

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Counterinsurgency Strategy Employed in Basilan

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A counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy can only be effective when it builds and promotes democratic legitimacy for the state. It is imperative that in developing a COIN strategy, there must first be an understanding of the role of the population and its perceptions of the political legitimacy of its government. There are many different theories on the origination of a state's legitimacy — whether it stems from policies of good governance and inclusion of the population in the political process, or from the state's coercive control measures. Notwithstanding the notions put forward by some scholars that political legitimacy can also be derived from state coercion, this paper asserts that establishing democratic legitimacy based on good governance is a more effective and enduring strategy — particularly in the context of the insurgency problem in southern Philippines.

In this research's use of the term legitimacy, a distinction between the definitions of democratic legitimacy and coercive authority has to be established. Democratic legitimacy is a positive term that reflects the population's support for the regime as a result of its equitable political policies, application of justice, and appropriate use of control measures to safeguard the population. Coercive authority is, therefore, taken to mean as not "legitimate" because of the negative definition of the term coercion, i.e., to restrain or dominate through force or the threat of force (Merriam-Webster 1987). While control is a necessary and important characteristic of any state, the democratically legitimate state maintains legitimacy with the population through the discriminate use of control measures to maintain justice and order. The coercive state, on the other hand, uses an excessive amount of control most often directed against the population. A dictatorial state may effectively control its population

with surrogates deployed down to the village or block level. This does not, however, produce democratic legitimacy; rather, it produces coerced authority. Goodwin points out that these "exclusionary" regimes are more likely to incubate revolutionary movements. The indiscriminate or overwhelming violence of a state against its citizens can have the effect of creating insurgencies by driving the people targeted by state coercive measures to seek shelter within the protective influence of an insurgency (Goodwin 2001). Revolutionary groups, Goodwin suggests, may prosper not because of the popularity of their ideology but because they offer people some protection from violent states (47). These states may be viewed as firmly in control although lacking popular support. Maintaining that control means that they must expend significant state resources in the form of coercive instruments such as the use of surveillance, informant networks, secret police, etc. Arguably, the level of these coercive instruments is much greater than the means employed by a state that maintains control through non-coercive good governance.

Douglas Borer (1999) suggests that political legitimacy is more closely aligned with the principle of good governance because it is "...the basis of social unity, cohesion, and stability within any given polity, with the polity comprising the ruling state apparatus and the citizenry of a given territory. Legitimacy is a function of the state's ability to govern effectively a society in which citizens see the state's power over them as being correct and just."

This perception by the population of correct and just rule is reflected in the degree of satisfaction the citizens feel in their security, opportunity, and prosperity. Borer further maintains that for a polity to survive in the long-term, the ruling state must have political legitimacy. The state's failure "to acquire legitimacy at their inception and to maintain it over time will eventually fail. States can rule without legitimacy, but not well and not for long."

Theories of legitimizing the state

Legitimacy through coercion

Max Weber (1947), describes three pure types of political authority: Traditional domination (based on the sanctity of tradition, patriarchy, and feudalism), legal domination (modern law, state, and bureaucracy), and charismatic domination (the appeal of leaders for allegiance based

on familial, heroic, or religious virtuosity). Weber theorizes that a natural progression or "rationalization" occurs over time where resistance to the traditional rule causes a state to inevitably move towards a "rational-legal" structure of authority using a bureaucratic structure.

He states that the effectiveness of a state's coercion and control over its people has a direct correlation to its legitimacy. Based on this theory, a state is that institution which monopolizes the means of coercion over the society. This definition, however, proves incomplete: The existence of another organization within the same borders, which possesses significant coercive power, say an insurgency, does not make it a legitimate state. This definition also does not fully explain the existence of authoritarian states that are viewed as illegitimate by large numbers of their people, yet they remain in power through coercive measures (Goodwin).

Goodwin offers a more refined coercion-based definition of a state as "an organization, or set of organizations, that attempts, and claims the right, to monopolize the legitimate use of violence in an extended territory" (12). This definition is useful in describing how authoritarian states or those that lack popular support maintain control, but does not incorporate the concept of good governance. It only uses just rule or other traits often associated with the popular support of a state or "democratic" legitimacy.

Legitimacy through the paradigm of good governance

Manwaring makes an important distinction in defining a strategy for promoting legitimate governance through political engagement. He suggests that if there is to be hope that other nations will embrace democracy and free market economies, the United States (US), having won the Cold War, must move forward to a "legitimate governance" strategy of engagement (Fishel and Manwaring 2006). Manwaring defines this legitimate governance as

governance that derives its just powers from the governed and generates a viable political competence that can and will effectively manage, coordinate, and sustain security, as well as political, economic, and social development. Legitimate governance is inherently stable because it has the political competence and societal support to adequately manage internal problems, change and conflict that effect individual and collective wellbeing (57).

Definition of democratic legitimacy

By combining the ideas of Weber, Manwaring, Goodwin, and Borer, a definition for democratic legitimacy that explains a state's need to both solicit the support of the population and enforce legal authority can be developed.

The legitimacy of the state is determined by the effectiveness with which the polity applies both good governance and control in the appropriate proportions. A legitimate state provides its population with an environment in which citizens are secure and can prosper while exercising its legal authority to protect the population and prevent challenges to its supremacy. The citizens within this society identify themselves with the polity, participate in the political process, and recognize the state's right to rule over them (Borer 1999, xix).

Based on the ideas and concepts proposed by scholars, this paper puts forward assumptions relating to democratic legitimacy:

1. Democratic legitimacy that uses non-coercive measures illustrates the degree of influence and control that the state has over its population (Weber).
2. Reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of a state requires that the state improve the basic conditions of security and the availability of food, shelter, and opportunity for social and economic advancement within the society. These factors also apply to non-democracies. Because they lack coercive control, democracies are comparably more reliant on socioeconomic measures (Fishel and Manwaring).
3. The expectations and perceptions of the citizens determine the legitimacy of the democratic state more so than the non-democratic state.¹
4. The power "potential" of internal opposition groups is inversely related to the legitimacy of a state and the state's need to negotiate with them.²
5. Hence, using this definition of legitimacy and the four assumptions as a guide, there's a far greater challenge to develop strategies in improving a nation's legitimacy, and ultimately in countering the growth of opposition or insurgent groups that threaten to overthrow the state.

Strategy-Legitimacy paradigm: Help from an external state

Whether it is a state addressing its own internal issues or an external actor developing a strategy to assist another nation in defeating a domestic insurgency, it is essential that building democratic legitimacy be the primary goal of any COIN strategy. A key to the success of an external state developing and supporting the execution of a COIN strategy in another state is that the former state must avoid the appearance of propping up the host nation government. As Borer points out, if the endemic population views their government as an instrument of the external actor, it could have a severe negative effect on the state's legitimacy. In the cases of the US in Vietnam and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, both the Vietnamese and Afghan governments were viewed by their own people as creators of foreigners. This fact, combined with their inability to provide security and stability, contributed significantly to the failure of both states and the ultimate defeat of the superpowers (Borer, 234). Borer also suggests that legitimacy is not something that can be forced on an unwilling or incompetent state by an external actor. Even with the assistance of a superpower, victory is not assured. The state must have the desire and determination, as well as a reasonably capable state infrastructure and security apparatus to successfully defeat an insurgency. Manwaring points out that a threatened government usually needs outside political help to deal with a threat of instability. Ultimately, that government must reform and strengthen itself.

Legitimacy in the Philippines

As the Philippines contends with lingering communist and secessionist insurgencies, problems of legitimacy hound the state. A recurring problem that impinges on legitimacy in the Philippines is the public perception that the state and its institutions are corrupt. It is not enough that a president is legitimately elected. S/he must also exercise effective leadership and governance. When s/he, or members of his/her administration, fails to deliver, or worse, are implicated in corrupt practices, his/her popularity decreases and, with it, the perceived legitimacy of his/her administration. This scenario has played out more than once in the Philippines — most recently with President Joseph Ejercito Estrada who was forced from office in January 2001 on

charges of corruption. He was replaced by his running mate and current Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (Walley 2004).

This perception is directly related to the perceived strength or weakness of the state apparatus (Fishel and Manwaring). When the state and its institutions fail to deliver basic goods and services and address issues of poverty, unemployment, injustice, and security — as is the problem in Mindanao — the population begins to question the legal authority of the state and its perception of the state's legitimacy decreases, leading to feelings of injustice and anger and a sense of relative deprivation among the population (Gurr 1965).

Challenges to legitimization

Relative deprivation: Setting the condition for conflict

In Ted Gurr's book *Why men rebel*, he argues that "men are quick to aspire beyond their social means and quick to anger when those means prove inadequate, but slow to accept their limitations" (58). Relative deprivation is viewed as a tension between one's actual state and what one feels s/he should be able to achieve (25). He adds that there is a "perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities" (37). Normally, deprivation occurs when one's value expectations exceed one's value capabilities. These values include welfare, security, self-actualization, and self esteem. The intensity and scope of relative deprivation strongly determine the potential for collective violence.

Fathali Moghaddam suggests that relative deprivation and an individual's feelings of injustice can lead him up a proverbial staircase to terrorism. In his 2005 book *The staircase to terrorism*, he describes the ascension of an individual from a disillusioned citizen to a terrorist as being achieved through the climbing of steps. He suggests that a strategy of targeting only the terrorists who have already ascended the steps is an ineffective plan. The best long-term strategy is prevention at the ground floor level.

