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**MOROJIHAD AND THE ISLAMIC VISION OF
USTADZ SALAMAT HASHIM:
UNDERSTANDING MILF'S POLITICO-RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY**

Col Francisco Cruz Jr.

I INTRODUCTION

I would like to be remembered as an innocent civilian forced to fight to defend my people.

Salamat Hashim

Ustadz Salamat Hashim died of a lingering illness on 13 July 2002 inside an MILF camp. At the time of his death, he was the leader and ideologue of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a *mujahideen* organization he founded in 1984 to wage a separatist war against the Philippine government. He was regarded as the *Imam* of the Bangsamoro people (Philippine Muslims), and *Amir* of the Bangsamoro Mujahideen (MILF fighters).

Morojihad is the continuous struggle for Islamic independence in Southern Philippines. Dubbed as the Bangsamoro struggle, it is perhaps the “longest and strongest movement in the region covering almost 400 years of violent struggle against the Spanish, American, Japanese and Filipino rule.”¹ In the middle of the 16th century, the Philippine Muslims first fought against the Spaniards who tried to colonize and convert them to Christianity. The Spaniards called the Muslims *Moros*, who reminded them of the Moors, occupiers of Spain for several centuries.

Hashim maintained that the Moroland (Mindanao) was “illegally and immorally annexed.” The Muslims fought the Americans who tried to integrate them under one administrative system of the Philippines. The colonizers encouraged

¹ Dr. Samuel Tan, *History of the Mindanao Problem, in Muslim Perspective on the Mindanao Conflict* by Amina Rasul, AIM Policy Center, Makati, Philippines, 2003. p4.

Christians to settle in Mindanao which led to “legalized land grabbing” or loss of their ancestral lands. By 1960s, the large scale migration of Christian settlers in Mindanao made the *Moros* a minority in Mindanao. The *Moros* today constitutes only 6% of the total population and are concentrated in Southern Philippines.

In the mind of Hashim, the root cause of the Moro rebellion is political, the Moro’s quest for self-determination:

“When the Philippine government was granted independence by America in 1946, the Bangsamoro people felt that instead of becoming free, they instead lost their freedom. Before the establishment of the Philippine government by western imperialists, the Bangsamoro people were independent. They had their sultanates or independent principalities in Sulu and Maguindanao which were united by alliance and cooperation. The Bangsamoro people felt that when their homeland was annexed to the Philippine government, the freedom they enjoyed was entirely lost. So this is the problem we want the Philippine government to address.”²

In 2000, former President Estrada ordered an all-out war against Hashim and his MILF forces. The military launched a massive offensive that led to the capture of Camp Abubakar--the MILF headquarters, and other camps. Hashim revealed that the military assault was a genocidal campaign against the Bangsamoro Muslims. Hashim in retaliation called an *all-out jihad* leading to fierce fighting. Today, the MILF and the Philippine government had declared ceasefire and negotiations had started to find a peaceful, meaningful solution to the Moro problem.

This paper attempts to examine Hashim’s concepts of *jihad* and Islamic state, the MILF’s ideology and his vision of “regaining the usurped Bangsamoro’s right to self-determination and establishing Islamic rule in the Moroland.” Although his dream remains unfulfilled, his legacy and political thought serve as a binding force in the ranks of the MILF. Hashim disdained being labeled as a fundamentalist or terrorist. His supporters consider him as a “reformer” who established a “reform movement,” and who can be compared to renowned reformers in the Muslim world like Caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz, Imam Shafi’e, and Ibn Taimiyyah.³

II THE LIFE OF AN ISLAMIC REFORMER

² Interview with Salamat Hashim, *The Muslim Separatist Rebel Wants the East Timor Formula*, Asiaweek, March 31, 2000. (Online: moroinfo.com)

³ Nu’ain Bin Abdulhaqq, *A Prophesized Reformer*, in *The Bangsamoro People’s Struggle Against Oppression and Colonialism*, ed. Nu’ain Bin Abdulhaqq, Agency for Youth affairs-MILF, Oct 2001.

As a reformer, Hashim called on Philippine Muslims to follow Islam more faithfully and reform their lives, their homes and the society. He wanted them to strictly adhere to *tawhid* (monotheism) and put Allah in the center of their private and public lives. Moreover, he wanted the political leaders to ensure that Islam becomes the foundation basis of any political action or behavior.

