



**PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE, VIOLENCE
AND TERRORISM RESEARCH**

POLICY BRIEF

No. 3, April 2010

**DEFEATING ABU SAYYAF GROUP:
THE STRONG AND URGENT NEED FOR AN
IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

**Brig. Gen. Francisco N Cruz Jr.*
Armed Forces of the Philippines**

This essay is an adaptation of the author's dissertation in his Master in Strategic Studies which he completed in 2005 at Singapore's Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies under its scholarship program. It is intended to influence public policy in the Philippines's war on terror.

Summary

The 2000 Sipadan crisis was the single most important event in the history of Islamic terrorism¹ in the Philippines. Perpetrated by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which dreams of converting Mindanao into an Islamic state, this crisis marked the internationalization of the Islamist cause and the transnational character of ASG brand of terror. It also demonstrated that terrorism works, and the seeming ineptness of the Philippine authorities to handle the problem. In 2003, after a military offensive to annihilate the group, the government announced ASG is a spent force. In reality, it is not. The ASG remains a formidable, deadly force evidenced by the Super Ferry and Valentine's Day bombings in 2004 and 2005 respectively, and by its continuing atrocities and resurgent ability to recruit members.

A military-based response is not enough to destroy Abu Sayyaf and other Muslim extremist groups² in the country. It would need a comprehensive approach to confront an enemy whose roots have political, social, economic and psychological dimensions, and whose ties with Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) have not been cut off. There are glaring weaknesses in policy and strategy to defeat terrorism, one of which is the absence of an ideological response or the conscious, deliberate effort to counter the radical/extremist ideology that drives recruitment, promotes hatred, and propels terrorist recruits to engage in violence. War on terror is a war of ideas and therefore the strategy to defeat ASG and *radical Islam*³—violent jihad or religious justification to violence-- requires an ideological counterforce that would compete with enemy ideology, eliminate prejudice and distrust between Muslims and Christians, destroy the enemy spirit and promote moderation.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO TERRORISM

On 23 April 2000, members of Abu Sayyaf Group, a homegrown terrorist group wanting to establish an Islamic state in southern Philippines through radical means, conducted a daring raid of Sipadan island resort in Sabah, Malaysia. With no resistance from Malaysian security forces, they kidnapped twenty people of seven different nationalities (eight Malaysians, three French, three Germans, two Finns, two South Africans, one Lebanese and two Filipinos) and without interference by the Philippine Navy they sailed directly to a remote jungle in Sulu, Philippines.

The events that ensued would transform the Sipadan kidnapping into a national crisis and would cause severe embarrassment to Philippine leadership. The crisis would emerge as an important event in the history of terrorism in the country, as it marked the internationalization of the Islamist cause and transnational character of ASG brand of terror. It would also demonstrate that terrorism pays dividends. For the succeeding months, the Sipadan crisis and ASG would capture an unprecedented international attention and would show the world the seeming ineptness of the Philippine authorities to handle the problem.

Local and international media would report the unspeakable concern of world leaders to end the crisis, thus giving ASG the 'oxygen of publicity.' Under extreme pressure from foreign nations and international organizations, the Philippine government would be forced to defy its 'no negotiation policy' and would yield to some of the terrorists' demands. In the beginning, ASG demanded political and economic concessions in exchange for the hostages: establishment of a separate Islamic state; cessation of military operations in Basilan island where government troops launched an offensive to free dozens of hostages held by another ASG group; creation of a commission to investigate allegations of maltreatment of Filipino Muslims in Sabah, Malaysia; declaration of Sulu Sea as exclusive fishing grounds for Filipino Muslims only; the withdrawal of all military forces from MILF camps; participation of the OIC and UN in the negotiations; and the designation of the Libyan ambassador to negotiate.