At the ground floor of his model, individuals believe that they have no voice in society and feel neglected and deprived of opportunity. Leaders encourage these individuals to displace their aggression onto out-groups. Through this influence, individuals begin to see the terrorist group as legitimate and the state as illegitimate (161-165). This phenomenon can be seen in many under-governed areas of the world —

particularly in southern Philippines where a minority Muslim population lives in an environment of insufficient government infrastructure and security with little hope of improvement. This situation has resulted to armed conflict and demands for self-determination.

Revolutionary consciousness: Lighting the fuse of an angry population

If a population's sense of relative deprivation sets the conditions for revolution, the concept of revolutionary consciousness gives legs to the social movement and helps to organize the revolt. The concept of revolutionary consciousness or class consciousness was developed by Karl Marx to explain the awakening of a population to its situation and potential for self-determination. As A. Dirlik (2005, 132) explains,

"Marx conceptualized consciousness in its dialectical relationship with history, with the proletariat as its concrete reference. Revolutionary consciousness represented the development of proletarian consciousness as the proletariat became aware of itself as a class by comprehending itself in history."

Mao Tse-Tung also wrote extensively on the subject and further developed the concept of revolutionary consciousness by suggesting that for the revolution to be successful, the revolutionary consciousness had to reflect and incorporate elements of the culture of the population. If the call for revolution was not put into a proper context wherein the population could relate to, or that it did not reflect their traditions, beliefs, and concerns, the population could view the revolution as alien and not representative of their goals (137).

As a Maoist organization, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) employed Mao's ideas on revolutionary consciousness in successfully organizing the poor. This same process of organization can be seen in the Muslim insurgent groups in Mindanao. It is less clear, however, if they were following the teachings of Marx and Mao, or if revolutionary consciousness was a result of the scholarship program sponsored by the Philippine, Libyan, and Egyptian governments in the 1960s. These programs were the initiative of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and were intended to provide Muslims from Mindanao with first rate education. The hope was that this program would begin to repair the perceived gap between the opportunities afforded to Christian Filipinos and those afforded to Muslim Filipinos. Egypt and Libya sponsored similar programs in Mindanao and brought

hundreds of youths to *madrassas* and universities in Egypt, Libya, and the Middle East. Many of the students studied law and, upon returning to Mindanao, began working through the legal system to effect change in Mindanao. This period was a turning point in Mindanao history. The combination of becoming intellectually empowered and the exposure to other Muslim cultures, such as Egypt and Libya, had a significant effect on many Muslims in Mindanao. It is reflected in the renewed call for independence in the 60s and 70s (Abuza 2003). Led by Nur Misuari of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Muslims of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago were organized into a popular revolt that threatened to wrest control of Mindanao from the GRP. This combined group declared Mindanao as an independent Muslim nation (Abat 1993). Reflecting on Mao's belief that the call to revolution must be presented in a population's cultural context, the MNLF coined the term *Bangsamoro* to describe the Muslims of the region as one people.³ The MNLF personalized the need for revolt and interpreted the goals of the revolution in terms that the Bangsamoro people could relate to, emphasizing the end of poverty, inequality, and destitution of the Muslim population in Mindanao.

Theoretical underpinnings of a COIN strategy

Understanding why a particular insurgency developed and the context in which it operates is critical in the conceptualization of any COIN strategy. It is essential that COIN strategies are tailored to fit the specific situation. This strategy may vary greatly within an area of operation, from region to region, or even from village to village based on a number of factors. These factors are determined through a careful and detailed analysis of the situation, population, enemy, history, root causes of the conflict, politics, socioeconomic conditions, strength/capacity of the host nation government, and external influences. The COIN strategy is a combination of direct and indirect approaches. The difficulty of developing an effective strategy accurately determines the necessary degree of each. As Manwaring points out, "the balance of persuasive and coercive measures will determine success or failure in the achievement of a just civil society and a durable peace" (Fishel and Manwaring, 63).

The "nesting" of Mack, Arreguin-Toft, and McCormick

Applying the principles of Andrew Mack, Ivan Arreguin-Toft, and Gordon McCormick should be viewed as being rank-ordered or "nested" ideas. Mack provides a sort of litmus test for the state in deciding if it has the will to win. His theory is useful in demonstrating that superior commitment, political will, and possibly sacrifice will be necessary to defeat the opponent. Once the decision to fight is made, Arreguin-Toft's theory is useful in determining what type of strategy will bring about the desired outcome. Arreguin-Toft relies heavily on Mack's principles as he describes his theory of interaction. This theory helps strategists in determining what type of strategy will be assembled to counter the foe — direct or indirect. Once the need for an indirect approach (IA) is identified, the mystic diamond strategy then provides the framework for a COIN strategy that recognizes the population as the center of gravity (COG). This type of analysis will present the state with a clear understanding of the type of threat it faces and provide effective options to generate a favorable outcome.

Mack's theory

Mack's theory is relevant as it provides the basis for understanding the role commitment plays in support of a strategy (Mack 1975). In the Philippines, it is assumed that the government security apparatus is more powerful than any insurgent movement. This is the focus of Mack as he examines the power asymmetry between two contending forces (178). He argues that the analysis should focus on the differentials in the political will to fight which is rooted in different perceptions to stakes at hand (177). He also says that power asymmetry translates to interest asymmetry. The materially weaker insurgent is more politically determined to win because he has more vested interest in the outcome of war than the stronger external power whose stakes are lower (177). For example, Mack observes that the successful post-1945 rebellions against European colonial rule, as well as the Vietnamese struggle against the US, all had one thing in common: The weaker actor is more committed to win the war (Record 2005-2006).

Furthermore, since the weak insurgent fights for his survival, he considers the war "total" while the stronger may only view it as "limited"

(Mack). As a consequence, it is not only politically impossible for the stronger power to mobilize its total military resources, it is also not deemed necessary (Record). Mack emphasizes that it is the actors' relative resolve or interest that explains the success or failure in asymmetric conflicts. In essence, the actor with the most resolve, regardless of material power resources, wins. As the gap in relative power widens, the strong actor is less resolute and, thus, becomes politically vulnerable. On the other hand, the weak actor is more resolute and less politically vulnerable (Mack). The weaker actor's superior strength, in terms of commitment, compensates for his military inferiority. The weak actor fights harder because his existence is at stake. He also displays more willingness to incur losses. This is something the strong actor cannot bear. Just as in Iraq with the US as the strong actor, its home population demands pullout if it incurs a lot of casualties — even though victory has not yet been achieved (185).

Arreguin-Toft's strategic interaction theory

This theory shows how an indirect strategy works. Arreguin-Toft argues that the likelihood of victory and defeat in asymmetric conflicts depends on the interaction of the strategies of weak and strong actors. For example, a strong actor is supposed to win against a weaker opponent by utilizing an indirect strategy against the indirect strategy of the enemy. All other things being equal, Arreguin-Toft contends that the stronger side is most likely to lose when it attacks with a direct strategy and the weak side defends using an indirect strategy. Any indirect strategy should seek to destroy the enemy's will to fight (Record). Using statistical and in-depth historical analyses of the history of conflicts spanning two hundred years, Arreguin-Toft contends that independent of regime type and weapons technology the interaction of similar strategic approaches favors the strong actors. On the other hand, the use of different strategic approaches favors the weak. The case of the US winning its war in Afghanistan in 2002 within a few months demonstrates what happens in a direct-direct confrontation. The opposite, however, occurred when the Soviet Union lost after a decade of brutal war by using a direct strategy against the Afghan indirect strategy (Record).

		Weak-Actor Strategic Approach	
		Direct	Indirect
Strong-Actor Strategic Approach	Direct	Strong Actor	Weak Actor
	Indirect	Weak Actor	Strong Actor

Figure 1 Expected effects of strategic interaction on conflict outcomes (Arreguin-Toft 2005).

Mystic diamond COIN model

Because it uses a holistic approach to the problem of insurgency, McCormick's diamond model of insurgency (Figure 2) is particularly useful (Wilson 2006). By placing the population at the apex of the diamond and presenting both the state and the counter-state as engaging in direct competition for their support, the people are the COG for both sides (McCormick 2007). The battle is over legitimacy and who controls the population. Legs 1 and 2 represent the state's efforts to work through the population. This improves the state's legitimacy and provides for the people's needs to gain their help in identifying the insurgents. Leg 3 represents the state efforts to strike the insurgents directly (Wilson).

The role of external actors is represented as the fourth point (bottom) of the diamond. Legs 4 and 5 represent the involvement of external actors. Leg 4 represents diplomatic measure taken by the state with external actors to gain assistance in defeating the counter-state. Leg 5 represents the state's efforts to cut off outside assistance and supplies

going to the counter-state. The dynamics between the external actors and the state show the latter working to improve its legitimacy in the eyes of foreign actors, receiving aid while also limiting the amount of aid that external actors can supply to the counter-state (6).