Salamat Hashim was born on July 7, 1942 in Pagalungan, Maguindanao in central Mindanao. He came from a religious family of seven. At the very young age of six, he could read the Holy Quran and recite many of its verses. A dedicated student, Hashim finished both his primary and high school education with honors. During weekends, he attended classes in the village *madrasah*.⁴

In 1958, Hashim went to Mecca for the *hajj*. The following year, he went to Cairo where he enrolled at al-Azhar University, the most prestigious institution of learning in the Muslim world. Most of the 200 Philippine Muslims who were granted scholarships by the government of Egypt under the pan-Islamic agenda of Gamel Abdul Nasser, studied in al-Azhar University.⁵

In al-Azhar, Hashim finished his secondary schooling in Arabic, his degree in basic Islamic studies and his Master degree in philosophy. Hashim completed the required units for a doctorate in Islamic studies. His thesis, which took him three years to research, was burned in 1973 when the military attacked his house in Maguindanao. The subject of his thesis was the rise of Islam in Southeast Asia.

Hashim was an active student leader. "His active participation in different student activities exposed him to various revolutionary trends, both Islamic and secular, which Cairo was known for at that period. This exposure brought him awareness of the colonial oppression his Muslim brothers and sisters were suffering back home, an awareness which gradually transformed him from a scholar to an Islamic revolutionary later on in his life."⁶

Hashim actively took part in the Philippine Muslim Student Association and the Organization of Asian Students in Cairo. While in Cairo he clandestinely organized a core group among the Filipino Muslim students who planned the Bangsamoro revolution in the early sixties. "Among the contemporary Muslim thinkers who influenced Hashim, two Muslim personalities made a lasting

⁴ *Madrasah* is a traditional religious school which teaches Arabic language and Islamic theology.

⁵ Thomas M McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels*, Anvil Publishing, Philippines. 1998. p143.

⁶ Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga, *The Peace Process: Salamat Hashim's Concept of Bangsamoro State and Government*, excerpts from his thesis, *The Political Thought of Salamat Hashim*. (Online: Bangsamoro.info)

impression on him: *Syed Qutb* and *Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi*.⁷ It was, however, Syed Qutb's writings which shaped his Islamic outlook and political beliefs. The impact that Syed Qutb and Mawdudi made on him was what inspired him to plant the seeds of Islamic revolution in the Bangsamoro homeland."⁸

Hashim was instrumental in covertly arranging the military training in Malaysia of the first batch of Muslim cadres (Batch 90) that was to become the military core group of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). In 1970, Hashim returned home to organize, together with Nur Misuari and other militant Muslims, the MNLF to stage a revolt against the Philippine government. He also arranged the military training of the second batch (Batch 300) of trainees in Malaysia.

In the MNLF, Hashim served as the first chairman of the Kutawato Revolutionary Committee (KRC), a Committee that handled foreign relations. Through his connections in the Middle East, Hashim was able to bring to the "attention of the Muslim world the cause of the Bangsamoro struggle for decolonization of their homeland, thus gaining for the MNLF moral, political and material support."⁹ In 1977, Hashim broke away from MNLF due to differences with its Chairman, Nur Misuari, on leadership style and ideology. On same year, pro-Hashim leaders signed a petition calling for the ouster of Nur Misuari, whom they accused of corruption and of being a communist, and recognizing Hashim as the new leader.

Two months later, Hashim executed an "Instrument of Takeover" and proclaimed himself the leader of the new MNLF. He justified that, "the MNLF leadership was being manipulated away from Islamic basis, methodologies and objectives and fast evolving towards Marxist-Maoist orientations...The central Committee has evolved into a mysterious, exclusive, secretive and monolithic body whose policies, plans and decisions—political, financial, and/or strategic—became an exclusive preserve of Nur Misuari."¹⁰

⁷ *Syed Qutb* (1906-1968) is described as most significant thinker of Islamic resurgence in the modern Arab world. Islamic scholar John Esposito called him as the godfather of modern revolutionary Islam. Qutb joined the Society of Muslim Brothers, and published his final book, "Signposts on the Road," which urged Muslims to struggle against all forms of *jahiliyya* (ignorance) that prevailed in the Egyptian society. *Mawdudi* (1903-1979) was a fundamentalist thinker who advocated a separate homeland for Indian Muslims. He founded Jamaati Islami (Islamic party) in 1941. After the creation of Pakistan, the Party clamored for the re-Islamization of the Pakistani society.