In June 2, the terrorists dropped their political demands and asked a million dollars for each hostage. Libya's offer of ransom in the guise of 'humanitarian assistance' would later be accepted by the terrorists. Secretary of National Defense Angelo Reyes admitted that at least PHP 245 million went to ASG. With huge amount of money in their hands, the ASG began recruiting more members offering Php100,000 and a firearm for each recruit.⁴

Two more terrorist acts would give the Philippine government sleepless nights. On 01 August 2000, a bomb killed 3 people in Jakarta and wounded the Philippine ambassador. It was discovered that Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) led the operation in response to the seizure by the Philippine military of Camp Abubakar, former headquarters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). On Rizal Day (30 December 2000), five bombs killed 22 people in Manila. Authorities concluded this as another MILF-JI joint operation.⁵

Three months after assuming the presidency, Philippine President Gloria ordered an all-out war against the Abu Sayyaf. She instructed her generals to 'annihilate' the group.⁶ After nearly two months, the terrorist group with enough money, courtesy of the Khaddafy Foundation, struck again. They abducted 20 people including the Burnham couple from the Dos Palmas resort in Palawan and sailed to Basilan without military obstruction.

In the wake of the Dos Palmas kidnapping, authorities launched a large scale military rescue operation and convened a Cabinet Crisis Committee.⁷ On 13 July 2001, government declared Basilan under a state of lawlessness, deployed more troops and intensified military operation.⁸

Thousands of government troops were deployed in Basilan to hunt down the terrorists. Arroyo introduced the reward system for informers, denied foreign negotiators and declared a news blackout on tactical operations. She also allowed the Americans to train with Filipino troops in Basilan in a controversial joint exercise called Balikatan 02-1. After the long, widely publicized military campaign, the military had declared the Abu Sayyaf a decimated force and labeled them as a bunch of bandits.

Few days after 9/11, President Arroyo issued her Fourteen Pillars of Policy and Action of the Government against Terrorism, that uses available tools of statecraft to demonstrate her commitment to prevent and suppress terrorism. So far, this was the first presidential directive that 'comprehensively' deals with international terrorism. It was 9/11, not local events like the Sipadan crisis and Rizal Day bombings, that compelled government to issue this policy. It was to be multi-pronged, multi-agency and multi-dimensional.

The administration waited three years (since the President declared an all out war on terrorism in 2001) before it finally set up an agency that will coordinate all efforts by government to defeat terrorism. On March 22, 2004, the President directed the creation of an inter-agency task force, called Antiterrorism Task Force (ATTF) and designated the Secretary of National Defense (SND) as head and National Anti-Terrorism Coordinator. The end objective of the ATTF is to achieve a well coordinated, effective government action for the destruction of terrorist groups and their capabilities. Composed merely of law enforcement agencies, the armed forces and civil defense units, the task force has obvious inadequacy i.e. it is meant to address 'terrorist capabilities', not 'terrorist motivations' (factors that fuels individuals to join the terrorist organization). Six months after, the President transferred chairmanship of the task force to the Executive Secretary.

The 14 Pillars has later evolved into a 16-point Counterterrorism Program. A National Plan to Address Terrorism and Its Consequences (NPTC) developed by ATTF does not encompass all 14 pillars/16-points. The NPTC prescribes the national framework, strategies and operational concepts to address terrorism and the measures to be undertaken to protect the people, restore government services, and provide emergency relief to individuals or organizations affected by the results or effects of terrorism. NPTC cannot be regarded as holistic simply because it only focuses on '*operational counterterrorism*': targeting terrorist cells and disrupting attack plans, not on '*strategic counterterrorism*': attacking terrorist motivations/mindset.⁹ Other instruments of

national power were not tapped. It lacks breadth because its mandate involves only intelligence, hardening of targets and consequence management. It lacks depth because intelligence is focused more on terrorist cells and less on their ideological infrastructure, and the private sector and civil society had not been utilized.

The government response to terrorism is bereft of an ideological component to confront a '*hearts and minds war*.' The absence of an '*ideological counterforce*' could explain to a certain extent why the government, after four decades, is still confronted with insurgencies and terrorism.

Eight years after the presidential order to annihilate ASG, the same problems remain and the ASG threat is still unabated. A military-based government response is not enough to destroy Abu Sayyaf and like-minded groups. It would need a multi-faceted approach to defeat an enemy that endures and whose roots have political, social, economic and psychological dimensions, and whose ties with other terrorist groups have not been severed. MILF founder Hashim Salamat once warned: the emergence of ASG is 'caused by the oppression and the continuous usurpation of the powers within our homeland...as long as the region and the Bangsamoro people are still under the control of the Philippine government, and oppression continues, we should expect more Abu Sayyaf style groups to come to existence.'¹⁰

WHY THE NEED FOR AN IDEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Terrorism is a by-product of ideological extremism.
Rohan Gunaratna

ASG is not yet a Spent-Force

Abu Sayyaf is still a formidable force, not yet a spent force. Abu Sayyaf has not been annihilated and it can still strike anytime, for a myriad of reasons.