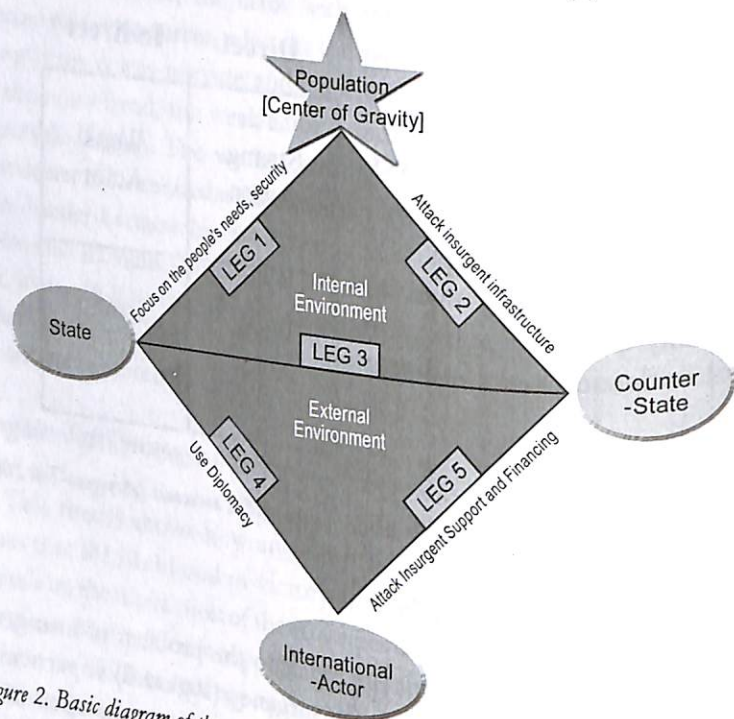


Figure 2. Basic diagram of the mystic diamond COIN model (Wilson 2006).

Figure 3 illustrates in greater detail how the diamond can be used to illustrate the dynamics between the state and the counter-state. Both the state and the counter-state must gain the support of the population but for different reasons. The state, marked by a 1 in Figure 3, is not immediately threatened militarily by the insurgent because it is insulated by a force advantage over the insurgent force. The state, however, lacks the information advantage to quickly identify and destroy the insurgency. It must get this information from the population within which the insurgency is hiding. The insurgency, marked by a 2, providing it anonymity and protection from the state security forces. What the insurgency lacks is a force advantage with which to attack and defeat the state. The insurgency must rely on the population to maintain

its anonymity and to provide information on the activity of the state, resources, and members elicited through recruitment.

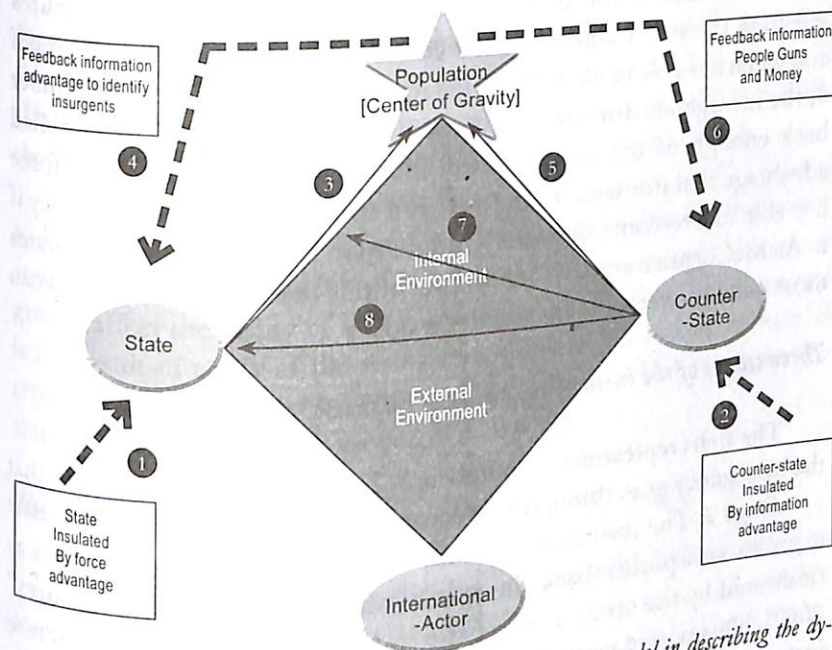


Figure 3. Illustration of the application of the diamond COIN model in describing the dynamics of the insurgency.⁴

Number 3 indicates the state's efforts to improve its legitimacy among the people by extending control over the population. If done properly, this has the effect of decreasing the legitimacy and coercive control that the insurgency has over the population. It also increases the amount of actionable intelligence that the state can then use to target the insurgents. This is shown by the arrow returning to the state at number 4.

The difficult task that the state faces lies in differentiating between the non-state actors and members of the population. The problem of using the right amount of coercion is a challenge that both the state and counter-state must try to formulate. Too much coercion from either side can force the population in the opposite direction. As such, too much coercion can prove disastrous and costly — not only through the loss of popular support, but also of legitimacy (Fishel and Manwaring). Number 5 in the diagram indicates the efforts of the insurgency to elicit the support of the population to provide information on the state, attract

new recruits, and gain money and resources (supplies and weapons) annotated by the arrow at number 6.

At number 7, the insurgency targets the state control measures affecting the state's ability to exert control. The state can do the same if and when it is able to identify the insurgent control measures. At number 8, the insurgency directly targets the state once it has sufficiently rolled back enough of the state's control measures and weakened the force advantage that insulates it. The state can also do this to the insurgency if it is able to overcome the latter's information advantage which insulates it. As McCormick argues, "the winner of this contest is the one who can most quickly overcome his disadvantage."⁵

Three stages of the insurgency's bid to "roll back" the state's control

The steps represented by numbers 5, 7 and 8 also represent stages that the insurgency goes through as it becomes more influential and effective:

Stage 1: The insurgency spreads its control over the population as it grows and pushes back the state's influence or "control measures" (indicated by the arrow at number 5 in Figure 3) (McCormick Lecture 2007). This period can take a long time and is highly dangerous as the insurgency is vulnerable to targeting by the state if it becomes visible (known) to the state.

Stage 2: As the insurgency "rolls back" the state's control measures (as indicated by the arrow at number 7 in Figure 3), it can begin to target the state's control surfaces (the state's methods of control, i.e., security forces and government infrastructure). The degree to which the insurgents can do this is in direct correlation to the success they have had with gaining the support of the population (McCormick Lecture). By targeting the state's control measures, the insurgency begins to affect the state's ability to exert control. The insurgency gains additional support from the population by demonstrating that the state cannot effectively target the insurgency or that it can no longer provide control and security to the population. If the state retaliates and lashes out at the population in an attempt to strike the insurgency, they may further alienate members of the population and unwittingly push them towards the insurgency. This is a difficult position for the state: If they do not react with enough force, it risks appearing weak and ineffective; if they respond with too much, it appears reckless and oppressive. Either end

of the spectrum results in the state losing legitimacy with its population that could result in strengthening the insurgency.

Stage 3: Once the insurgency has sufficiently weakened the state's force advantage by rolling back the state's control surfaces, it can target the state directly (as indicated by the arrow at number 8 in Figure 3) (Fishel and Manwaring). If the insurgents attempt to do this too early, they risk being destroyed by the state's superior force advantage.

To fully understand the role of the population and its role in supporting to know how population control is reached and its role in supporting state (or insurgent) control. A state's control over its population can greatly affect the ability of an insurgency to develop itself. This control is the result of a mix of the state's control measures and its policies of attraction or "good governance" that leads the population to view the state's right to rule over them as correct and just.⁶

The fine balance between control and cooperation

The application of force by the state requires a fine balance between creating the right level of control for the sake of security and stability and meeting the expectations of the population for freedom and rights. If the state increases the amount of force, exceeding the level perceived by the population as appropriate, the state's legitimacy can be damaged. Sometimes the state must employ its military force to maintain order, such as during the aftermath of a natural disaster or periods of social unrest.

The state may also attempt to co-opt or entice the population into supporting state objectives by making concessions or promises to the population such as agreeing to negotiate land reform measures desired by the target population. Hence, the ability of the government to establish control over a population and a territory enhances its legitimacy. When the state is perceived as legitimate, it is very difficult for an insurgent group to diminish that legitimacy.

Basilan: Winning the war of ideas in southern Philippines

How do the COIN models used in the Philippines tackle the issue of legitimacy? How does an indirect COIN strategy based on McCormick's diamond model deal with the relative deprivation that breeds insurgency?

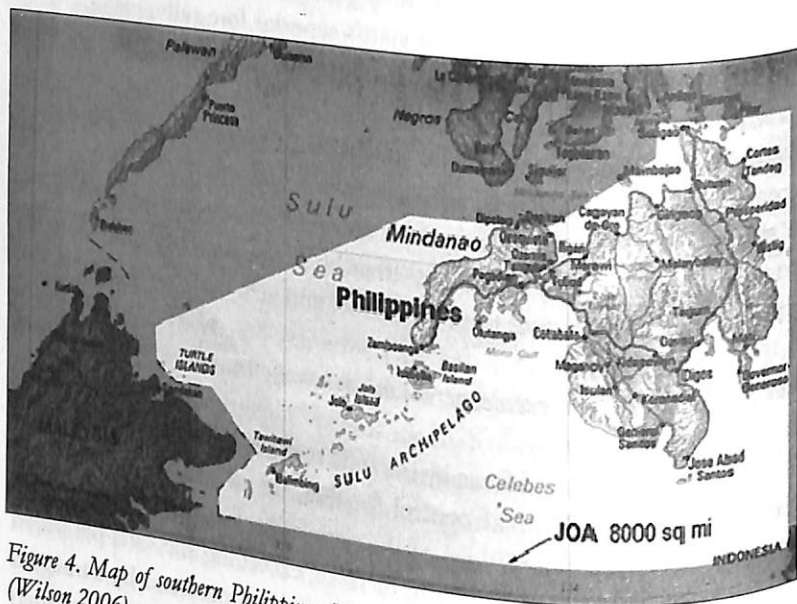


Figure 4. Map of southern Philippines. The highlighted area is the Joint Operation Area (Wilson 2006).