⁸ Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga, *The Peace Process: Salamat Hashim's Concept of Bangsamoro State and Government*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Marites Danguilan Vitug and Gloria M Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*, Institute for Popular Democracy and Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, 2000. p123.

In 1984, the new MNLF was renamed MILF. The word “National” was replaced with the word “Islamic” to emphasize Hashim’s Islamic ideological line. By 1990, MILF strength has grown to 10,000-15,000 armed regulars that can be backed up by 122,000 trainees. By 2000, MILF was already pushing for the official recognition (acknowledgement) of 13 major and 33 minor camps in a move to achieve belligerency status.¹¹

III CONCEPT OF JIHAD

Hashim wrote in 1985 a pamphlet called “The Bangsamoro Mujahid” to guide MILF fighters in the conduct of *jihad*. It was through this writing that Hashim had inculcated in the minds of the *mujahideens* the Islamic essence of their struggle for independence. He wrote that the purpose of jihad is to “defend their religion, the dignity of the Bangsamoro people, and regain their legitimate right to self-determination...and the ultimate objective of the Muslim community or *ummah* is to “make supreme the word of Allah, which means: the establishment of a true Muslim community and a genuine Islamic system of government and the application of real Islamic way of life in all aspects of life.”¹²

According to Hashim, this objective could only be realized through *dawah* (Islamic call) and *jihad* (struggle in the way of Allah). The intentions of *dawah* are: “a) to transform every individual Muslim member of the MILF into a true and real Muslim whose beliefs, system of worshipping his Creator, norm of discipline, character, conduct and behavior and his entire life is in conformity with the teachings of Islam derived from the Quran and Sunnah; b) to transform homes of Muslim MILF members into real Islamic homes where the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah prevail; c) and to transform our community into a truly Islamic one governed by the Shariah.”¹³ This was in essence Hashim’s Islamization agenda.

Jihad is justified when *dawah* or the development of the Islamic community is obstructed, Hashim asserted. “When a Muslim community is persecuted, oppressed or denied liberty and freedom to perform its obligatory duties to Allah which include conducting *dawah* until its final goal is achieved, then armed struggle is permitted for the purpose of repulsing such persecution and oppression.”¹⁴ Hashim quoted the following Quranic verses to support his *jihad*:

¹¹ International Crisis Group, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, 13 July 2004. pp 4-5.

¹² Salamat Hashim, *The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His Objectives and Responsibilities*, Bangsamoro Publications, Mindanao, Jan 1985. pp8-9.

¹³ Ibid., pp9-11.

¹⁴ Ibid., p11

And why should ye not
Fight in the cause of God
And those who, being weak,
Are ill-treated (and oppressed)?
Men and women and children
Whose cry is: Lord
Rescue us from this town
Whose people are oppressors;
And raise for us from Thee
One who will protect;
And raise for us from Thee
One who will help. (S. IV: 75)

And fight them on
Until there is no more
Tumult or oppression,
And there prevail
Justice and faith in God;
But if they ceased,
Let there be no hostility
Except to those
Who practice oppression. (S. II: 193)

In Hashim's creed, there are two major elements of the *morojihad*, *Iman* (faith) and knowledge. *Iman* is a "firm belief arising out of knowledge and conviction, which leads men of a life of obedience and submission to the Will of God... and *jihad* is the culmination of faith in Islam." A mujahid needs knowledge to confront every challenge. He must know the "basic teachings of Islam, the cause they are fighting for, war techniques and strategies, the enemies (the oppressors), friends and allies (the entire Muslim *ummah* and the peace-loving people of the world." ¹⁵

This is the *lesser jihad* that Islam allows. Islam condones "fighting only when the conflict involves self-defense (defensive war), defense of one's religion from the assaults of unbelievers, and in response to the forcible displacement of people from their living quarters."¹⁶ *Jihad* means exerting oneself for the sake of God from avoiding sins and helping others (*greater jihad*) to physical fighting (*lesser jihad*) for the purpose of suppressing injustice and oppression.

Hashim shared the view of many Muslim jurists that jihad is compulsory in a world divided between the *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and the *dar al-harb* (land of

¹⁵ Ibid., pp17-23.