First, according to military intelligence, Abu Sayyaf strength reached its peak of 1,270 members in 2000. This number has been reduced significantly to only 436 in the first semester of 2004 as a result of sustained military operations.¹¹ Based on this development, the military was quick to conclude that the Abu Sayyaf has been 'decimated.' Conversely, this may not be the case. Four hundred forty-six terrorists are still a force to reckon with. Needless to say, at the height of conflict in Cyprus between the British forces and the revolting National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) in the 50s, EOKA had only 400 active terrorists and yet they successfully forced the British to grant them independence.¹²

By the end of 2009, ASG has still 391 fighters,¹³ with mastery of terrain and capability to produce home-made bombs/Improvised Explosive Devices.¹⁴ They are difficult to detect because they operate in cells, and their firearms are almost intact. Abu Sayyaf still possesses 340 firearms (end of 2009)¹⁵, a little less than it possessed in 1999 (380 firearms), two years before President Arroyo declared an all-out-war against the group.

When Abu Sayyaf raided the Ipil town of Zamboanga del Sur in 1995 it had only 230 firearms. The true measure of effectiveness of counterterrorist response is not body count but the ability to suppress acts of terrorism and contain the growth of militancy/radicalism by impeding recruitment.

Second, Abu Sayyaf still has varying degrees of influence in many villages in Sulu, Basilan and Zamboanga.¹⁶ The number of ASG affected barangays remained at 164 by the end of 2009¹⁷. This means that the group still enjoys community-based support. This support network from relatives and co-religionists is an abundant source of weapons, food and intelligence, provides them freedom of movement and is critical to the survival of Abu Sayyaf.

Third, Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping business had provided them funds to sustain the organization, recruit new members and conduct operations. It was estimated that Abu Sayyaf received ransom of more or less US \$10.44 million from foreign hostages of the Sipadan incident alone.¹⁸ Up to his time, these kidnappings and extortions seem unstoppable, and continue to give government headaches and sleepless nights. In 2009, ASG raised P47 M ransom.¹⁹

Lastly, Abu Sayyaf's connection with MILF, MNLF-Misuari Group and Jemaah Islamiyah/Al Qaeda complicates the conflict situation. Military sources confirmed that such links, which help them endure, do exist. Terrorism expert, Dr. Rohan Gunaratna wrote that Al Qaeda has decentralized its operations and is now operating through its associated groups (that include Abu Sayyaf) in 102 countries.²⁰ Due to its shrinking strength after 9/11, Al Qaeda has 'adapted, instilling its mission and vision in associated groups (like ASG) and transferring its capabilities to them.'²¹ ASG links up with MILF for weapons and logistics, and with JI for ideology and terror skills. JI is reportedly present in ASG areas in Sulu and MILF sanctuaries in Central Mindanao.²²

Political Content of ASG's Terror

The Philippine intelligence community needs to review its strategic assessment of Abu Sayyaf. Are they terrorists with political agenda or simply criminals? Labeling and treating Abu Sayyaf as mere criminals limit government options to security and law enforcement. This author has always maintained that Abu Sayyaf is still a politico-religious terrorist group that espouses violent jihad, the core of its ideology. It has become one of Al Qaeda's associated groups.²³ Former ASG hostages have claimed that the kidnappings had political and religious undertones due to the fact they were lectured on Islam and pre-Spanish history of the Sulu sultanate.²⁴ Kidnappings are not an end in itself. They were part of Abu Sayyaf's strategy to finance its future operations and recruit new members. Like bombings they are meant to create fear and wreck the economy. The Al Qaeda training manual explains that kidnapping for ransom is allowed in Islam especially if the victim is a non-Muslim.²⁵

Ostensibly, the 2004 Super Ferry bombing, the 2nd most lethal terrorist attack in Asia after the Bali bombing, and the 2005 Valentine's Day bombings, demonstrated the political content of the ASG struggle. On 28 Feb 04, WG&A Super Ferry 14 passenger ship was bombed killing more than a 100 people. Abu Sayyaf claimed responsibility for

the tragedy and said the terrorist act was carried out in 'retaliation for the maltreatment of women in the ASG areas and was only the beginning of concerted terrorist attacks'. The AFP claimed it was propaganda. The Philippine Coast Guard denied the incident was a terrorist act, but the government would later admit it was the handiwork of the ASG.