In the case study on Basilan, the Philippine government, assisted by the US, faced an ideology-based insurgency waged by Muslim separatists and terrorist organizations. This case study examines how the Special Operations Command – Pacific (SOC PAC) partnered with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on a considerable interagency effort to successfully execute campaigns against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). This also examines how the IA, employing the framework of the diamond model, proves effective in addressing the issues of relative deprivation as a main effort and direct military action as a supporting effort.

Trouble in the south

Development of an effective COIN strategy for southern Philippines requires an in-depth understanding of the history of the region and the

roots of its internal problems. A clear understanding of the goals of the multiple insurgent groups is critical to developing a COIN strategy that would support the legitimacy of the GRP and siphoning away the insurgent's population support base. Influenced by their knowledge of the works of Mack and the principles of Arreguin-Toft's strategic interaction model, SOCPAC planners employed McCormick's diamond model as a framework on which to develop a plan that they believed was appropriate for the complex political and social environment of southern Philippines.⁷ Planners understood that much of the battle for the population's support would be won through the improvement of their socioeconomic condition. They also determined that a sophisticated information strategy would be required to synchronize actions and messages to promote the principles of good governance (Haider Interview 2008). McCormick's diamond model offers the right combination of direct and indirect strategy. It takes advantage of opportunities to target the insurgency directly with Philippine Security Forces (PSF) through a relentless pursuit campaign. It most often works through the population with a highly targeted civil military and information operations strategy to change the conditions that provided the ASG safe haven.⁸

Reestablishing the US-GRP relationship

By 2001, the Philippine government was facing several serious challenges. Already home to two of the world's longest running insurgencies, its southern region of Mindanao had become a training ground and transit point for international terrorist groups (Ressa 2005). Philippine intelligence documents show that throughout the 1990s, thousands of Islamic militants, Filipinos, and aspiring terrorists from all over the world had been traveling to Mindanao to train in more than twenty-seven camps run by the MILF (9). The presence of Al Qaeda in Mindanao had also become a growing concern to the Pacific Command (PACOM)⁹ and SOCPAC. These two began to look at training and assistance options to improve the capability of the AFP to combat terrorism (Briscoe 2004). Planning, however, would be complicated by some significant constraints.

The first major hurdle that PACOM and SOCPAC planners had to overcome was to reestablish US/Philippine military relations severed in

1992 after the closure of US military bases in the Philippines. Beginning in 1991, the US drastically reduced its security assistance funding to the Philippines – from \$350 million in 1991 to \$5 million by 1993.¹⁰ This drastic and massive cut in funding, combined with the reduction of exchange training to less than one exercise per year (the *Balikatan* exercise was held intermittently between 1992 and 1999), resulted in a measurable decline in Philippine military readiness (Walley 2004). Also, as a result of the long presence of US forces in the Philippines in the past, the Philippine government had written an article into its Constitution that outlines any future US presence. The 1987 Philippine Constitution specifically states under Article XVIII, Transitory Provisions: Section 25, that

“after the expiration in 1991 of the Agreement between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America concerning military bases, foreign military bases, troops, or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and, when the Congress so requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the people in a national referendum held for that purpose, and recognized as a treaty by the other contracting state.”

In February of 1999, the Philippine government ratified the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). This bilateral agreement restored protections to US military personnel deployed to the Philippines (Adan Interview 2008), paving the way for renewed cooperation between the US and GRP and the reestablishment of US/RP military exchange training.

The next step was to coordinate the legal justification for US assistance. To reinforce and demonstrate US respect for Philippine sovereignty, the GRP would need to lobby for and justify the assistance of the US. Fortunately, the US and GRP had previously signed a Mutual Defence Treaty (MDT).¹¹ As planning progressed, this document became the framework on which the future strategy would be built (Adan Interview). The importance of this document cannot be overstated. The MDT was the cornerstone document that supported US military assistance to the Philippines. It, however, was written to address outside threats and the Philippines was facing internal threats of insurgency and terrorism. Opponents to US involvement within the GRP were adamant that such involvement was not supported by the Philippine Constitution or the MDT. In response, PACOM representatives and the Arroyo administration drafted the Terms of Reference (TOR) for *Balikatan* 2002, outlining and clarifying the extent of US assistance. The TOR

stated that the US presence in southern Philippines would not exceed six months; US forces would not participate in combat operations although they were authorized to defend themselves if attacked; all operations would be AFP-led; and US personnel would always be accompanied by AFP personnel. In 2001, the TOR was signed by the then Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teofisto Guingona. This completed a critical phase in US/GRP efforts to combat terrorism (Adan Interview). This partnership would later be supplemented with a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) in November 2002, outlining the storage of US materials and resources on Philippine bases.¹² These agreements are essential to the continued presence of US forces in the Philippines and are frequently used by the VFA Commission to answer legal challenges to US involvement in southern Philippines (Adan Interview).

Another constraint facing SOCPAC planners was the requirement for a small US presence in the Philippines. Size was a constraint for several reasons. First, a primary goal of the US task force was to promote the legitimacy of the Philippine government, but planners acknowledged that a large US presence would likely detract from that goal. It would, instead, give the appearance of US unilateral operations, leaving locals the impression that the GRP was just a puppet of the US (Mossberg Interview).

Second, there was also tremendous pressure on President Arroyo and her government to deny, or at least strictly limit, the number of US forces deployed to the Philippines (Briscoe 2004). After long negotiations with the PACOM and SOCPAC commanders, permission was granted and a “force cap” was placed on the number of US personnel (660 task force members).¹³

Lastly, SOCPAC had ordered assessments as the first step in developing a strategy for Basilan (Wilson). Assessments of the local populace indicated a lingering resentment over the US COIN operations conducted in the early 1900s (Briscoe). Although nearly one hundred years had passed since Generals Pershing and Leonard Wood had fought in the Archipelago, locals still recall the conflict like it had occurred fairly recently.¹⁴ Insurgent propaganda themes spoke of past US betrayal of the Moro people, accusing the US of planning to steal what little the local people possessed.¹⁵ A large US presence would likely inflame a population that was already distrustful of the intentions of the United States (Mossberg Interview).

Limited US resources also created a constraint for planners. US commitments in Afghanistan and the build-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom left little in the way of men and resources to commit to Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P) (Haider Interview 2008). A small advisory force had always been the goal of SOCPAC Commander, MG Wurster, 1st Special Forces Group Commander, David Fridovich, and the SOCPAC planners. This constraint helped them achieve that goal. If OEF-P had been the "only show in town" or the only US military combat zone, the US military would likely have been much more interested in beefing up the size of the task force with conventional units and equipment. This constraint is now viewed as having contributed to the success of the operation because it allowed PACOM/SOCPAC to develop a strategy that was less intrusive as opposed to a US unilateral operation. The relatively small operation also drew little attention from Washington when compared with operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. This allowed SOCPAC a degree of freedom to plan and execute the operation without significant influence or interference from Washington.¹⁶

SOCPAC and GRP planners also had to consider the reaction of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces in Basilan.¹⁷ Planners had to figure out a way to target the ASG without inciting hostilities from the MILF or MNLF (Dolorfino Interview 2008). A tenuous ceasefire was in place between the GRP and MILF forces in Mindanao. After decades of fighting, the ceasefire was a result of a mutual agreement between the GRP and the MILF to discuss terms for a peaceful resolution to MILF ancestral rights claims. The deployment of US and GRP forces to Basilan could threaten the ceasefire and bring thousands of MILF fighters into the conflict. The GRP sent envoys to discuss the upcoming operation with the MILF. It explained that the AFP was targeting the ASG because they were engaging in criminal and terrorist activities. The GRP requested that the MILF Central Committee declare the ASG outlaw and deny them support or safe haven in MILF camps. In return, the GRP would continue negotiations of a peace treaty with the MILF and possible concessions to MILF claims of ancestral domain rights in Mindanao. The MILF agreed and remained neutral, at least publicly, throughout Balikatan 2002 (Dolorfino Interview).

First steps in assisting the Philippines in its fight against terror

By 2000, PACOM and SOCPAC had developed a plan to assist the Philippines in addressing its growing terrorist threat, but when it was offered to then Philippine President Estrada, it was rejected. It was only after Estrada was forced out of office on corruption charges and Arroyo took office as President that the US offer of assistance was accepted (Briscoe). With the kidnapping of several US citizens by the ASG and an overall increase in attacks by terrorist and insurgent groups, President Arroyo approved a SOCPAC plan to address the threat. The plan included improving the COIN capacity of the AFP as well as establishing a counter-terrorism (CT) capability. It also included a Joint Special Operations Group (JSOG) to coordinate the efforts of Philippine Counter Terrorism Forces (Mossberg Interview).

Initial Security Assistance (SA) programs focused on creating a CT capability and improving other capabilities to support CT missions. Specifically, the plan included:

- Establish the three Light Reaction Companies (LRC). Responsibility would fall to 1/ISFG(A) to train and equip these new companies.
- Establish and train the first Joint Command in the Philippine Military. The JSOG was designed to command and control the LRCs and LRB (Light Reaction Battalion).
- Train and equip six light infantry battalions and conduct non-commissioned officers' leadership training.
- Train and equip twelve Naval Special Operations Unit (NAVSOU) teams and develop an instructor cadre.
- Develop night vision capability among Philippine UH-1H pilots and train six instructor pilots and co-pilots.
- Support Philippine intelligence modernization (Haider Interview).