¹⁶ Shaykh Muhammad Sarwar and Brandon Toropov, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to The Koran*, Alpha Books, New York, 2003. p164.

war), and that all Muslims should engage in the struggle to “expand the *dar al-Islam* throughout the world so that all of humanity would have the opportunity to live within a just political and social order.”¹⁷ Hashim taught his MILF fighters that the duty of every mujahid is to “establish a just social order under the stewardship of leaders adhering to the Quran and Sunnah.” That *jihad* is an obligation is evident in Hashim’s many writings.

The MILF ideology, as espoused by Hashim is “LA ILAHA ILLA ALLAH MUHAMMAD AL RASUL ALLAH: There is no deity except Allah, God alone must be worshipped. Muhammad is the Messenger of God, that the worshipped of God is to be carried out according to the teachings of and examples set by the Prophet.” Hashim explained that this belief system is anchored on the unity and sovereignty of Allah:¹⁸ “All authorities emanate from Allah’s sovereignty. Allah is the absolute law-giver. No authority on earth can pass laws contrary to the laws handed down by Allah through His Prophet.. The core of the MILF’s social program is the Islamization of the Bangsamoro people.”¹⁹

In his interview with Nida’ul Islam in 1998, Hashim consistently stressed the Islamic basis of their struggle and the role of MILF as the “vanguard of the Islamic movement in the Bangsamoro homeland.” He affirmed the Front’s methodology is complete submission to the Will of Allah, and that every MILF fighter must strive to accomplish a six-point objective: “make supreme the Word of Allah; gain the pleasure of Allah; strengthen the relationship of man with his Creator and of man with man; regain the illegally and immorally usurped legitimate and inalienable rights of the Bangsamoro people to freedom and self-determination; and establish an independent state and government and implement shariah.”²⁰ The mujahideens must, in simple terms, seek for the creation of an Islamic state.

IV CONCEPT OF ISLAMIC STATE

Hashim made clear the differences between the MILF and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF): “MNLF is more inclined to secularism, while MILF adopts the Islamic ideology and way of life...and believes in the Islamic concept of state and government.”²¹ MNLF recognizes the Philippine constitution, while the Islamic

¹⁷ John Esposito, *Unholy Wars: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2002. p35.

¹⁸ This is also called *tawhid*, the oneness of God, God’s absolute unity, or God’s sovereignty over the Islamic community or state.

¹⁹ Interview with Salamat, *MILF leader to Nida’ul Islam*, (Online: bangsamoro.info.)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Front rejects it. The MNLF negotiated with the government and opted for autonomy, and this led to the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

In pursuit of establishing an Islamic state, Hashim conceived of a 20-year program (1981-2000) that encompassed: Islamization of all aspects of the Bangsamoro people; military buildup; self-reliance; and strengthening and improvement of the organizational and administrative and managerial capability. Hashim later extended this plan into a 50-year program (2001-2050) that would continue the 20-year agenda and would focus on: “establishment of justice; ensuring full freedom and respect of human rights; overcoming criminality, poverty, ignorance and sickness; ensuring equal opportunity and equal rights to earn and live honorably; overcoming graft and corruption and exploitation of properties for personal interest; and undertaking measures to solve social problems.”²²

Hashim had, until his death, envisioned to create an Islamic state founded on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. His position was that man-made laws cannot be above and superior to God’s laws. “Islam, as a complete way of life and system of government, cannot function properly under another constitution other than the Quran.”²³

Professor Abhoud Syed Lingga, a Philippine Muslim affairs analyst and lecturer, studied extensively the life and works of Hashim Salamat. In 1995, he published his thesis, “The Political Thought of Hashim Salamat,” which details Hashim’s operationalization of his vision of a Bangsamoro Islamic state and government.²⁴

Hashim firmly believed that “the establishment of an Islamic government is one of the requirements in the perfection of the Muslim’s *ibadah* to Allah... *Ibadah* is not limited to the performance of prayer, fasting, *hajj* or giving of *zakah*, although these are basic requirements of Islam, but includes the political affairs of man, his