One year after on a Valentines Day, the ASG would again manifest its fury and ability to inflict harm. Three nearly simultaneous bombings occurred in cities of Makati, Davao and General Santos, killing 11 people and wounding 83 others, in retaliation for military offensive. ASG leader Abu Solaiman went on radio in Manila and said, 'We will find any means to inflict more harm to your people's lives and properties, Allah willing... We will not stop until we get justice for the countless Muslim lives and properties that your people have destroyed. May the almighty Allah punish your nation again through our hands.'²⁶

Obviously, the above terrorist incidents had no monetary gains. The benefit gained by ASG was more psychological e.g. to boost morale in the ASG ranks, to entice new recruits and to produce public fear and anxiety. Following the bombings, the issues on National ID system and Anti-terrorism bill emerged again in the agenda of government, a succinct reaction against terrorists not criminals. Crimes have been a tactic of terrorists. For example, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia had also employed kidnappings to finance its activities. The Tamil Tigers were heavily involved in organized crimes like drug trafficking to further their aims.²⁷

The ideology that keeps ASG and other Muslim extremist forces alive in the country is radical Islam or the waging of jihad by violent means. Their struggle is rooted on this ideology. 'The incitement of Muslims to hatred and violence, the plotting, and the killing are all being done under the banner of jihad—Holy War.'²⁸ To counter Islamist terror is to prevent the creation of 'terrorists strategically' by targeting ideology that produce terrorists—or counter the belief that it is the obligation of every Muslim to wage violent jihad.²⁹

Ideology is fundamental in violence, thus a 'counter-ideology' should be central in counterterrorism. Gunaratna writes:

Ideology is 'a powerful message that motivates and propels ordinary human beings into action. A dynamic and evolving belief system, it is created by the interpretation of events by ideologues. Ideology frames organizational structure, leadership, and membership and shapes and strategies adopted by the group...Ideology is used to attract and retain recruits as members, supporters, and sympathizers. An individual's personal history and worldview may make him or her more or less susceptible to a particular terrorist or extremist ideology...While targeting terrorist operational cells is essential to reduce the immediate threat, fighting terrorism is more about fighting extremism that provides the recruits, funds and justification'³⁰

Abdulrazak Janjalani, ASG founder and first ideologue, had opposed the secular leadership of MILF and the moderate Islamist stance of MILF. For him, the 'only goal is

the rule of the Koran, not autonomy, not the Tripoli agreement, not independence.' He advocated violent jihad as the only means to establish an Islamic state in Mindanao, a state 'where Muslims can follow Islam in its purest and strictest form as the only path to Allah.'³¹

ASG is media savvy

ASG has skillfully used the media to gain domestic and international attention, and force the government to negotiate as evidenced by the Sipadan hostage crisis. In spite of news blackout during the military siege in Sulu, still ASG managed to steal air time. Abu Sabaya, the ASG spokesman at that time, had good grasp of media tactics. He invited celebrity Robin Padilla to act as negotiator and he wrote the scripts for Martin Burnham, who was tasked to speak for the hostages. When ASG posed for TV footage, they looked happy and brandished their HPFAs to demonstrate high state of morale and physical strength. Abu Sabaya stood with arms across his shirt with 'No Fear' logo.

