

**PHILIPPINES TERRORISM:
THE ROLE OF MILITANT ISLAMIC CONVERTS**

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PHILIPPINES TERRORISM: THE ROLE OF MILITANT ISLAMIC CONVERTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Terrorist alliances in the Philippines are in flux in a way that could affect the peace process between the Arroyo government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF is distancing itself from partnership with the extremist Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), pushing individual JI members increasingly toward the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). MILF members unhappy with concessions by more moderate leaders may seek to join militant alliances. The ASG and JI are working increasingly with the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), militant converts to Islam based in Manila and northern Luzon, who are a vehicle for more experienced terrorist groups to move into the country's urban heartland. As it pursues peace, the government needs a better security/human rights balance: improved police anti-terrorism capacity but also humane detention and speedier, more transparent prosecution of suspects.

The RSM is the radical fringe of the Balik-Islam movement, literally "return to Islam". Members call themselves "reverts", not converts, for two reasons. First, they maintain that all humans are born free of sin into Islam, but, misled by parents or guardians, may be brought up in other traditions. When they revert to Islam, they are cleansed of sin. Secondly, they argue that Islam was the country's original religion, whose spread was forcibly reversed by Spanish colonial intervention. A powerful symbol of this frustrated destiny is Rajah Solaiman, Muslim overlord of Manila at the time of the Spanish conquest. Filipino workers returning from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are the most important source of adherents for the more ideological forms of activist Balik-Islam.

Ahmed Santos, the RSM leader arrested in October, converted to Islam in 1993, and married into the top ranks of the ASG before RSM was formally established in January 2002, apparently to divert military attention from the Basilan-based ASG. In 2004 and 2005, members of his new group took part in two bombings in the capital region that reflected intertwined relationships between the converts, the ASG who directly handled them, their Indonesian mentors and the MILF commanders who sheltered all three groups.

Several counter-terrorism "successes" have inadvertently deepened the nexus between foreign jihadis, Abu Sayyaf, the RSM, and more militant MILF members. One is pressure on the MILF through its peace talks with the government to stop harbouring foreign terrorists, whether members of JI or other Indonesian groups. This, as noted, has led the foreign fugitives to find other partners. Secondly, pressures ranging from widespread arrests to the collapse of JI's administrative structure in Mindanao have forced foreigners into far greater direct cooperation with their hosts. Thirdly, the U.S.-Philippine "Balikatan" manoeuvres on Basilan island forced the core of ASG to flee to the Mindanao mainland (by way of Sulu), bringing it into more direct contact with militant MILF commanders seeking new alliances in the face of the moderate Al-Haj Murad's rise to leadership.

The fate of the peace process remains tied to how counter-terrorism strategies are pursued but is complicated by a number of factors. First, while the ethnically Maguindanaon-controlled leadership of the MILF is willing to act against rogue commanders of the same ethnicity who support and protect foreign terrorists, it is not willing to do the same against ethnic Maranaos, for fear of splitting the movement. Secondly, the steady deterioration of the government's 1996 agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) may undermine MILF confidence in its own peace process and drive some disaffected members into militant alliances. Thirdly, if MILF moderates are perceived as giving away too much for only limited concessions, militant leaders may break openly with them. Finally, efforts of various militant groups to build a united front strategy, using real and perceived human rights violations by the Philippines government against suspected terrorists as a recruiting argument, may help build a defensive bulwark around those who are actually committing acts of terror.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Philippines Government:

1. Exchange and integrate comprehensive databases on persons of interest with other countries in the

- region; the databases should include full information on cohort and kinship connections and actual or potential antagonisms, so Philippine and Malaysian officials have a keener appreciation of JI and like-minded groups, and Indonesians and Malaysians know enough about the MILF and ASG to ask jihadi detainees the right questions.
2. Craft carefully, in consultation with civil liberties experts, an anti-terrorism law that, to reduce well-founded fears of abuse, contains safeguards such as:
 - (a) limits on pre-trial detention;
 - (b) regular judicial review of individual cases; and
 - (c) guarantees of access to legal counsel.
 3. Provide for a single national identification system to facilitate law enforcement efforts to identify and track suspects.
 4. Accelerate the judicial process in Philippines terrorism cases, ensure that trials are transparent and evidence is made public, and bring Ahmad Faisal, alias Zulkifli, and Ahmed Santos to trial as matters of priority.
 5. Expand the mandate of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) to cover MILF and MNLF personnel in collusion with identified terrorist groups or individuals, and require MILF to provide a full accounting of disciplinary action taken against commanders with proven terror ties as well as its own list of terrorism suspects.
 6. Create a new senior cabinet-level position in the Philippines overseeing the peace process, empowered to liaise and build consensus with key stakeholders in Congress, the security forces, local politicians and civil society groups, and to manage a full-time, permanent peace panel with enhanced diplomatic status.

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PHILIPPINES TERRORISM: THE ROLE OF MILITANT ISLAMIC CONVERTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two years, alliances among terrorist and insurgent groups in the Philippines have been in a state of flux. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which provided protection and training facilities to Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) for over a decade, has increasingly found the ties a liability, particularly as peace talks inch forward with the Philippines government. Meanwhile, key JI fugitives from Indonesia and Malaysia have moved closer to the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), while JI's administrative structure in the Philippines has all but collapsed. It is not clear who these fugitives report to in JI, if anyone.

Top ASG leaders have been forced out of their base areas in Sulu and Basilan and into areas that are more the traditional turf of the MILF, while non-JI groups from Indonesia have established their own relations with MILF and ASG commanders and each other, making organisational divisions extremely fluid. Indonesians associated with Darul Islam (DI) and KOMPAK as well as JI have continued to go to Mindanao for training.

ASG and foreign, largely Indonesian, jihadi Islamists are working with a small circle of militant converts who form the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), dedicated to the "re-Islamisation" of the northern Philippines by revolutionary means.¹ These militants are the radical fringe of Balik-Islam (literally "return to Islam"), a movement whose members claim they were originally Muslim but were forced generations ago to convert to Christianity. The converts in turn benefit from a "united front" strategy in alliance with veterans of the divided Communist Party of the Philippines.

Despite the arrest of RSM founder Ahmed Santos on 26 October 2005, the emergence of a militant wing within Balik-Islam is particularly worrying for three reasons. It may presage more attacks in the northern Philippines, particularly the urban heartland around Manila, similar to the Superferry bombing of 27 February 2004 and the coordinated, three-city bombing on Valentine's Day, 14 February 2005. It suggests that a fresh channel for funding South East Asian terrorism might be forthcoming from the Gulf countries, since a pool of some 900,000 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia generates a steady stream of returning converts. And it has potential to offer a new source of protection for foreign jihadis, mostly Indonesians and a few Malaysians, as the MILF grows less hospitable.

The ASG-RSM-JI link is mutually beneficial in several ways. RSM and ASG get the direct benefit of JI expertise and technical assistance. JI and the ASG get new field operatives. (To Crisis Group's knowledge, JI has never tried to induct Filipinos as full-fledged members.) After more than 30 years of secessionist warfare in the south, militants see attacks on civilians in northern cities as righteous retribution. By extending their reach into the enemy's urban heartland, they aim to project an image of ubiquity and invincibility, seizing the offensive to distract and over-stretch security forces while gaining greater publicity than attacks in the south would produce. High profile operations in the capital contribute to the polarisation of opinion in the country's media and policy-making centre, attract new members to the extremist cause and divide the mainstream civic community. As ASG spokesman Abu Solaiman proclaimed in March 2005, "you don't have to bring the war to Mindanao. We will bring it right to your doorstep".²

