreed upon when the OIC representatives visited the camp in Bitan-ag, the initial date of the meeting was set for October 2006, but was repeatedly moved back by the Philippine Government. As of February 2007, the schedule of the meeting had not been finalized. What prevented the tension from boiling over was the relationship of General Dolorfino with the MNLF representatives and the MNLF commanders.

In February 2007, these tensions finally came to a head when General Dolorfino visited Habier Malik, a top commander of the MNLF, in their camp in Mt. Bitan-ag. Their meeting which took place after that of the advocacy group sought to formalize the ‘blood money’ arrangements made to settle the misencounter with MNLF forces. Things were going well and the arrangements were finalized as planned during the visit. However, as the group was about to leave, Undersecretary Santos of the OPAPP remarked that the planned tripartite meeting would be postponed yet again. This angered Malik who, at first, prevented the group from leaving until some clarification was provided about the postponement of the meeting. When USEC Santos insisted on leaving, the situation quickly turned into a hostage situation. General Dolorfino was able to ensure that there would be no fighting between the MNLF forces and his own security team.

It was a tense two days while the party was being held at the MNLF camp. General Dolorfino and his companions were treated with respect, taken care of, and allowed to use their mobile phones to update people on their condition while they were in the camp. They were just not allowed to leave, however. Meanwhile, government representatives were trying to negotiate the release of the party while the local military commanders were also preparing for the possibility of military action to rescue the party. The community was concerned because the scale of military force required to attack a major MNLF position would have to be very large and the collateral damage could be great.

The situation was eventually resolved peacefully, with Malik finally accepting the word of the government representatives that the meeting would be scheduled as soon as possible. It is also believed that Malik finally began to listen to General Dolorfino who repeatedly said that an armed confrontation would be imminent if the situation continued persisted. Should that happen, it would not serve the purpose of the MNLF.

Finally, the party was allowed to leave the MNLF camp peacefully, but there would be ramifications on the part of General Dolorfino. After the hostage situation, the military leadership no longer allowed him to get involved in the affairs with the MNLF. Some sources also said that the hostage incident soured the relationship between the government and the MNLF, and made the government less inclined to pursue the peace process with the MNLF.

The Fighting Resumes

The fighting officially resumed on 13 April 2007 with Habier Malik launching attacks on military and government positions in Sulu before going into hiding. The attacks again polarized the stakeholders and made it very difficult to have just one account of the reasons behind the resumption of the armed conflict. Among other things, there was no longer a venue for the views to be discussed. The information gathered present the accounts of the different stakeholders about the resumption of the fighting and the reasons for its happening¹¹.

1. The MNLF Perspective

In November 2001, MNLF forces in Sulu launched a massive attack on the AFP Sulu Headquarters. This incident took place near the capital municipality of Jolo. It left scores wounded and dead, while thousands had to evacuate the populated areas.

According to MNLF sources, the main reason for the 2001 incident was the passing of the law expanding the ARMM Act by Congress, without consulting the MNLF leadership. The government countered that the passing of the ARMM expansion and its being submitted to a plebiscite were in accordance with the 1996 Peace Agreement. The 2001 incident which took place in the last months of the ARMM governorship of Misuari led government to arrest Misuari, alleging that he masterminded the said MNLF offensive against the AFP forces.

The MNLF for its part said that the AFP and the government were not sincere in pursuing the 1996 Final Peace Agreement as manifested by the continued postponement of the GRP-OIC-MNLF Tripartite meeting that was supposed to review the implementation of the peace agreement. The MNLF claimed that the continued detention of its chairman was a breach of the peace agreement.

In between the 2001 incident and 2007, major and minor armed skirmishes between the MNLF and the military took place. The MNLF claimed that these incidents showed the government's insincerity toward pursuing lasting peace in Mindanao, particularly Sulu. Most of these skirmishes pertained to the continued incursion of the AFP into MNLF territories, allegedly in the guise of pursuing elements of the Abu Sayyaf Group.