Kidnapping and hostage taking are 'protracted incidents that take place over a prolonged period of time,' thus they give the terrorists more 'opportunities for propaganda and publicity.' Protracted incidents, like the Sipadan, Dos Palmas and ICRC hostage³² crises, provide 'drama, excitement, protagonists, and the possibility of development over time, for example, the escalation of pressure on a government through demands, deadlines and threats...and offer a great potential for terrorist for achieving coercive aims directed at government and for gaining legitimacy and support in the process.'³³

The mujahideen's roadmap by an Islamist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda like ASG calls on all mujahideen (holy warriors) 'to enlarge the circle of the Islamic struggle by distributing the operations all over the world, incite militant Islamic activity not only in Iraq but in other countries...to learn to use computers and the Internet, and to employ such technologies to ignite a psychological war against the enemy.'³⁴ Ostensibly, ASG and other extremist groups in the country have become a part of Al Qaeda's global jihad or the struggle to establish strict Islamic rule in the Muslim world through violent means.

WHAT COULD BE DONE

While the current crop of terrorist leaders can be killed, captured or even rehabilitated, the seeds have already been planted for the next generation. Hence, in the longer term, counter-ideological responses are crucial to disrupt the recruitment and regeneration cycle.

Mohamed Bin Ali

The Philippines' war on terror requires an ideological response or a psychological war campaign³⁵ involving various agencies of government, across all levels of governance

from national to local, in collaboration with the civil society, and using all channels of communication, with the objective of countering terrorists' political propaganda that produces recruits and keep constituencies committed to their cause. This means preventing the spread of radical Islam, espoused not only by ASG but by other Muslim extremist elements in the country. Essentially, this has to be done not piecemeal, not short-term, but protracted, budgeted and in a massive scale, and has to be managed by an effective government mechanism. This would also require an effective intelligence community, which should include in their collection effort the 'ideological/belief mindset of the group, as revealed through its statements, publications and other propaganda materials, and those of its supporters and sympathizers,' which is indispensable in 'devising ways to penetrate the group, to disrupt or manipulate its internal dynamics by psychological warfare means, or to counter its propaganda.'³⁶

Countering terrorist ideology necessitates among others: harnessing the power of the media especially television, 'engaging mainstream Muslims in dialogue away from corrupt perverted interpretation of religious texts; an ideological counterweight that promotes correct understanding of jihad, fatwa, sharia, relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims; empowering moderate Muslims who advocate cooperation and non-violent solutions to conflict; educating the public on the ideologues, organizations and tactics of terrorism without blaming Muslims; and enlisting the support of the public and Muslim majority as strategic partners in counterterrorism.'³⁷

Promoting Culture of Peace and Non-violence

Government must through all forms of media and other channels--church, people's movements, NGOs and academic institutions, Muslim leaders--promote culture of peace and non-violence. It should advance moderation and elimination of prejudices between Muslims and Christians. Community-level peacemaking should be undertaken to also address clan conflict. Muslim moderates should be encouraged to take an unequivocal stand against terrorism. Government should act and be perceived as 'sponsor' and not an enemy of Islam.

Inter-religious interfaith dialogues should be hastened and broadened. There are already existing organizations that advocate peace and reconciliation. The Bishops-Ulama Forum, for example, espouses peace education down to the level of parish priests, pastors, ustadz and imam (Muslim equivalent of priests), geared towards promotion of mutual understanding, reconciliation, peace, and unity between Muslims, Christians and lumads in Mindanao. But its presence is hardly felt. It has limited reach and has the apparent 'inability to enter into impartial dialogue with the Muslim community.' The Ulama League of the Philippines, a pillar of Bishops-Ulama Forum is less prominent, and 'does not speak for all ulama.'³⁸ In this respect, government should come in to provide the needed stimulus.

Gaston Ortigas, who suggested the establishment of a Center for Moderate Muslims, critically analyzed peace building efforts in Mindanao:

'The role of Muslim leaders in inter-religious dialogues is not prominent compared to Christian religious...The focus of Ulama is to strengthen themselves internally, rather than external relations...Interfaith dialogues are still at leadership levels, not yet spread to involve the critical mass...Mainstreaming of

peace education into regular curriculum at various school levels is hardly been done... effect of reducing prejudice in society and schools still has to be seen.’³⁹

Investing in Education

An ideological response would need the active participation of the Department of Education (DepEd). Government should invest more on education to prevent the creation of suicide bombers, terrorist recruits and sympathizers. The school is a ‘potent force for culture of peace.’ Peace education should be introduced in schools, with framework based on ‘intra and inter cultural appreciation, cultivating active non-violence, promoting human security and social justice and respect for human rights.’⁴⁰