For the RSM and ASG, the most valuable publicity comes from the perception that government counter-measures discriminate against Muslims, and converts in particular. It is a classic tactic of asymmetric warfare for insurgents to seek to provoke governments into clumsy overreaction, one that is all the more effective when conducted in the full glare of the urban media spotlight. During the martial law period (1972-1986) and two further decades of communist and secessionist insurgency in the Philippines, a sophisticated advocacy infrastructure has grown up

¹ For earlier Crisis Group reporting on the Philippines, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°80, *Southern Philippines Background: Terrorism and the Peace Process*, 13 July 2004. For related reporting on Indonesia, see most recently, Crisis Group Asia Report N°103, *Weakening Indonesia's Mujahidin Networks: Lessons from Maluku and Poso*, 13 October 2005; Crisis Group Asia Report N°92, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia: Darul Islam and the Australian Embassy Bombing*, 22 February 2005; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°90, *Indonesia: Rethinking Internal Security Strategy*, 20 December 2004. For more general discussion of Islamism, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

² *SunStar* (Manila), 16 March 2005.

around victims of state repression, serving to radicalise potential recruits on the fringes of the armed movements. There are clear indications that elements of this activist machinery are now swinging behind a new cause – Balik-Islam terror suspects – in loose alliance with opposition politicians and Saudi Arabian-funded *daawa* (religious outreach) organisations.

This report analyses militant converts' collaboration with ASG, the JI network and the MILF in the larger context of the Balik-Islam movement in the Philippines. It examines the wider "revert" movement not in order to identify it with terrorism, but precisely to clarify the distinction between the mass of ordinary converts who shun violence and the few who embrace it. It looks at the evolution of the various terrorist groups operating in the Philippines and the shifting alliances among them.

Finally, it looks at the impact, intended and unintended, of the peace process between the MILF and the government on the terrorist networks and of counterterrorism strategies on the peace process. In 2005, the MILF began to distance itself clearly from JI, and if it did not formally endorse government air strikes against suspected JI hideouts, neither did it strongly condemn them. But it will be difficult for MILF moderates to sustain even passive cooperation against terrorists unless this is matched by progress towards a comprehensive peace settlement – a prospect dimmed by Manila's protracted presidential crisis. On the other hand, if a peace pact is eventually signed that satisfies MILF moderates but not its militants, the latter could be drawn into a new extremist coalition.

II. BALIK-ISLAM

Philippine Muslims, some four million strong, complain with justification that they are poorly understood by the majority population in Asia's only Christian country. Muslim converts – at some 200,000, a minority within a minority – object that the term Balik-Islam has become synonymous with terrorism. In fact, very few converts have any connection to terrorist activity. Yet sensitive identity politics, if handled ineptly by authorities, make this a group ripe for the kind of jihadist infiltration that has occurred in Muslim diaspora and convert communities elsewhere.³

The concept of reversion (Balik-Islam) rests on two fundamental premises. First, at the universal and individual level, it is asserted that all humans are born free of sin into Islam, but, misled by parents or guardians, may be brought up in other traditions. Nonetheless, they retain a birth-heritage (in Tagalog, *likas na pamana*; in Arabic, *fitrah*) – a natural proclivity to return to their essential relationship with God, who has granted us the gift of choice.⁴ Secondly, at the collective level and specifically in the Philippines, it is held that Islam was the country's original religion, and the basis of its first states, the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao, established between the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Resonating strongly with the notion of individual *fitrah*, Muslim nationalists argue that, but for Spanish colonial intervention, the entire archipelago would have embraced Islam in the natural course of events.⁵

³ By comparison, about 5,000 of Britain's 1.5 million and Germany's 2 million Muslims were converts in 1990, as were 30,000 to 50,000 of France's 3 million Muslims (now estimated at 100,000 of 5 million). See J. Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh, 1992). One of the four 7 July 2005 London suicide bombers was a convert; other converts involved in previous terrorist activity in the West include Richard Reid, the British would-be "shoe bomber", and Australia's Jack Roche.