The 2005 MNLF offensive led by Habier Malik against the AFP was in response to the murder of an MNLF commander and his family in Kapuk Pungol, Maimbung, which elements of the Philippine army allegedly perpetrated. The incident killed two MNLF members, one woman and two children. The resulting MNLF-AFP clash saw close to 10,000 families evacuating their homes in Panamao, Talipao and other municipalities in Sulu. It hit the news especially when MNLF mortar fire killed Colonel Dennis Villanueva of the Philippine Army. The 2005 major clash led to the AFP's occupation of the MNLF camp in Bitan-ag, Panamao. After the brief occupation of the camp by AFP forces, the MNLF moved in.

There were other such incidents like the killing of MNLF commander Kaddam and six civilians in Timpo, Patikul. It happened in January 2007 when a military patrol chanced upon a meeting of MNLF regulars and engaged them in a firefight. The AFP later reported that those who died were ASG members. Several military personnel were also killed. This incident stood out because it took place when there were supposed to be security arrangements between the MNLF armed forces through Habier Malik and the AFP through Maj. General Ben Dolorfino signifying the cessation of hostilities for the purpose of trust building.

There were also several other incidents of AFP incursions into MNLF territories while in pursuit of ASG elements, particularly in the camp of MNLF State Chairman Khaid Ajibon in Marang, Indanan. Again these were allegedly conducted in violation of the security arrangements. The MNLF suspected that these alleged mis-encounters were intentional on the part of the AFP since the military ground commanders were aware of the boundaries of MNLF territories as set in the so-called security arrangements. The motive of the AFP, so the MNLF alleged, was that the military was “aching for a fight with the MNLF” while using the Abu Sayyaf as a convenient excuse.

As far as the MNLF was concerned, they had been too accommodating with the government. Many times they cooperated with the AFP during operations against the ASG simply by denying ASG elements safe haven in MNLF camps. The MNLF also claimed to have exercised extreme patience in the face of the continued government default insofar as the

long pending tripartite conference was concerned. The tripartite conference was critical to the MNLF cause as it would provide a venue where they could point out to the GRP the many peace agreement provisions allegedly violated by the latter. In addition, the continued detention of Nur Misuari remained a sore point in the MNLF-GRP relationship.

Furthermore, because of the disillusionment of a big part of the MNLF leadership and members over the previous government agreements, the agreements started through the BL process also suffered. Many said that the BL was doomed from the start since the process called for the sincerity of all the stakeholders. The MNLF maintained that the AFP had no real intention to pursue peace in Sulu.

2. The Military Perspective

The Armed Forces of the Philippines had always been part of the Moro rebellion history of Sulu. In the 1970's, the AFP was a major player in the infamous 1974 bombing of Jolo. Within this context and given the closeness of majority of the people of Sulu with the MNLF forces, the AFP had always been viewed with suspicion. As such the AFP leadership and personnel in Sulu always had to assume the position of trying to win the trust of the locals, while maintaining its policy of relentlessly pursuing the Abu Sayyaf and other lawless elements.

According to sources, the AFP's main strategy in combating the Abu Sayyaf took on the form of intensive civic-military operations achieved by way of development projects

and civic activities. Military commanders shared how people in the communities approached them for assistance, ranging from water projects to the repair of school chairs. Thus when the BL process took place, their initial pessimism was dispelled. Many military commanders expressed optimism at the whole prospect of continuing dialogue with the local MNLF leaders and communities. According to these officers, their main concern was the possibility of discontinuing the process once those who had undergone the BL process were reassigned elsewhere.

However not all military officers during the time that the BL process took place were open to dialogue. The overall commanding general of the AFP forces in Sulu Maj. General Aleo did not sign the Sulu Road Map for Peace. Many viewed his mistrust of the MNLF as something that the BL process did not help address. In late 2006, the AFP had a new set of ground commanders in Sulu, including the overall commander of Task Force Comet. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the officers who underwent the BL process and were part of the security arrangements were pulled out of Sulu. During the time of the AFP officers reshuffling and with the coming of new AFP units such as the Army's elite Scout Rangers and Special Forces relative to the intensified manhunt for Abu Sayyaf elements and alleged foreign terrorists, the Road Map and the BL process hit a snag.