It is imperative that the madaris⁴¹ be given sufficient attention. The military intelligence service chief has divulged in June 2003 that the madaris teach waging of jihad against the government.⁴² MILF and ASG operatives underwent religious training in a Marawi madrasah before going to military training in MILF camps.⁴³ It was only in 2002 that the government began to focus on the madrasah by pushing for its integration into the country’s national educational system for better government control of their activities and curriculum. A unified curriculum for madrasah was adopted in 2005, a move that concretizes the accreditation of the madrasah system by the Philippine government. Under DepEd’s ‘reconciliatory policy’, the madrasah system will adopt the revised Basic Education Curriculum being used in government schools. It will retain the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic values. Public schools with Muslim students, on the other hand, will integrate the teaching of Arabic and Islamic values in the curriculum. However, this mainstreaming program, in order to succeed, must involve teaching peaceful jihad and religious tolerance (‘accepting others’ religious beliefs and practices which disagree with one’s own’), and should be fast-tracked and supported with quality teachers and sufficient government funds.

Winning and Co-opting Media

It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles.

Osama bin Laden⁴⁴

More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of Muslims.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi⁴⁵

The media is a powerful tool to change perceptions and public opinion, thus it has a crucial role in the ideological war on terrorism. It has to be co-opted and won.

Media, a double-edged sword, can serve both the terrorist and the counterterrorist. The media has provided terrorist with a ‘ready-made publicity platform from which to air their grievances, legitimize their causes, mobilize potential recruits, disrupt government

counter-responses and underscore their political relevance.' Equally, the media can also benefit the government. 'Through coverage of terrorist acts and atrocities, the media also harden public resolve against terrorists and destroy their reputation by showing their savagery. The media can help create heightened public awareness or vigilance, provide public warnings, and advise how to react in emergencies. The media can also provide a forum for discussing counterterrorism policy formulation and remind the government of the need to adhere to democratic norms.'⁴⁶ In this regard, it becomes essential that government must make media a battleground, take advantage of its 'privileged access' to the media, and craft innovative ways to starve the terrorists of publicity. Interagency leadership and cooperation among government information/communication agencies has to be strengthened with more executive powers and budget.

Government should formulate a national communication strategy, with proper themes and messages (ideological alternatives to extremism) to address enemy hate propaganda and win back its supporters, to delegitimize the enemy and kill its will to fight, to promote public image of Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance, and to enlist public support, and with budgets and specific actions by various agencies, and with strategies to co-opt counterterrorism partners (moderate Muslims, ulama, madaris, civil society etc.).

Other countries combating terrorism have also done counter-ideological work to reduce the threat. In Yemen, suspected Al-Qaeda supporters and sympathizers were engaged in regular religious dialogue sessions with Islamic scholars. In Indonesia, a task force which included the Indonesian Ulama Council was formed to counter extremist ideologies, and the mainstream scholars were encouraged to write books that propagate non-violence and peaceful Islam. And in Singapore, authorities established the Religious Rehabilitation Group to de-radicalize⁴⁷ or rehabilitate JI detainees and their families away from ideology of terror through counseling sessions, and have started educating the public especially the youth against JI's violent ideology.⁴⁸

The first step toward defeating an enemy is to 'know' him. Terrorists are motivated by 'anger, an anger based on hurt, pain and suffering.' They feel or they were made to feel 'unheard, powerless without resorting to violence, under attack and forced to fight back, and defeated—that they have already lost, have nothing to lose, and therefore committed to a lose-lose scenario.'⁴⁹ This is their mindset, their belief system. This has to be assailed.

CONCLUSION

Government response is more focused on a direct strategy--attacking terrorism by force and deterrence. It must add in its arsenal an indirect strategy—employing least amount of force and more of political and ideological methods. A great deal of government resources should be dedicated to ideological response/psychological warfare--not on bombs--to counter enemy propaganda, destroy the legitimacy of competing ideology, isolate the extremists, impede recruitment, win Muslim moderates and influence media.