⁴ See, for example, the Tagalog-language web-page of the International Committee for the Support of the Final Prophet: "gagamitin ng Satanas ang mga magulang, kapatid, asawa, anak, kamag-anak, kaibigan, trabaho, kapitbahay atbp., para lamang mapanatili niya ang tao sa maling relihiyong kaniyang kinagisnan [Satan will use parents, siblings, spouses, children, relatives, friends, work, neighbours and so on, just to keep people in the false religion they have known since infancy]". <http://icsfp.com/PH/>, accessed 9 April 2005. Reverts believe themselves cleansed of all accumulated sin upon embracing Islam.

⁵ MILF Central Committee member Mohagher Iqbal wrote: "Had the Spaniards delayed their coming to the Philippines for just half a century, there would be no such thing as the

A powerful symbol of this frustrated destiny is Rajah Solaiman, Muslim overlord of Manila at the time of the Spanish conquest. Grandson of the Sultan of Brunei and scion of a Bornean dynasty recently implanted in the area, Solaiman led local resistance to the Spaniards before falling at the Battle of Bangkusay, off the shore of Manila's Tondo district, on 3 June 1571.⁶ Although most historians agree that Islam had yet to take root among the population of the northern and central islands, some Muslim nationalists cite a web of interrelated trading chieftaincies like Solaiman's to argue that the Philippines "was already a Muslim country" before its christening in honour of the Spanish monarch, Philip II.⁷

There are as many reasons for conversion as individual converts, but several strands can be distinguished. In parts of Mindanao where Muslims and Christians live in close proximity, such as Zamboanga, Basilan, Lanao del Norte and parts of Cotabato, intermarriage is not uncommon and, following Islamic law, requires Christian wives to take their husbands' religion.⁸ Male marriage outside the faith is encouraged by the expense of the traditional Muslim bride-price, while resulting mixed-ethnicity ("mestizo") offspring may, like their mothers, consider themselves Balik-Islam on consciously embracing the fathers' faith. Relatively cosmopolitan, these mestizo Muslims are often urban migrants, entering universities, government or the civil society sector, where their sense of difference may be more acutely felt.

A second strand comprises members of only recently or partially Islamised tribes in the south, such as the Subanen/Kolibugan, who decide to commit more explicitly to Islam, which may offer prospects of upward mobility.⁹ A third strand, especially significant at the height of the Mindanao conflict in the 1970s and early 1980s, consists of Christians who convert for reasons of personal safety while employed in Muslim-majority areas.¹⁰

'only Christian country in Asia'". Salah Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny* (Kuala Lumpur, 1999), p. 9.

⁶ Ibid, p. 38. Other accounts have Solaiman living on to lead an anti-Spanish uprising in 1588.

⁷ "Maikling Kasaysayan ng Islam sa Pilipinas, [A Short History of Islam in the Philippines]", at <http://icsfp.com/PH/>.

⁸ The reverse is not permitted by Islamic law, but does happen. Chinese traders in Sulu have long married local Muslim women after themselves converting. Nor is it unusual for Muslim men to avoid paying bride-price twice by taking a Christian second wife or mistress.

⁹ Indigenous to Mindanao's Zamboanga peninsula, the Subanen and Kolibugan would constitute a single ethno-linguistic group but for the latter's recent Islamisation.

¹⁰ Luis Q. Lacar, "Balik-Islam: Christian converts to Islam in the Philippines, c.1970-98", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12 (1), January 2001, pp. 39-60.

But the strongest impetus driving more ideological forms of activist Balik-Islam comes from a fourth strand of converts: overseas workers returning from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Most of these come from and return to metropolitan Manila and the northern island of Luzon.

A. ISLAM IN MANILA

Only about 10 per cent of Manila's Muslims are believed to be converts. The rest are mostly migrants from the south who tend to congregate in ethnic enclaves around mosques, markets and cemeteries. The influx of Muslim-born refugees from Mindanao's endemic conflicts, which crested in the late 1970s, reestablished a significant Islamic presence in Manila for the first time in four centuries.