In May 2001, the need for a Philippine CT capability was reinforced with the ASG kidnappings of Martin and Gracia Burnham from a resort in Palawan Island (Ressa 2003). This kidnapping was just the latest in a series of kidnappings perpetrated by the ASG and served to demonstrate its ability to operate with a high degree of impunity in southern Philippines. The perpetrators of this latest kidnapping were quickly traced back to Basilan where they took refuge in MILF camps

deep in the interior jungles of the island (Kaplan 2005). This event and the launching of other kidnappings and attacks by the ASG served to underscore the lawless environment present in southern Philippines and to convince President Arroyo to accept the US offer of military assistance (Walley).

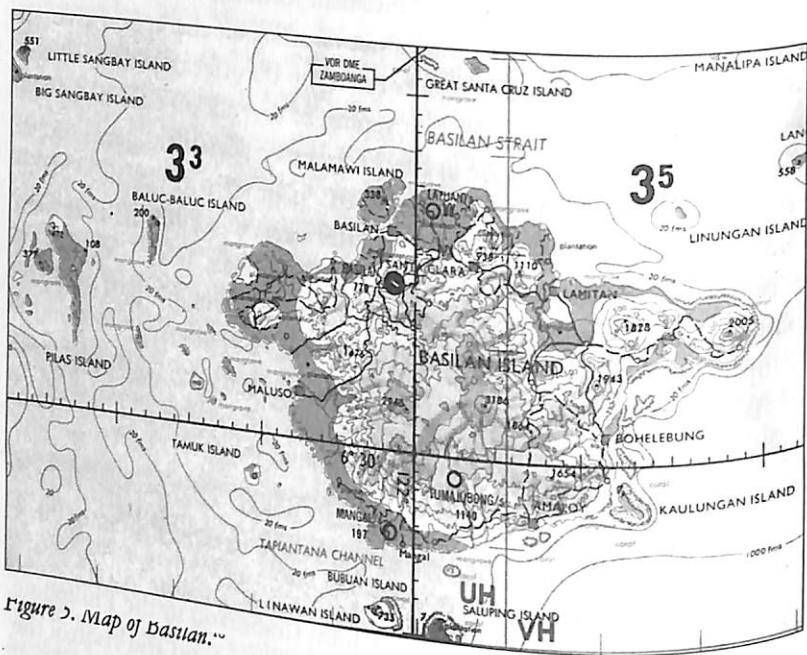


Figure 3. Map of Basilan.

Making the case for Basilan

Influenced by the principles of the theories of Mack and Arreguin-Toft, SOCPAC planners began developing a strategy that would employ McCormick's diamond model as a COIN framework to address the underlying causes of insurgency and promote the legitimacy of the Philippine government. It would also concurrently improve the AFP's ability to provide security and defeat the ASG forces in Basilan (Fridovich and Krawchuk 2007). Understanding that promoting legitimacy was the key to successfully assisting the GRP, SOCPAC considered the challenge of removing the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist threats from Mindanao without igniting hostilities with the MNLF and MILF (Abuza 2003).¹⁹

To keep them out of the fighting, the GRP and the US viewed negotiating with the MNLF and MILF as key to the success of the strategy. This difficult task was accomplished through GRP negotiations with both the MNLF and MILF (Haider Interview). As Goodwin (2001) points out, government negotiations with mobilized groups have typically served to deradicalize them as they anticipate the accumulation of greater influence and resources. Negotiations and political inclusion also create an impact on the population by demonstrating that the state is "reformable" and interested in the concerns of its people (46). Negotiations with the state can also serve to bolster the insurgency. The mere fact that the state is officially recognizing the group creates legitimacy and credibility that can assist the insurgency in recruiting members and resources (47). In this case, the negotiations organized by the GRP with the MNLF and MILF were successful in motivating the two groups to deny support to the ASG and JI – at least publicly – and acknowledge them as criminal elements suitable for targeting by PSF.²⁰ The lead Philippine negotiator was then Colonel Benjamin Dolorfino, a Muslim, and native of Sulu (Dolorfino Interview). The success of the negotiations was a tremendous achievement by the GRP and contributed significantly to the overall success of their operations against the ASG. While there were clear signs that the MNLF and MILF were still supporting and providing safe haven to the ASG, both maintained neutrality in public and did not openly support the ASG.²¹ The agreements were successful in keeping these groups and the approximately 17,000 fighters they command out of conflict while allowing the AFP to pursue the ASG and JI (Dolorfino Interview). If the GRP had not sidelined the MNLF and MILF, Mindanao and the Archipelago would likely have deteriorated to a full-scale war (Banlaui Interview).

Understanding that the MNLF was heavily supporting the ASG, President Arroyo also suspended Nur Misuari as Governor of Autonomous Regions in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in November 2001. This sent Misuari into hiding and sparked attacks in both Sulu and Zamboanga by a splinter group of the MNLF calling themselves the Misuari Breakaway Group (MBG). These attacks were repelled by the AFP. Casualties were high on both sides.²²

Assessment of the population and atmospherics

Analysis of the Basilan population and environment began before US forces were actually deployed to the island. This assessment became the baseline for planning and was critical in determining how the development of an IA strategy²³ would effectively separate the population from the insurgent. It was imperative that the RP/US identify the areas that supported the insurgency (Wendt 2005). The assessments focused on determining the enemy situation, Philippine military training requirements, local demographics, condition of infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions or relative deprivation (Wilson) to aid planners in building a "map" of disenfranchisement and identify where likely active and passive support for the ASG would develop (6). As the operations continued, successive assessments were done regularly to evaluate the effect that the strategy was having in the area (Wendt). From these evaluations, more effective initiatives were recommended (Fridovich and Krawchuk). A similar assessment was also done on each AFP unit to determine resource requirements and track progress in building capacity (10). This "effects-based" measurement was used by SOCPAC to closely monitor the return on investment on the operation and activities with host nation partners (10). The assessments and measurements of effectiveness were also necessary to SOCPAC in demonstrating mission progress when reporting to US military and civilian leadership. The protracted nature of the IA means progress is often incremental and difficult to quantify. The assessments and measurements of effectiveness assisted SOCPAC in demonstrating progress as well as requirements for additional resources. Assessments were also critical in the development of the Information Operations (IO) strategy (Martin Interview 2008). An accurate understanding of the local population facilitated the development of information products and the targeting of civil military projects that would have the greatest positive effect.

Diamond model in Basilan

The assessments conducted on Basilan found significant levels of relative deprivation with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, low school attendance, and little government infrastructure (Wilson). These

were issues that affected the legitimacy of the GRP and needed to be addressed through Leg 1 of the diamond model (Wendt). The assessments did not, however, find significant signs of an ideological alignment between the population and the ASG. In other words, the population was supporting the ASG out of necessity because of the lack of government infrastructure and security. While the assessments indicated that planners were facing an insurgency, the root causes were correctible with the application of good governance and a secure environment (Mossberg Interview).

To sever the relationship between the insurgent and the population, the next step was to address Leg 2 of the diamond model (Wendt). Support for the ASG had been attained largely through coercion and intimidation with just a small percentage of the locals categorized as ideological supporters. The in-depth analysis of the local population allowed the SOCPAC planners to determine that physical security was the single greatest need in Basilan (10). They predicted that if the GRP could provide security, as well as begin to improve the socioeconomic conditions on the island, the GRP should be able to sever the population's support to the ASG. SOCPAC planners began to develop a strategy to counter the terrorist/insurgent ideology by promoting a different ideology — one of good governance (10).

Leg 3 of the model represents the effort by the state to target the insurgents directly when they can be identified (10). Capacity-building efforts were aimed at improving the capability of the PSF to effectively target the insurgents (Mossberg Interview). While kinetic operations would be a necessary and prudent aspect of the strategy, SOCPAC planners estimated that the majority of the battles would be information-based and non-kinetic (Haider Interview). The IA that concentrates on countering the insurgency by attracting the populace towards an ideology of good governance consisted of two distinct but mutually supporting campaigns (Haider Interview). The first campaign was the COIN strategy, designated as the "main effort" that would erode the population's support of the stateless networks and promote an ideology of good governance. The second campaign and the "supporting effort" was the CT campaign that would defeat key nodes of stateless networks within southern Philippines, rendering them ineffective.

The result of this analysis was illustrated in what SOCPAC planners called the Basilan model. Built on the McCormick diamond model, the Basilan Model (Figure 7) depicted the specific struggle in Basilan and the basic SOCPAC strategy.