War on terror needs more brain power, not muscle power. The military option can be inevitable but it should be well calibrated to prevent collateral damage and cycle of violence, because using violence to stop violence only promotes a culture of hate and revenge, thus prolonging the war. The government's strategy of annihilating Abu Sayyaf needs rethinking. Abu Sayyaf is a terrorist group with Islamist agenda, not mere criminals, and with the ability to endure and inflict harm. It is time for government to take serious efforts to deal with the radical ideology advocated by ASG and other extremist groups.

For comments, please email fnacruzjr@yahoo.com.

**About the Author*

BGen Francisco N Cruz, Jr. AFP is an intelligence and civil military operation professional. He was Group Commander of 300th Air Intelligence and Security Group and defense attaché to Singapore. He completed two Master's degrees: Master in Public Management at the University of the Philippines, and Master in Strategic Studies at the prestigious Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies of Singapore under its scholarship program. His penchant for community work made him Adopted Son of Pasay City and Mabalacat, Pampanga, and a recipient of two *Sagisag ng Ulirang Kawal* awards. He also received the Philippine Military Academy Cavalier Award for Air Force Operations and the most coveted The Outstanding Philippine Soldier (TOPS) award. He was awarded the Outstanding Defense and Armed Forces Attache (DAFA) Post for two consecutive years in 2004 and 2005. He was conferred the Gold Cross Medal and meritoriously promoted to Captain after he led a daring raid against MNLF rebels in 1983. He served four years in Mindanao and once viewed the Mindanao conflict as an attrition war, but later realized it is more of an ideological, 'hearts and minds' war where non-military methods must dominate government strategy. He now heads the AFP Civil Relations Service.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Violence rooted in Islamism (Islam is not only a religion but also a political system; that modern Muslims must return to their roots of their religion, and unite politically. -Source: Wikipedia)
- ² Also called radical Muslim terrorist groups, they include rouge factions of Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and Rajah Sulaiman Movement.
- ³ Also called extreme Islam or violent Islam.
- ⁴ Military Briefing: *Update on Developments of ASG*, AFP, 15 April 2001
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Norma Sayoto. *Domestic Terrorism: The Philippine Experience*, in *Terrorism Perspectives for the Asia Pacific*. CSCAP, ISIS, Malaysia, 2002.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Mohamed Bin Ali, *Ideological Response to Terrorism and Extremism*, www.pvtr.org
- ¹⁰ Sourced from Rommel Banlaoi, *The Abu Sayyaf Group: From Mere Banditry to Genuine Terrorism?* 2006
- ¹¹ Military Intelligence Briefing, *National Security Situation*, July 2004.
- ¹² Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, St Andrew University Press. P 59.
- ¹³ Security Situation Update, Dec 2009
- ¹⁴ Peter Chalk, "Militant Islamic Extremism in the Southern Philippines," in *Islam in Asia: Changing Political Realities*, Isaacson and Rubenstein, ed., pp 202.
- ¹⁵ Security Situation Update, Dec 2009
- ¹⁶ These are called 'affected barangays', an intelligence term, to mean Abu Sayyaf has infiltrated and has supporters/sympathizers in these villages. This number was based on an NDCP Paper, *State of Radicalization in Muslim Communities in the Philippines*, presented by Commo Carlos Agustin during the Regional Conference on Radicalization of Moslem Communities in SEA, held in Manila on Dec 2005.
- ¹⁷ Security Situation Update, Dec 2009
- ¹⁸ Norma Sayoto. *Domestic Terrorism: The Philippine Experience*.
- ¹⁹ Security Situation Update, Dec 2009
- ²⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, *The Post Madrid Face of Al Qaeda*. The Washington Quarterly, 2004.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Joint AFP-PNP National OB Validation Workshop on 10-11 July 2009.
- ²³ My *Abu Sayyaf Terrorist Profile* elaborates Abu Sayyaf's links with Al Qaeda. There are pieces of evidence that suggest that Al Qaeda encouraged and financed the formation of Abu Sayyaf.
- ²⁴ Norma T Sayoto, *Domestic Terrorism: The Philippine Experience*.
- ²⁵ Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, (Hurst and Co Publishers Ltd, 2002). pp 75-76.
- ²⁶ <http://www.thestandard.com.hk/stdn/std/World/GB15Wd02.html>
- ²⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *The Lifeblood of Terrorist Organizations: Evolving Terrorist Financing Strategies*, in *Countering Terrorism through International Cooperation*, ISPAC, 2004.
- ²⁸ [http://www.heritage.org/research/Homeland Defense/upload/wtcw.ch7.pdf](http://www.heritage.org/research/Homeland%20Defense/upload/wtcw.ch7.pdf)
- ²⁹ Rohan Gunaratna, *The Post Madrid Face of Al-Qaeda*, The Washington Quarterly, 2004. p91-100.
- ³⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, *Strategic Counterterrorism: Getting Ahead of Terrorism*, Part II The Ideological Response, Jebsen Center for Counterterrorism Studies, Research Briefing series, vol 2, no.2, Nov 2007
- ³¹ Marites Danquilan Vitug and Glenda Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Manila: PCIJ, 2000) p205.
- ³² On January 15, 2009, ASG abducted three workers (one Italian, one Swiss and one Filipino) of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Patikul, Sulu while on a humanitarian mission. The hostage crisis which lasted nearly six months grabbed local and international attention.
- ³³ Ronald D Crelinsten, *Terrorism and the Media: Problems, Solutions, and Counterproblems*, in *Democratic Responses to International Terrorism* ed. David A Charters, University of New Brunswick, Transnational Publishers Inc. New York, 1991. pp 275-276
- ³⁴ *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* Eds Hillen Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, Eric Brown, Hudson Institute, Washington DC, Institute of Islam, Democracy, and The Future of the Muslim World 2005. p43
- ³⁵ Psychological operations, also known as psywar, propaganda or political warfare are 'planned use of any form of communication designed to affect the minds, emotions, and action of a given group for a specific purpose. This definition by Linebarger is cited by Kumar Ramakrishna in his book *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds* (Curzon Press 2002)