As recently as the 1950s, a small group of converts who approached the Philippines' sole Muslim senator at the time, Domocao Alonto, seeking help in organising Friday prayers, were confronted by the "sad fact" that Manila was without a single mosque. This group, known as the Believers in Islam from the Island of Luzon (*Muhminin al-Islam Fil Balad il-Luzon*), was founded in 1953 by a former Catholic, Imam Muhammad al-Lauhi de Leon. It had about 50 members by 16 March 1956, when, at the senator's residence, the "very first Jumaah Prayer after about 400 years of foreign domination was held in full congregation in Manila, where practically every trace of anything Islamic had been eradicated". The prayer was led by Ustadz Ilyas Ismail of the Indonesian embassy.¹¹

Efforts by the Muslim Association of the Philippines (*Musaphil*) to establish a permanent site for worship bore little fruit until July 1964, when a small lot was acquired that became the nucleus of today's Islamic Centre in Quiapo. A rudimentary mosque built by residents was renovated in 1975, and again in the early 1980s, by which time a flood of mainly Maranao migrants from the Lanao provinces of Mindanao had increased the settlement's Muslim population to about 25,000, including many transients. Its Golden Mosque on the north bank of the Pasig River, built with Saudi and Libyan funds, now serves Manila's best-known Muslim community.¹²

¹¹ Khatib Ibrahim Pedro B. Ayuda, *Brief History of Convislam, Converts to Islam Society* (Manila, 1980).

¹² Mochtar I. Matuan, "The Maranao Migrants in Metro Manila", master's thesis, University of San Carlos, Cebu, 1983. *Musaphil* was organised by Punjabi merchants in 1926. Imam de Leon, whose organisation, *Muhminin al-Islam*, changed its name to Convislam in 1968, also served as *Musaphil*'s secretary general. Contradicting Ayuda, another account indicates that Manila's first mosque was built in 1924, close to today's Golden Mosque.

The capital's other major Muslim concentration also dates from 1964, when President Diosdado Macapagal released portions of a military reservation in Taguig to the landless. A Tausug migrant from Sulu, Imam Mohamad Khusin, began clearing land around a small burial site, attracting other Tausug families fleeing clan feuds at home.¹³ Khusin secured the aid of Eduardo "Abdul Latif" Martelino, an army officer and convert to Islam, in developing the site, which President Ferdinand Marcos declared a dedicated Muslim subdivision, Maharlika Village, in 1973. The village's Blue Mosque, built in 1977 with Libyan funding, is the centre of Tausug religious life in Manila, while a growing "squatter" population contributes to the area's reputation for criminality and political intrigue.¹⁴

Quiapo and Taguig together account for more than a third of Manila's Muslim population.¹⁵ Following a similar if more dispersed pattern of chain-migration, Balik-Islam communities tend to cluster around mosques, Muslim schools known as *madaris*, prayer-rooms and markets in secondary Muslim population centres like Cubao and Tandang Sora in Quezon City, Greenhills in San Juan, Caloocan City to the northwest and Cavite, south of Manila. No reliable figures exist for the total number of converts in and around Manila, but they might be estimated at 20,000. Central Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Baguio City and Pangasinan province also have significant convert populations. It is among these groups that various forms of religious activism have taken root, in part because of the Saudi connection.

B. THE SAUDI CONNECTION

The Philippines is the world's top exporter of labour as a share of its population, with Saudi Arabia the number one destination.¹⁶ Like Manila's population of displaced Muslims, this phenomenon is a legacy of the martial law imposed in 1972 by then President Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos enacted a new labour code in 1974, just as oil

prices were booming, spurring massive growth in the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Most went to construction jobs in the Middle East. From 10 per cent in 1975, the region absorbed 70 per cent of OFW in 1977 and 90 per cent in 1981.¹⁷ By the end of 2001, there were 915,239 Filipinos in Saudi Arabia, and about 1.5 million throughout the region.¹⁸ Almost three-quarters of OFWs in the Middle East appear to come from metropolitan Manila and Luzon. Less than 1 per cent are from Muslim Mindanao, where educational standards are poor.¹⁹