The AFP's General Rafael claimed that they were extending the hand of dialogue to the MNLF leadership. To some extent the security arrangements forged during the peak of the BL engagement were honored and continued to be hon-

ored by the AFP. In an earlier military operation against the Abu Sayyaf, the AFP operated in close coordination with the MNLF, particularly in Buansa, Indanan where a major MNLF camp was also situated. In August 2006 General Dolorfino, with some ground commanders, had clearly established the demarcation line where the military could conduct its operations without encroaching on MNLF territory. The operations lasted several months.

However, the April offensive of the AFP against the Abu Sayyaf conducted in almost the same area in the municipality of Indanan, happened differently. Initially, the AFP gave ample notice to the MNLF state chairman Khaid Ajibon regarding the impending operations. According to sources Khaid Ajibon's aides were in constant contact with Colonel Ramon, the deputy commander of Task Force Comet. However, it was alleged that the military had encroached into the MNLF camp during the operation, which precipitated the gun battle between the two forces. Two fighters each from both sides were killed.

The same incident precipitated the MNLF offensive led by Habier Malik against the forces of the AFP. It started in 13 April 2007 when security arrangements were broken. While the AFP leadership claimed to have open communications with some MNLF commanders on the ground, there was an unspoken belief within the ranks of the AFP that some MNLF commanders were helping the Abu Sayyaf. The MNLF leadership denied these allegations.

AFP leadership in Sulu would like to note that it showed

its willingness to re-engage the MNLF in a dialogue using the BL process. Bridging Leadership training should have been conducted in February 2007, but the AFP preparations for the national elections and increased operations against the Abu Sayyaf put the planned BL session in the back burner.

3. The Civil Society Perspective

The Sulu CSOs were basically characterized as being organizationally weak, having limited program implementation capacity and having inadequate skills in engaging the AFP, MNLF and LGUs toward a lasting peace and sustained development in Sulu. However, these CSOs also viewed themselves as the voice of the civil sector that was the most affected by the ongoing conflict between the AFP and MNLF. In the present context, civil society was viewed as capable of bringing together the MNLF and AFP back to the dialogue table.

With this in mind, the Sulu CSOs who affiliated themselves with the Pagtabangan BaSulTa consortium made inroads in engaging the AFP leadership. To date, the AFP had been consulting with the CSOs on how to proceed with the civic military projects. The MNLF, on the other hand, maintained close ties with the CSO leaders. There was a serious discussion among the ranks of the PB-affiliated CSOs on talking with Habier Malik. However, the word was that the MNLF armed wing was closed to the idea of dialogue until the tripartite conference was finally held. This left the CSO leaders to hold off in engaging the MNLF of Habier Malik and Khaid

Ajibon.

In the meantime there was a growing concern in the CSO sector about the mounting reports on the human rights violations of the military. There were several accounts of civilians killed by the military on suspicion that they were Abu Sayyaf members, when in fact most victims were actually farmers and forest product gatherers.

What shook the CSO sector was the fatal shooting of a child by members of the Army's Scout Rangers in March 2007 in Tagbak, Indanan. The boy was walking home from his aunt's house where he watched the evening TV shows, when Army troops accosted him. Fearing the soldiers, the boy started to run, thereby prompting a soldier to shoot the boy and kill him instantly. His wounded cousin was taken into custody by the MNLF's Khaid Ajibon. It turned out that the victim was a grandson of the MNLF state chairman. A CSO leader facilitated the dialogue between the AFP and the victims' family, and the matter was settled. Among the ranks of the CSOs there remained a general feeling of mistrust of the AFP, but this did not stop the leaders from engaging the AFP leadership in Sulu in a dialogue.

The Sulu Roadmap Closure Workshop

The one-day workshop provided many insights on what the group went through in the Sulu Roadmap process. The experience showed how a multi-stakeholder could address a complex situation, just as it highlighted the challenges inherent

to working on such complex issues like peace.