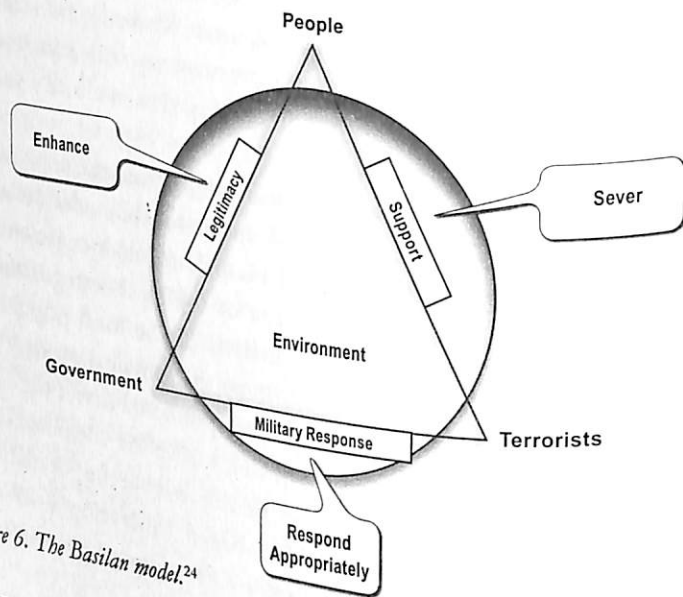


Figure 6. The Basilan model.²⁴

Planners also had to address the external political environment affecting the insurgency. This step is illustrated by the bottom half of McCormick's diamond model which defines the influence of external actors on the conflict (Wilson). In this case, support from the US and other nations coming into the GRP to help them in their COIN fight is represented by Leg 4. Efforts of external actors supporting the insurgency are represented by Leg 5 (5). Partnered with the US country team in Manila, SOCPAC planners developed a plan to assist the GRP in disrupting outside resources from getting into the insurgency, such as guns and money, among other things. With the COIN strategy focused on the population and the CT strategy focused on the stateless networks, each was designated as a COG.

Ideology of the IA

Using the McCormick diamond model as a framework to develop their strategy, SOCPAC planners began with the premise that the IA

must promote an ideology of Philippine government legitimacy rather than trying to directly counter the insurgent ideology.²⁵ The IA, in short, promotes a core democratic ideology – locally applied – that good governance is of, for, and by “the people” and that a government is obligated to provide basic needs, i.e., security, infrastructure, rule of law, and economic opportunity (Wilson Interview 2008). The planners recognized that all elements of the strategy must demonstrate this ideology (Haider Interview).

Recognizing that the Department of Defense (DoD) was just one of the many stakeholders in the Philippines, SOCPAC planners developed a strategy that proposed a division of labor within a broader role of the DoD in general, and SOF in particular, within a broader host nation and interagency environment (Haider Interview). Finally, the planners articulated the need for patience. Success in the IA meant changing the perceptions of a population and improving the capacity of its government to expand its infrastructure and provide security. They described the IA process that requires a long-term view of accepting measured developments and incremental results.

The IA strategy developed for Basilan was made up of three major interconnected efforts or “Lines of Operation” (Haider Interview):

- The first line of operation was operations and intelligence fusion support to AFP units. This meant that the US would provide assistance in planning and synchronizing AFP operations as well as provide logistics support. US forces would also provide intelligence to support AFP forces.
- The second was capacity-building. US forces would train, equip, advise, and assist AFP forces through long-term SA and direct US military engagement. The objective was to assist PSF in improving the physical security situation and in effectively countering terrorist and insurgents. Improved security will demonstrate to the people that the Philippine government is capable of protecting them from the insurgency and make them more likely to assist the AFP in targeting lawless elements. Improved capacity would increase effective targeting of lawless elements and minimize civilian injuries.
- The third was to conduct strategic communication and humanitarian action efforts to rehabilitate and develop communications that counter existing terrorist or extremist

ideology (Haider Interview). Strategic communications or information operations were designed to enhance the legitimacy of the Philippine government by promoting the successes of the first two lines of operations. The term strategic communications referred to many different informational efforts including building rapport and trust with the local leaders and population, properly framing US/AFP operations to the media and other entities external to Basilan, and developing themes to discredit the terrorist ideology of the ASG. Effective strategic communications were essential to mission success. Upon the deployment of US forces to Basilan, all SF detachments began to communicate and interact with local leaders and government officials (Haider Interview).

Information themes also targeted the insurgents. For example, playing card-sized handouts were circulated, offering cash for information leading to the capture of ASG members (Haider Interview). Civil military operations targeted areas where ASG had developed a support base and had a measurable effect on improving the socioeconomic conditions of the local population.²⁶ The investment in infrastructure, improved medical care, and education was targeted to demonstrate the commitment of the Philippine government to its people and to improve their quality of life (Martin Interview). Improved economic conditions would also encourage the non-radical elements of the population to seek safer work rather than fighting government security forces (Haider Interview).

These lines of operation complimented the efforts of the US country team to improve the legitimacy of the GRP and strengthened its efforts along Legs 1 through 3 of the diamond model. SOCPAC and what would later become the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) worked closely with the US Embassy country team, GRP officials, and key members of the PSF to develop a combined strategy, one that would ensure that PSF forces were the lead in all operations and that the US would remain in a strictly supporting role. This involvement of other stakeholders was essential to the SOCPAC strategy (Wilson).

Important lessons from Basilan

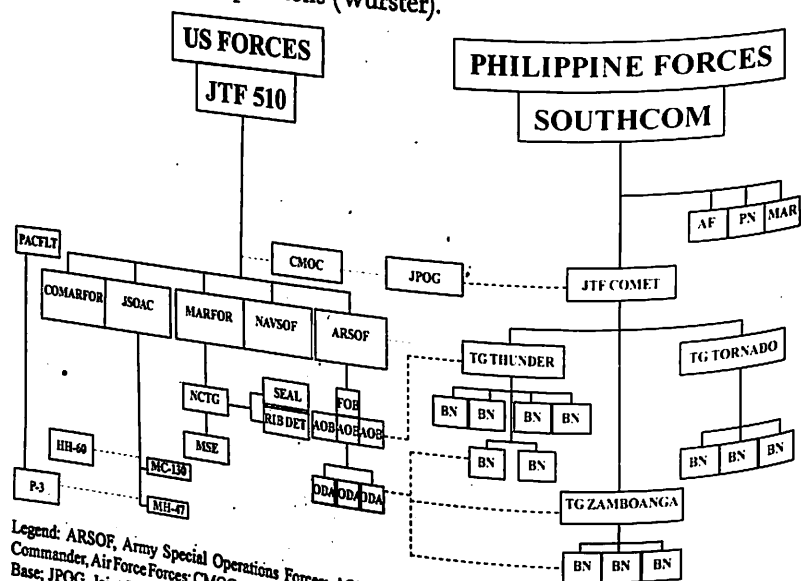
By all measures, the IA strategy used in Basilan was highly effective in denying ASG terrorists safe haven as well as improving GRP legitimacy, security, and the socioeconomic situation on the island.

Operations and intelligence fusion and capacity-building

By the end of Balikpapan 2002, there were clear indicators that the Basilan strategy had been effective. Initially, it had taken fifteen AFP battalions to establish a secure environment. By 2004, that number had been reduced to two AFP battalions and a small contingent of Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) and a lightly armed and under-resourced village civil guard service (Mossberg Interview). ASG operations in Basilan and throughout the archipelago had been significantly disrupted by the loss of both its safe haven and its sub-leader, Abu Sabaya.²⁷ According to the Congressional Research Service Report (CRSR 2007), the operation reduced ASG strength from an estimated 1,000 active fighters to an estimated 200-400 in 2005 (Lum and Niksch 2007).

Joint Task Force (JTF)-510 efforts to build the capacity of the AFP subsequently resulted in improved security on the island (Wilson). SF advisor teams had focused on military skills that improved the AFP's capacity to track and defeat the ASG. The JTF had partnered with US advisors at each level of Philippine command from the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Headquarters, to the Task Group Headquarters, and to the AFP battalions (Wurster). USSF advisors also accompanied Philippine units on combat missions, but remained with the Battalion Commander of the Philippine unit out of direct enemy contact and in a strictly advisory role (Wurster). Figure 8 outlines the task organization and relationship of the JTF-510 with its AFP counterparts. Gray lines denote coordination and synchronization nodes at each level of AFP command to provide advice and assistance. JTF Comet was the AFP task force headquarters, supported by the USJTF staff and Civil Military Operations Cell (CMOC) through the Joint Psychological Operations Group (JPOG). The SF companies or "AOBs" were collocated with the AFP task groups or brigade headquarters. At the battalion level, typically, one SFODA was assigned to advise and assist

each AFP battalion to conduct capacity-building as well as to advise and assist during combat operations (Wurster).



Legend: ARSOF, Army Special Operations Forces; AOB, Special Forces Company; BN, Battalion; COMAFFOR, Commander, Air Force Forces; CMOC, Civil Military Operations Cell; FOB, Special Forces Battalion Forward Operating Base; JPOG, Joint Psychological Operations Group; JSOAC, Joint Special Operations Aviation Cell; JTF, Joint Task Element; NAVSOF, Naval Special Operations Forces; NCTG, Naval Construction Task Group; PACFLT, Pacific Fleet; P-3, Airplane Surveillance Unit; HH-60, Helicopter Unit; MC-130, Cargo Plane Unit; MH-47, Helicopter Unit; PN, Philippine Navy; RIB DET, Naval Special Boat Detachment equipped with 11 meter rigid inflatable boats; SEAL, U.S. Navy Special Operations Forces; SOUTHCOM, Philippine Southern Command; TG, Task Group.

Figure 7. Task organization chart for JTF-510 depicting advise and assist relationship with AFP counterparts (Wurster 2008).

CMO and improving GRP legitimacy

At the outset of Balikatan 2002, most of the GRP infrastructure and services were located in the northern, predominantly Christian, part of the island. On the eastern and southern sides of the island, which were predominantly Muslim, there were few government facilities and a weak or nonexistent government security presence (Kaplan 2005). By the conclusion of the Balikatan 2002, that situation had changed dramatically. The construction of eighty kilometers of roads, four bridges, and two piers on the island had dual benefits: Improved security on the island (allowing PSF forces to respond quickly to emergency situations) and improved economics (making it possible for some remote villages that previously supported the ASG to get their goods to market). Completed civil military projects by the end of Balikatan 2002 included sixteen schools, seven medical facilities, and twenty-five fresh water proj-

ects. Over 20,000 local patients were treated during medical civic action programs (Wurster).