Like their counterparts working in insecure parts of Muslim Mindanao, many Christian OFWs in Saudi Arabia reportedly fear for their safety or job security.²⁰ Others are drawn to Islam out of curiosity about its all-embracing impact on everyday life in their host country, or from boredom, loneliness, or a desire to tap into social networks.²¹ There are strong incentives to convert even before taking into account Saudi efforts to promote salafi Islam.²² Pursued at home and abroad, Saudi *daawa* (religious outreach) activity targets guest workers both in order to strengthen domestic stability and to gain influence in the countries to which they eventually return. Filipinos are the largest non-Muslim community in Saudi Arabia after Indians.

Saudi *daawa* activity is supervised by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Propagation and Guidance. This powerful ministry, which oversees the Muslim World League (Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami), International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) and World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), also controls about 50 domestic outreach bureaus catering to non-Muslim residents. Known variously as Islamic Propagation Offices, Foreigners' Guidance Offices, *Daawa* and Guidance Centres, and Cooperative Offices for Call and Guidance, these manage so-called "Care Centres for New Muslims" and "communities sections", providing lectures in a range of

Matuan, however, notes that Malaysian premier Tunjku Abdul Rahman could not find a mosque in the capital as late as 1961.

¹³ Ben J. Kadil, "The Muslims in Metro Manila: Their Beginning and Growth into Communities (1964-84)", master's thesis, University of the Philippines, 1985.

¹⁴ Reuben B. Corpuz, "Urban Muslim Community in Manila: A Critique of the Maharlika Village Project", master's thesis, University of the Philippines, 2003. Martelino was a central figure in the 1968 "Jabidah Massacre" that ignited modern Muslim activism, after a failed conspiracy to destabilise Malaysian Sabah, claimed by the Philippines.

¹⁵ Based on figures in Matuan, op. cit., pp.125-126.

¹⁶ About 8 million Filipinos work overseas, almost 10 per cent of the population and a quarter of the work force. Official remittances alone account for about 10 per cent of GNP and 20 per cent of export value.

¹⁷ Joaquin L. Gonzalez, *Philippine Labour Migration: Critical Dimensions of Public Policy*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore, 1998).

¹⁸ Esnaen Catong, "Philippines-Saudi Arabia Relations, 1968-1998: A Diplomatic History", PhD thesis, University of the Philippines, 2003.

¹⁹ Gonzalez, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁰ See Jane A. Margold, "Narratives of masculinity and transnational migration: Filipino workers in the Middle East", in Filomeno V. Aguilar (ed.), *Filipinos in Global Migration: At Home in the World?* (Manila, 2002).

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, April-May 2005. See also Zainab P. Lucero, "Islam: Bakit Ko Ito Niyakap", Islamic Propagation Office in Rabwah, (no date), for a sample of Filipino convert testimonials.

²² For more on salafi Islam, see Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

languages including Tagalog. Concentrated in Riyadh and Jeddah but with a presence across the country in Dammam, Jubail, Ahsaa, Qaseem, Zulfi, Hail and Abha, among other places, they employ some 500 staff and 40 Filipino converts.²³

In 1990, six or seven Filipino converts based in Saudi Arabia established an organisation called Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), which was registered as a non-stock corporation in the Philippines in January 1991.²⁴ Its stated objectives were to solicit Saudi donations (*zakat*) for the publication of missionary materials, and to establish charitable institutions and Islamic centres in the Philippines. ISCAG's key Saudi patron is Sheikh Hamoud Muhammad al-Lahim, who works closely with its Balik-Islam founding president, Bienvenido "Khalid" Evaristo, to produce a steady stream of Islamic tracts in English and Tagalog.