-
- ³⁶ David A. Charters, *Counterterrorism Intelligence: Sources, Methods, Process, and Problems in Democratic Responses to International Terrorism* ed. David A Charters, University of New Brunswick, Transnational Publishers Inc. New York, 1991. pp 231-2.
- ³⁷ Rohan Gunaratna, *Strategic Counterterrorism: Getting Ahead of Terrorism*.
- ³⁸ Steven Rood, *Forging Sustainable Peace in Mindanao: The Role of Civil Society*, East-West Center Washington 2005
- ³⁹ Religious Leaders Building Peace in Mindanao, Briefing Paper by Gaston Z Ortigas Peace Institute Phis for the International Consultation on Religious Building peace, 5 -6 Oct 2004 London—
- ⁴⁰ Culture of Peace in Sulu, Tabang Mindanao Study for Pagtabanganan Basulta, 2006
- ⁴¹ Madaris (plural form of madrasah) are privately owned but community -based schools that teach Islam and Arabic.
- ⁴² MindaNews, Defense, DepEd to look into Madaris' Alleged Role in Breeding Terrorists, Jewel Canuday, 15 June 2003.
- ⁴³ Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf, Zachary Abuza, Sep 2005
- ⁴⁴ Steven Corman and Jill Schefelbein, *Communication and Media Strategy in the Jihadi War of Ideas*, Consortium for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University, 2006.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Graeme Steven and Rohan Gunaratna, *Counterterrorism*, ABC-CLIO Inc., California 2004. p119
- ⁴⁷ This is a process to change the attitudes of the terrorist about violence.
- ⁴⁸ Mohamed Bin Ali, *Ideological Response to Terrorism and Extremism*, www.pvtr.org
- ⁴⁹ Sharif Abdullah, *The Soul of a Terrorist: Reflections on Our War with the Other*, in Chris Scott, *The Psychology of Terrorism, A Public Understanding*, Vol 1, Praeger Publishers, Westport CT, 2002. . p133.

**This Policy Brief is the official publication of the
PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE, VIOLENCE & TERRORISM RESEARCH (PIPVTR)**
3rd Floor, LMP Building, 265 Ermin Garcia Street, Barangay Silangan
Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines
Telephone: + 632 6665763; Fax: +632 4335248
www.pipvtr.com

For further queries about the PIPVTR and its publications, please contact:
Prof. Rommel C. Banlaoi
Chairman of the Board and Executive Director
Email: rbanlaoi@pipvtr.com