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hashim’s concept of an Islamic state closely resembles that of Mawdudi, an Islamic thinker who had influenced the thinking of Hashim. In Mawdudi’s “Political Theory of Islam,” in Kurshid Ahmad, ed., *Islam: Its meaning and Message* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), he described the characteristics and purpose of an Islamic state: Main characteristics of Islamic state: “a. God alone is real sovereign; all others are merely his subjects. b. God is real law-giver and the authority of legislation vests in Him. The believers cannot resort to totally independent legislation nor can they modify any law which God has laid down. c. An Islamic state, must in all respects, be founded upon the law laid down by God and His prophet. If the government disregards the law revealed by God, its commands will not be binding to believers.; Purpose of the Islamic state. a. prevent people from exploiting each other, to safeguard their liberty and to protect its subjects from foreign invasion b. evolve and develop well-balanced system of social justice c. eradicate all forms of evil and to encourage all types of virtue and excellence.”

business transactions, social relations, education, culture and all other aspects of life. All these have to be pursued in accordance with the system provided by Allah... A Muslim may be able to perfectly perform his prayer, observe the rules of fasting and *haji*, but if the political authority to whom he owes obedience and allegiance does not recognize the supremacy of the Law of God, he has not perfected his worship to God.”²⁵

This belief conforms to the propositions on *ibada* by two Islamic thinkers, Al-Mawardi (d.1058) and Ibn Taimiyya (d. 1328) which express that: “The purpose of man is service of God, *ibada*. Complete *ibada* requires the existence of an organized community of believers. The existence of such a community requires government. The primary purpose of government is the rendering possible of *ibada*.”²⁶

Government is an instrument for realization and perfection of man’s worship to God. This is Hashim’s system of thought on the function of government. “In any society men transact business, administer public affairs, enter into contract, legislate rules and regulations and interact with one another. All these have to be done in accordance with the system and law of God. The function of government is to regulate the affairs of humankind so that individually and collectively they can perform their worship to God. Government should ensure that justice prevails and should eradicate all forms of evils and encourage all forms of virtue and excellence.”²⁷

The model, in Hashim’s mind, that should be followed in the establishment of the Bangsamoro government is the government organized by the Prophet when he migrated to al-Madinah... and the rule of his four immediate successors, *al Khulafa al-Rashidun*...”Specific matters of governance should be left to *ijtihad*²⁸, taking into consideration the conditions, needs and welfare of the people.”²⁹

As to the system of governance, Hashim maintained that governance must be founded on *shura* (consultation), justice and equality. For Hashim, “justice is the natural consequence of *shura* and equality is the natural consequence of justice. There will be no equality if there is no justice, and there will be no justice unless the affairs of men are conducted through consultation.”³⁰

²⁵ Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga, *The Peace Process: Salamat Hashim’s Concept of Bangsamoro State and Government*.

²⁶ Barakat Halim, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp 119-147.

²⁷ Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga.

²⁸ *Ijtihad* refers to the independent judgment exercised on matters of religion or religious law not specifically detailed in the Quran.

²⁹ Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga.

³⁰ Ibid.

In line with Hashim's Islamic doctrine, the MILF practices consultation through the Bangsamoro *majlis as-Shura* (Bangsamoro Consultative Council) constituted in 1993 with 51 members. The organizational structure of the MILF comprises three divisions: the executive functions exercised by the Office of the Chairman; the legislative functions by the *majlis as-Shura* (Consultative Council); and the judiciary by the Shari'ah Court.³¹ This practice can be seen and felt at Camp Abubakar.

V CAMP ABUBAKAR, A PROTOTYPE OF AN ISLAMIC STATE

Camp Abubakar was the Headquarters of the MILF that spanned more than 5,000 hectares mostly agricultural land. It was named after the first successor of Prophet Muhammad, Abubakar which literally means "father of ladies." It was the center of power and authority, and the "symbol of Bangsamoro revolutionary resistance and a pride to most Muslims" until it was overrun by the military in 2000.

Camp Abubakar was also a "symbol of de facto belligerency status towards which the movement was negotiating."³² In 1997, ceasefire was reached between MILF and the government in favor of peace talks. MILF pushed for recognition of its camps as precondition to the talks. By 1999, MILG gained acknowledgement of Camp Abubakar and other camps. The government allowed the establishment of the camps to "define the boundaries of the MILF so as to hold the group accountable should lawlessness or clashes occur. However for the MILF, "each acknowledgement was another step towards de facto belligerency."³³ It was in Camp Abubakar that the Jemmaah Islamiah (JI), a regional terrorist network, set up and run a terrorist training camp called Camp Hudaibiyah. Camp Hudaibiyah was a concrete evidence of Hashim's ties with the JI.³⁴ Hashim had consistently denied his connections with JI.