Among other things, the group discussed how the stakeholders were able to convene and organize themselves into the Bridging Leadership Advocacy Group that would work on the Sulu Roadmap. The group was able to arrive at informal agreements to keep the peace, but these agreements were not formalized because of many reasons. These informal agreements were not enough to change the long-term situation, however. Further, the group discussed how factors external to the dialogue process complicated the dialogue.

The group discussed the future prospects of the dialogue process after talking about the insights gleaned. The relationships developed during the process remained, as evidenced by the quality of the conversations during the workshop. However, the group was very much aware of the differences in the conditions at present. General Dolorfino was still not allowed to involve himself in MNLF affairs while the OPAPP was still not actively pursuing dialogue with the MNLF. Also, the administration that supported the Sulu Roadmap process had been replaced by a different set of elected provincial government officials. A new governor won in the 2007 election and seemed to be distancing himself from the Roadmap process. Sources believed that his stance stemmed from the fact that the initiative was very clearly identified with the previous administration. While the possibility of pursuing the dialogue process remained, most agreed that it would follow a route different from that which the Sulu Roadmap took.

Conclusion

In the end, even if the prospects were bleak, the group agreed that the Sulu Roadmap process provided an example of how peace in Sulu could be achieved in a sustainable way. The conditions might not be conducive at the moment, but the possibility of stakeholders' coming together remained. The stakeholders and facilitators of the workshop came out of the process with a better understanding of what this kind of work entailed and would be better prepared to undertake a dialogue process when the conditions improved. Professor Garilao expressed his insight on the value of this process:

“Whatever it was, the Sulu Roadmap process provided one year of peace for the people in Sulu. It ended after a year but the economic and social effects, even if they were difficult to quantify, were possibly very great.”

General Dolorfino also believes that, despite the setbacks, the process in Sulu was not a waste. The stakeholders learned a lot from the process. For a short time, prejudices were set aside and the process of healing began. They learned that everybody who is part of the problem is also part of the solution. They learned that everyone has a distinct role in the process and that each person or organization has their own pool of resources that they can contribute in order to solve to problem. No one organization has all the resources needed. That is why each sector's noncooperation would jeopardize resolution of the problem and what is needed is cooperation and collaboration.

The process also opened up new paths of communication and established crucial relationships needed that could possibly sustain development initiatives. One of the local organizers of the seminar stated:

“The seminar resulted to a change in relationship between sectors. Now stakeholders have access to each other and are now able to discuss things. In the past, that was unheard of.”

However, as he reflected on the process in Sulu, it became clear to Gen. Dolorfino that it will still take a long time before the problem can be fully resolved. He recognized that there are still a lot of things that he has to learn. His continuous involvement in the peace process and bridging leadership serves as his training ground in his continuing work to build peace. His sentiments on the process can be summed up in his statement:

“All of us are aware that the problem cannot be immediately resolved. There are still different areas that need to be addressed. But it is good that everyone realized that they need to act now to start the healing and the progress. There is still hope for Sulu.”

End Notes:

¹ Some parts of this biography were lifted from the case written by Cecilia Ubarra entitled, “Forging the Peace in Buliok: Colonel Ben DeOcampo Dolorfino and the 2nd Marine Brigade”, 2005: Asian Institute of Management, Makati City, Philippines.

²The name Tausug, which means “people of the current”, refers to a Philippine ethnic group in the northern part of the Sulu province. One of the distinctive characteristics of this people is their preference for houses on stilts near the sea. The Tausugs were known for their carvings, metalworks, woodworks, tapestry and embroidery, mat making and basketry, textile and fashion, pottery and other minor arts. <http://www.pinoyfarmer.com/dti/people_tausug.html>

³The Moro National Liberation Front was organized in the 1970s by Nur Misuari to create an independent “Moro nation”. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is an offshoot of the MNLF. It was formed in 1981 when Hashim Salamat and his followers split from the MNLF due to the latter’s reluctance to launch insurgent attacks against the Philippine government forces and to move towards a peace agreement