In 2004, an assessment team visited Basilan and observed several other indicators that the GRP/JSOTF initiatives continued to impact significantly on the security situation (Wurster). As compared to the situation in 2002 to 2004, a clear change in the behavior of the local population was evident. Children who lived in Basilan were now attending school in large numbers, unlike prior to Balikatan 2002 when the ASG had closed the islands' schools and hospitals by kidnapping and executing several teachers and nurses (Kaplan). Children were also observed to be playing outside, something that was not often seen during the ASG's reign of terror. At night, parents brought their children inside to get a good night's sleep in preparation for school the next day (Mossberg Interview). This was a marked change from 2002 when many children did not attend school and often stayed out late into the night (Haider Interview).

When the assessment team toured the facilities that had been constructed during the Balikatan 2002 exercise, they found that they had been well maintained by the local people (Wurster). In the two years since Balikatan 2002, the ASG had attempted to reestablish a presence in Basilan, but the population had refused to support them (Mossberg Interview). Indications demonstrated that the people of Basilan valued the alternative to supporting the ASG and had chosen instead to support the GRP (Wurster).

The improved security situation in Basilan also had a positive effect on the overall economic conditions on the island. Initial investment had been provided largely by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) program. By 2004, Basilan was also experiencing an increase in corporate investment. With the installation of the new road system, farmers and craftsmen were now able to get their goods and products to merchants in the larger towns and cities where they could be processed and exported for sale all over the Philippines (Wurster). The lucrative rubber plantations were also active once again. This provided much needed revenue and jobs. Refrigerated warehouses and export facilities had also been constructed, reestablishing Basilan's once thriving export industry. Philippine corporations also recognized the dramatic change in the security and socioeconomic conditions in Basilan. One very

visible indicator of this was the construction of a Jollibee franchise in the capital city, Isabela. The decision by the Jollibee Corporation to open a franchise in Basilan was not based only on an assessment that the environment was secure enough, but also that the population had the disposable income to support the fastfood outlet. This had not been the case two years earlier when Basilan held one of the lowest Human Development Indices (HDI) in the Philippines.²⁸

Information operations

The strategic communications or information strategy also had a significant effect in establishing local confidence in the GRP. In his 2002 Summary of Operations, then LTC David Maxwell, commander of 1/ISFG(A), described the US efforts to establish a dialogue with Basilan locals and leaders in the following terms:

“Initial actions by all elements were to immediately establish rapport both with military counterparts and in the local communities. The reception by the citizens on Basilan was generally excellent. Although at first very apprehensive and wary, the local citizens quickly warmed to the presence of US forces.

“Immediately upon arrival all units began interaction with the local governments (from provincial to barangay levels). Many municipalities including the Basilan Provincial Council passed unanimous resolutions supporting the deployment of US troops under the auspices of Exercise Balikatan. Many SF personnel were able to speak at various democratic forums (*sic*) to answer questions about the US mission and intentions. These meetings were instrumental in putting the local government officials as well as the local citizens at ease and turned their opposition or apprehension to support.

“The local governments and citizens of Basilan have embraced the US presence. They have passed unanimous resolutions initially supporting US forces presence and then later requesting extension of the presence past the original six months in the terms of reference. Many officials and citizens describe how peace and order has returned to most areas. Evidence can be seen in such events as the return of civilians to Upper and Lower Mahayhay (an ASG stronghold), the return of 1000 displaced civilians in the Sumisip area, and the conduct of celebrations such as the 28th Anniversary of Basilan and the First Anniversary of Isabela as a component city. Numerous outdoor events supposedly could not have been conducted just months ago but now are conducted with confidence. School graduation ceremonies in

Sumisip had been suspended for five years but were again held in March of 2002 with AFP and US presence. These are indicators that the combined US and AFP presence is improving the lives of the citizens of Basilan.”

Challenges amid the success in Basilan

While the ASG had not been completely wipe out or driven from the island, most of the ASG leaders had been either killed or forced to flee the island. Those who remained were able to blend into the MILF forces or general population and await another opportunity to revive their lawless activities.

The strategy used by the GRP and JSOTF was successful in making the environment untenable for the ASG, but the lack of good governance practices and poor socioeconomic conditions that first created the insurgency still exist in Basilan. If continued improvements are not made in this area, Basilan could once again become a safe haven to the ASG or other groups offering an alternative to poverty. Despite improvements since 2002, Basilan remains one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines (PHDR 2005). If it hopes to maintain peace there, the Philippine government must continue to expand government infrastructure and encourage investment in Basilan both from corporations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Banlaoi Interview). Money alone, however, will not solve the problems in Basilan. According to Rommel Banlaoi, Chairman and Executive Director of the Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR), eighty percent of foreign aid given to the Philippines since 2001 had been spent on Mindanao, yet it still counts as one of the poorest provinces in the country. Banlaoi believes that the issue is a lack of good governance and that where poor governance persists, so will terrorism.

One of the greatest challenges for US Special Operations forces during Balikatan 2002 was the restrictions placed on them by theater and national-level leaders who lacked an understanding of unconventional war (Maxwell 2004). The combatant commander and Secretary of Defense had imposed restrictions on Special Operations forces that severely limited their ability to effectively advise AFP forces in the fight against terrorism. This had been based on a misunderstanding of

the Philippine Constitution and poor coordination with the GRP in establishing the limitations of the US/RP partnership.²⁹ A more effective information strategy would also have helped to counter Philippine media misinterpretation of the Constitution (Banlaoi Interview 2008).

As AFP operations shifted to Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Mindanao in general, the JSOTF was faced with another significant challenge: Their ability to continue to provide assistance and capacity-building to AFP forces in Basilan. The JSOTF is constrained in terms of personnel and resources and must prioritize areas where SF detachments are deployed. In July 2007, fourteen Philippine Marines were killed and ten beheaded in an engagement with what was, at first, thought to be the ASG, but was later determined to have been most likely MILF members from the 103rd Base Command (Associated Press 2007). This engagement reinforced other assessments that the security situation was deteriorating in Basilan. With the end of Balikatan 2002, the US presence in Basilan had been reduced to occasional short duration Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) events. Concerned that the progress made in Basilan was in jeopardy, the US and GRP quickly developed a plan to "re-enter" the island. In response to the killing of the fourteen Marines, President Arroyo, now confident in the effectiveness of the IA, announced to the media that the GRP would launch a "humanitarian offensive on Basilan" in retaliation of the beheadings.³⁰ The JSOTF deployed a small contingent of US Army and Navy Special Operators to the island to assist the AFP in maintaining the progress that had already been made there.

In effect, the Marine killings highlighted the tenuous GRP ceasefire with the MILF. A breakdown in the ceasefire could be disastrous — not just for Basilan, but for the region as demonstrated by the recent failure of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) and the subsequent fighting between elements of the MILF and AFP in Mindanao.³¹

Another shortcoming of the operation is the failure by the US and the GRP to properly market the Basilan success story to the Filipino people (Banlaoi and Mendoza Interviews). Rightfully touted as a success story in the United States, the operation and its outcome have gone largely unrecognized among Filipino citizens. Banlaoi and recently retired Philippine National Police (PNP) Intelligence Chief, General Rodolfo Mendoza, explained that if the story of the Basilan success was

advertised to the Filipino people, there would be much less suspicion as to what the US military was doing in the Philippines. They also believe that if other local government leaders in the Philippines learned of the success of the IA, they would likely be more supportive of GRP efforts to improve governance in their home districts.

Conclusion

Generally, the operational environment provides the basis for any given COIN strategy. Any environment is unique in terms of the dynamics of politics, information, economy, and security that interplay with the culture and identity of the nation. The perception of legitimacy may also differ among people of different races and in different regions. The manner by which people recognize as well as resolve their problems ultimately changes relative to specific context or environment. As such, while the COIN models in the Philippines had a profound effect in addressing the threats, there is no guarantee that these will work in other areas. Given this, the Basilan model cannot be a "perfect template" to any insurgency in the world. Any strategy to be adopted in any country shall be justified by certain context or operational environment. There is no one-size-fits-all model for COIN. Successful models, however, provide important lessons that could enhance the prosecution of any COIN strategy. In the final analysis, the models may provide ideas that could work in Mindanao, but the government must be careful in analyzing the differences in context that may require some innovations or changes in the strategy.

Specifically, the case in Basilan worked in as far as addressing the problems on a shorter term is concerned. The building of infrastructures, provision of basic services, such as water supply, health and education, and attempts to address poverty are just the necessary components of a long-term commitment to address the roots. And for as long as poverty, unemployment, injustice, and marginalization remain, the seeds that breed discontent could still sprout and provide the rationale to challenge the Philippine state's legitimacy. In a more specific note, the case study in Basilan described in this research presents compelling evidence that the McCormick diamond COIN model and its IA strategy have been highly effective in improving the security situation in southern Philippines. Coupled with other measures to improve governance and

the inclusion of opposition groups in the political process, the IA is changing the culture of violence in Mindanao. The successful peace negotiations with the MNLF, the continued involvement of the MILF in peace negotiations, and the involvement of the CPP in the political process demonstrate the mutual desire of these groups to resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner. The success of the IA strategy has had the effect of compelling these groups to pursue a peaceful resolution to the conflict by diminishing their influence, mobility, and popular support. By offering economic opportunity, hope, and security, the GRP has given the people of Mindanao a viable alternative to supporting the insurgents. With the significant emphasis on peaceful resolution demonstrated by the Arroyo administration and the assistance of the US military forces in continuing to improve legitimacy and security in the region, there is reason to hope that Mindanao will experience a new awakening — not one of revolutionary consciousness, but one of economic and social prosperity.