Marites Danguilan and Glenda Gloria are two prominent Filipino journalists who wrote in 2000 a substantive book, "Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao." They depicted Camp Abubakar as the "closest living model of the MILF's dream of an Islamic state." Vividly, they described the Islamic life in the camp:

³¹ Ibid.

³² International Crisis Group, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, 13 July 2004. p10.

³³ Ibid., p6.

³⁴ Ibid., p 13.

“They practice their own brand of justice, defend territory they claim as theirs, train their own soldiers, send their children to the *madrassah*, run their own rice, fruit, and vegetable farms... It is a self-contained community...

The MILF no longer regard themselves as a guerilla group but a semi-conventional fighting force. The MILF has set up a purely military camp, and built an entire community with religious, social, economic and military structures, with schools, mosques, shariah courts, and multi-purpose cooperatives...MILF believes it is more enduring to have a multi-dimensional organization where Islam is practiced as a way of life.

They have in a way set up a parallel government whereby they run their own affairs... The justice system...is anchored on the shariah... Under Philippine laws, shariah courts cover only domestic and family issues. But the MILF disregards this and expands the court's domain to criminal offenses. Punishment for offenses ranges from public lashing—100 lashes for fornication between unmarried man and woman—to hard labor for those who steal to pay their debts. Recidivists are jailed. Executions do take place and apply to murderers.

The Internal Security Force (ISF) kept peace and order and perform police duties. They are sometimes called “spiritual force” or “religious police” because they see to it that Quran is followed and they monitor the practice of Islam in the camps.”³⁵

Hashim had claimed the MILF camps as another country. MILF is involved in security and socio-economic projects for its “constituents.” The lifeblood of the organization comes from contributions from Middle Eastern diaspora, Libya and Iran, wealthy Arabs and from foreign MILF-controlled charities. Reports reveal the MILF collected one million pesos monthly from about 27,000 Muslims overseas contract workers in the Middle East. Revenues from internationally funded charities were used for the construction of mosques and Islamic schools, for health and social services and for the production of Islamic literature. MILF also received domestically *zakat* collection. Muslim families were obliged to contribute 10% of their income to the *imams* to maintain mosques. MILF also received about 1.5 million pesos a month from *saqadas* (offerings to the mosques). Foreign nationals who visited Camp Abubakar likewise made large donations to MILF. Although evidence suggests, the Front denied having been involved in illegal activities like kidnapping, extortion, marijuana plantations and illegal logging to generate income.³⁶ The Islamic governance in Camp Abubakar was the reason why Hashim had always wanted to negotiate with the Philippine government as another country.

³⁵ Marites Danguilan Vitug and Gloria M Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao*, pp107-114.

³⁶ Rohan Gunaratna, *The Lifeblood of Terrorist Organizations: Evolving Terrorist Financing Strategies*, in *Countering Terrorism through International Cooperation*, ISPAC, 2004.

VI POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE MINDANAO CONFLICT

Hashim was firm in his stand: the right to self-determination and independence is non-negotiable. He is not opposed to a peaceful resolution of the Mindanao conflict. His advocacy was referendum as the only viable political option for Mindanao. He urged the Philippine government to “allow the Bangsamoro people to decide on their future and destiny in a democratic manner such as the holding of a popular referendum in the Bangsamoro areas on the issues of independence, federalism, autonomy or even status quo”³⁷

This exercise is to be conducted by a third party, possibly the United Nations, only on areas like Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi, and other municipalities where Muslims are the majority. Hashim avowed to respect the result of the referendum even though only one province opted for independence. Hashim wanted the East Timor formula to finally put an end to the conflict. He said, “War will go on until the root cause of the problem, the restoration of our people’s right to self-determination and freedom is finally resolved.”³⁸ In his view, the notion of self-determination is “having a separate territory, a separate government, a separate armed forces, the power to tax, the power to exploit our natural resources, the power to conduct foreign affairs, the power to negotiate with other countries, including Manila.”³⁹

As openly declared by Hashim, the source of conflict in Mindanao is neither ideological nor cultural, but political. Hashim addressed the Filipino leaders and people, in his conversation with Soliman Santos Jr, a Filipino legal scholar who also made a research on MILF:

“We would like to say to our friends in Manila and the rest of the Filipino people that the conflict in our part has nothing to do with ideology. We are not fighting because the Manila government is dominated by Christians. We are not against the Christian Filipinos. We are not against religion of any kind. We are simply against oppression. *And to us the worst oppression is the long deprivation of the Bangsamoro people of their inalienable rights to freedom and self-determination....*We hope the Filipino people will try to understand us. We are Muslims, never fundamentalists or terrorists.”