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moro_Islamic_Liberation_Front)

⁴Pagtabangan BaSulTa is a network of social development organizations who operate on a national scale and local multi-sectoral leaders in Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The program is a collaborative approach between different stakeholders in BaSulTa in order to bring about vibrant communities. It operates primarily at the provincial level, wherein local initiatives and projects are implemented by development organizations in partnerships with local civil society organizations and communities together with the local government and other relevant stakeholders. The network engages and supports local leaders and other multi-sectoral constituents to develop lasting so-

lutions to the problems of poverty, conflict and marginalization in the region. (www.bridgingleadership.aim.edu)

⁵ This NGO mediates and facilitates the resolution of armed conflicts. <<http://www.hdcentre.org>>

⁶ The Marine was about to have his radio repaired. When he heard an explosion, he immediately went to the site and took some pictures because he was with the intelligence division. <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2006/mar/29/yehey/top_stories/20060329top4.html>

⁷ Two years ago, he and other military officers were trained on Bridging Leadership in Davao but there was no followup activity after-wards. As a result, agreements reached during that seminar were not pursued further.

⁸ The Military described a mis-encounter as an unintended skirmish between them and some armed group that they did not intend to engage

⁹ Ramadan (Arabic: 9, Ramadan) is a Muslim religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar in which participating Muslims do not eat or drink anything from dawn until sunset. Fasting is meant to teach the person patience, sacrifice and humility.

¹⁰ The 'blood money' principle is a local practice where the aggrieved party receives a commensurate amount as reparation.

¹¹ The views of the Local Government and of the Police are not included because the original representatives of these groups were no longer in position and were unavailable for official comment. The Local Government representatives did not win in the 2007 elections and the police had been reassigned.

PICTORIALS



THE MEN BEHIND THE PEACEBUILDING TRAINING IN MINDANAO

**LTGEN BEN D DOLORFINOAFP
LTGEN RAYMUNDO B FERRERAFF
FR. ELISEO R MERCADO JR., OMI**



LTGEN Dolorfino trooping the line with SN



Security briefing to CSAF and SND



SND, CSAFP and CWMC giving press briefing



2010 Ateneo de Zamboanga PeaceAwardees



LTGEN Dolorfino receiving the PeaceAward



LTGEN Dolorfino with Basilan Bishop Martin Jumoa



Basilan United Front HOPE meeting



Peace and Order Council (POC) Meeting



Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Meeting



With community religious leaders



With peace advocates



Well-loved by the people



Respected by the rebels



Talking with angry rebels



Meeting with MNLFComdr Tahil Sali



**Talking peace with rebel commanders in MNLFCamp
Jabal Uhod, Mt. Bitan-ag, Panamao, Sulu**



**Briefing MNLF commanders in Camp Marang,
Indanan, Sulu**



Coordinating peace for MNLF rebels



Charity giving during Eidil Fitr celebration



Eidil Fitr congregational prayer



Zamboanga City United Front HOPE meeting

About the Institute for Autonomy and Governance



The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG) is an independent and non-partisan think tank founded in 2001 to generate ideas on making autonomy an effective vehicle for peace and development in the Southern Philippines.

IAG views autonomy as a broad and evolving concept that encompasses any political structure that is less than an independent state. It provides the country's minority Muslim and Indigenous Peoples platforms to evolve self governance structures whether federal, autonomous or associative.

IAG continues to conduct research, fora, roundtable discussions, and conferences on the issues of autonomy, good governance and political settlements between the GRP and the Rebel Fronts (MNLF and MILF). It has published policy papers and journals on political, economic, and security issues that define the much needed measures to be undertaken for meaningful self-governance in the region.

IAG also provides support to the ARMM Executive and the Iranon Development Council (Buldon, Barira, Matanog, Parang and Datu Blah Sinsuat), specifically in capacity-building with focus on the processes of policy formulation and legislation.

IAG is an institutional partner of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in the Philippines.

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