Notes

¹ Borer (1999, xix) explains that legitimacy is a function of the state's ability to effectively govern a society in which citizens see the state's power over them as being correct and just.

² Goodwin suggests that the degree of radicalization of mobilized groups against the state is largely attributed to the group's perception of their chances of attaining some significant share of state power or influence. He further suggests that the political "incorporation" of mobilized groups has typically served to "de-radicalize" them. Political inclusion also discourages the sense that the state is unreformable or an instrument of a narrow class or clique and accordingly, needs to be fundamentally overhauled.

³ Banlaoi explains that prior the MNLF movement in the 1970s, the term "Moro" was actually a derogatory term used to describe the Muslims of southern Philippines. The word Moro comes from the original term Moor, which was used to describe the Muslims of Spain.

⁴ This diagram is a combination of points made by both COLs Wilson and Wendt in their illustrations of the diamond model.

⁵ McCormick lecture on the diamond model attended by the authors, 13 September 2007.

⁶ Borer, xviii. It should be noted that under certain conditions strong coercive measures can result in public support when the alternative to those coercive measures is perceived as being worse. For instance, Thomas Hobbes' notion of the Leviathan is based on the idea that "the state of nature" is a state of chaos with a constant struggle for power among all individuals. Hobbes asserts the first order of legitimacy of the state (his

Leviathan) is based solely on imposing order over that chaos. Hobbes' experience was based on the English Civil War, which has modern parallels to the state of Afghanistan following the departure of Soviet forces. The Taliban government was considered legitimate by many Afghans despite its heavy-handed policies.

⁷ Interview with LTC Haider, former JSOTF-P Forward Commander, 2005, by MAJ Hastings, 25 May 2008, Camp Smith, HI, hereafter cited as Haider interview. SOCPAC planners were well versed in COIN theory and historical examples of successful and unsuccessful COIN operations. Some of the planners, like COL Wendt, were also recent graduates of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and they had studied Mack and Arreguin-Toft. Professor McCormick is the Chairman of the Defense Analysis department at NPS and teaches the Guerrilla Warfare Seminar where he explains several theories on COIN that includes Mao, Guevara, Mack, and Arreguin-Toft. He also introduces his COIN model known as the "mystic diamond."

⁸ Interview with MAJ (P) Steve Mossberg (pseudonym) by MAJ Hastings, 28 April 2008, hereafter cited as Mossberg interview.

⁹ The combined Navy, Army, Marines, and Air Force units of the US military forces in the Pacific.

¹⁰ Interview with Undersecretary Edilberto P. Adan, Executive Director for the Office of the President, Presidential Commission on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFACOM), interviewed by MAJs Hastings and Mortela, 16 September 2008, Manila. Hereafter cited as the Adan interview.

¹¹ The US is the only country with which the GRP has a MDT.

¹² The MLSA would be clarified further in a July 2006 document known as "Kapit bisig"

¹³ C. Walley, "Impact of the semi-permissive environment on force-protection in Philippine engagements" (*Special warfare*, 2004, 37). The force cap for Balikatan was established in the December TOR — 500 personnel for the JTF Headquarters and 160 SF soldiers on Basilan Island.

¹⁴ Interview with MAJ (P) Dan Howard (pseudonym) by MAJ Hastings, 10 October 2008, Camp Aguinaldo, Manila, hereafter cited as Howard interview. Although many residents of Mindanao and the Archipelago had had positive experiences with US personnel in the past, many were suspicious of the true intentions of the US. MILF, MNLF, and ASG propaganda also played on previous US combat operations, particularly in Sulu, bringing fear and distrust to the surface.

¹⁵ Interview with MAJ Jeff Martin (pseudonym) by MAJ Hastings, 28 May 2008, SOCPAC HQs, Camp Smith, HI, hereafter cited as Martin interview.

¹⁶ Haider interview. Hy Rothstein also discusses this situation in his 2007 article, "Less is more," *Third world quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 2, 275-294. He describes the lack of interest of the DoD during both OEF-P and the US operations in El Salvador in the 1980s. He also suggests that if the US had not been involved in both Iraq and Afghanistan at the time and the GRP was willing to accept a large contingent of US forces, DoD may have displaced the "right-minded" SOCPAC command and sent large numbers of US forces creating a magnet for jihadist.

¹⁷ Interview with MG Ben D. Dolorfino, Commandant, Philippine Marine Corps, by MAJs Hastings and Mortela, Marine Barracks, Manila. 18 September 2008, hereafter referred to as the Dolorfino interview.

¹⁸ Map of Basilan, FEETEC Geographic Information System, http://map.primorye.ru/raster/maps/asia/basilan_island_tpc_1984, accessed 14 September 2008.

¹⁹ The ASG differed from the MNLF and MILF in that it acted more as a criminal organization than as an insurgency. It seemed uninterested in mobilizing the population to oppose the GRP, but focused instead on criminal activities and targeting the Philippine population with intimidation and violent attacks (Ressa). The MNLF, on the other hand, with the signing of the peace treaty with the GRP and the assumption of control of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), has moved into the "politics" segment with a bit of overlap into the "insurgency" segment. This is due to the threat of armed conflict with GRP forces and continued support of the ASG. Since entering into negotiations with the GRP, the MILF has moved away from the "terrorist" segment into the insurgent segment. As it makes progress towards a negotiated peace agreement with the GRP, it becomes more moderate and closer to functioning as a legitimate political organization (Abuza).

²⁰ Interview with Rommel Banlaoi, Chairman and Executive Director, Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, by MAJs Hastings and Mortela, 15 September 2008, Camp Aguinaldo, Manila.

²¹ Operation Ultimatum Assessment, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Headquarters, Western Mindanao Command Camp, after Action Report, Zamboanga City, 29 March 2007.

²² C. Walley, 18. MBG fighters attacked the airfields in Sulu and Zamboanga resulting in sixty AFP killed and 100 MBG members killed. The fighting lasted one week.

²³ COL Eric Wendt, author of "Strategic counterinsurgency modeling" (*Special Warfare*, September 2005), 10. COL Wendt was also one of the key planners involved in developing the Basilan strategy. He also served as Deputy Commander, Army Special Operations Task Force during Balikatan 2002, Commander of 1/1 SFG(A) and Commander 1st SFG(A). COL Wendt is also both a graduate of the Defense Analysis Department at NPS and a Senior Fellow of the department.

²⁴ Taken from a presentation given by LTG Donald Wurster, former SOCPAC Commander and Commander of JTF-510: Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines to the Defense Analysis Department, NPS, Monterey, CA. and attended by the authors, February 2008.

²⁵ Interview with COL Greg Wilson, Former JSOTF-P Forward Commander, 2005, Commander, 2/1 SFG(A) 2002-2004 and Senior Fellow, Defense Analysis Department, NPS, Monterey, CA, 11 September 2008, interviewed by MAJs Hastings and Mortela. COL Wilson is also the author of "Anatomy of a successful COIN operation: OEF-Philippines and the indirect approach." Thereafter referred to as the Wilson Interview.

²⁶ COL David Maxwell, "1/1SFG(A) Battalion Commander's OEF-P Unclassified Operation Summary OPSUM," 5 May 2002. As the commander of 1/1SFG(A) and SF forces Assigned to Balikatan 2002, then LTC Maxwell wrote this summary of operations on Basilan.

²⁷ The effect of the JTF-510 operations on the ASG was described by MG Wurster when he visited the NPS to brief the Defense Analysis Department of the operation. He

placed particular emphasis on the effect the CMO operations or IA had on separating the population from the ASG, February 2008.

²⁸ In 2003, Basilan ranked fourth from the bottom in terms of Human Development Index (HDI). This evaluation of Philippine provinces considered not just economic poverty, but also literacy, life expectancy, and other indicators. The other three provinces making up the lowest in HDI were in the ARMM: In descending order, Maguindanao, Tawi Tawi, and Sulu. See *Philippine human development report 2005*.

²⁹ Specifically, US advisors had been restricted to operate no lower than the AFP battalion level. This restriction implied that there was some safety for US advisors with the AFP battalion headquarters. It was based on the misconception by theater and national leaders that there was a definable front line that the battalion headquarters would stay well behind. Repeated requests by Special Operations forces to advise GRP troops at the AFP company level or lower were denied for the first six months of Balikatan 2002. Once permission was granted, this new authority still severely restricted the Special Forces' ability to advise AFP forces effectively in combat.

³⁰ Telephone interview with COI David Maxwell, former Commander JSOTF-P, Oct 2006 to Oct. 2007 and Battalion Commander 1-1SFG(A). COL Maxwell was also one of the original planners of the Basilan strategy and commanded the SF soldiers who executed the early SOCPAC initiatives of training the LRC and executing Balikatan 2002. Interview by MAJ Hastings.

³¹ Interview with Secretary Hermogenes C. Esperon Jr, Presidential Peace Advisor, Office of the President of the Philippines and former Commander of Philippine Armed Forces (2006-2008) by MAJs Hastings and Mortela, 17 September 2008, Manila.

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