³⁷ Interview with Salamat Hashim by the Mindanao Crescent, April 27, 2001. (Online: Moroinfo.com)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Hashim believed that the clamor for independence is not only among ranks of the MILF but also among other sectors of the Bangsamoro society. Lingga, who is also a proponent of the referendum, reinforced this assertion. He wrote that the more than one million delegates to the First Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly (BPCA) held in 1996 in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao were unanimous in calling for reestablishment of the Bangsamoro state and government. He added that the Second Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly held in 2001 attended by more than 2.6 million delegates from all over the Bangsamoro homeland, including representatives of non-Muslim indigenous communities, unanimously declared that "the only just, meaningful, and permanent solution to the Mindanao Problem is the complete independence of the Bangsamoro people and the territories they now actually occupy from the Republic of the Philippines."

Hashim was confident he had the numbers to count on when referendum is held. He believed he already had established a political and ideological clout in the Moroland. He was convinced the Bangsamoro people would eventually choose independence.

VII CONCLUSION

The Government of the Philippines (GRP) and MILF had decided to stop the fighting and go back to the negotiating table. The negotiations had been slow perhaps because the two panels have contradicting political framework. The GRP works along the dictates of the Philippine Constitution, the country's fundamental law, whereas the MILF has the Quran as its fundamental law. In the Constitution, sovereignty resides in the people, in Quran sovereignty resides to none but Allah. Hashim wanted a separate state, but the GRP would not allow dismemberment of the Philippine territory. This is the dilemma that the panels are facing and which makes the Moro problem a complex matter.

Hashim Salamat's Islamic system of thought represents an utopian orientation. Utopia is the dream of Islamic revivalists.⁴⁰ Like Hashim, their vision is to create a true Islamic state, an ideal society where poverty and crimes don't exist, where peace, equality, happiness and justice prevail, and where God's sovereignty and shariah reign. Hashim was looking at the future and he failed to diagnose the status quo. Mindanao has the poorest regions in the country. Muslim provinces have dropped to the status of the "poorest of the poor." In 1998, the Autonomous Region

⁴⁰ Based on an essay by Syed Farid Alatas: *Ideology and Utopia in the Thought of Syed Shaykh Al-hady*, utopia refers to "distortions of reality, its categories transcend the present and are oriented to the future...utopias are wish-images."

of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) registered the lowest per capita income (P9,476)—Manila had P43,120. ARMM had also the lowest literacy rates.⁴¹ Insurgency and military operations had prevented children from going to school and had hampered economic progress in the area.

Hashim has succeeded, in a limited extent, in the Islamization of the Moroland. Camp Abubakar was the reflection of this vision. He died never realizing his dream, but his *jihad* continues. His MILF fighters had not abandoned the Bangsamoro struggle, the fighting did not end. Armed skirmishes occur intermittently.

Hashim will forever be remembered as a religious scholar, a freedom fighter, the ideologue of the Front and the architect of the Islamic form of the Bangsamoro struggle for freedom and self-determination. This is his greatest legacy. Shortly after his death, he was quoted in a speech, “In Memory of Salamat Hashim,” delivered before the Muslim Youth Organization by Soliman Santos, a non-Muslim who wrote the book, “The Moro Islamic Challenge:”

“This idea (Islamic state) might be viewed as idealistic but I don’t mind. What is important is that I believe in it and it is my duty to work for it and I have offered myself to die for it. Whether it is acceptable now or not does not matter. Because I believe a well-founded and deeply studied concept will not die. Only the proponents will die.”

About the Author:

Col Cruz is a Counter-Terrorism Research Fellow of the Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (PIPVTR). He currently serves in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. He started his military career as an intelligence officer in Southern Philippines. He completed his Master in Public Management at the University of the Philippines, and Master in Strategic Studies at Singapore’s Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies. He has written several essays, monographs and theses on strategy, terrorism, insurgency, psychological operations and civil-military operations.

⁴¹ Amina Rasul, *Poverty and Armed Conflict in Mindanao*, in *Muslim Perspective on the Mindanao Conflict*, AIM Policy Center, Philippines, 2003, pp 123-146

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