Printed in Saudi Arabia, imported and distributed free of charge, ISCAG's output is the main source of Islamic literature in the Philippines, which is without an Islamic publishing industry of its own. Much of this literature is generic and produced in association with the Cooperative Office for Call and Guidance at Riyadh's Ring Road industrial area. It deals largely with elementary theology, ritual and conduct, inspirational themes, testimonials and comparative religion. The classic texts and exegesis widely debated in Indonesia and the Muslim world are scarcely seen in the Philippines. Even the Koran is a work in progress: only the first three and final 37 *surah* have been authoritatively translated into Tagalog.²⁵

Evaristo's strong personal ties with the Saudi establishment ensure that ISCAG is the best-endowed convert organisation in the Philippines today – the motive force of the Balik-Islam movement.²⁶ Overshadowing older groups with an indigenous perspective but limited access to Arab *zakat*, like the Islamic Daawa Council of the Philippines (IDCP), ISCAG promotes a minimalist form of salafi Islam, defined most powerfully by what it is *not*, including not tolerant of Christianity, Western materialist lifestyles, and local Islamic cultural practices.

²³ One source estimates eighteen such offices in Riyadh and six in Jeddah, where about 100 Filipinos typically attend lectures, compared with 70 Indians or 40 Sri Lankans. About twenty Filipinos a month are said to convert in Jeddah alone. Crisis Group interview, Baguio City, April 2005. On a more modest scale, Kuwait's Islam Presentation Committee runs nine outreach centres; the Qatar Guest Centre also "calls non-Muslim communities residing in Qatar to Islam".

²⁴ Senior converts associated with this core group in Saudi Arabia since the early 1990s include Khalid Evaristo, Omar Penalber, Ahmed Barcelon, Muhammad Ameen Cave and Ibrahim Mata.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Cavite, April 2005. Only two or three sections of the Koran are available in Tagalog pamphlet form, first appearing in 1999. See *Al-Fatihah at Juz-u Amma: At Ang Pagkakasalin Nito Sa Wikang Pilipino* [Conveying Islamic Message Society and King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Koran, 1999] and *Pagpapaliwanag sa Kahulugan ng Banal na Quran: Surah Al-Imran* (ISCAG, no date). *Surah al-Baqarah* has also reportedly been translated. Imam de Leon's much earlier *The Meaning of the Holy Quran in Tagalog* (Manila, Convislam, 1982) deals only with legislation and is now rare, as is a Cebuano version by a former pastor converted in Saudi Arabia: Najeeb Rasul Fernandez, *Ang Balaan nga*

Quran: Hubad sa Pinulongan nga Sugboanon (Jabal Nur Publishing House, c. 1989).

²⁶ ISCAG's Arabic-language "annual reports" show "foreign donations" of 44.27 million pesos in 2000 (approximately \$1.1 million), an increase from 20.54 million pesos in 1998. This amounted to 96 per cent and 98.8 per cent of total revenues respectively. All references to dollars (\$) refer to U.S. dollars.

III. AHMED SANTOS AND THE RAJAH SOLAIMAN MOVEMENT

One man whom ISCAG drew into Balik-Islam is Ahmed Islam Santos, head of the Rajah Solaiman Movement, who was arrested in Zamboanga City, Mindanao on 26 October 2005. Who is he, and how did he come to be at the centre of the convert terror network?

Ahmed Santos was born Hilarion del Rosario Santos III in 1971, the eldest of three brothers raised by their grandfather, a retired army officer. The boys' parents separated when Hilarion III, nicknamed "Geté", was about five; his father Hilarion II ("Jun") suffered a breakdown and was committed to an institution.²⁷ The grandfather, Hilarion I, had accumulated land during his military career in Masbate, the Manila districts of Cubao and Caloocan, and in Anda, Pangasinan province, where the brothers were brought up in a strict Catholic and martial tradition. Hilarion I was a karate black-belt and ensured the boys developed similar skills.

Hilarion III applied unsuccessfully to the U.S. Navy on completing high school, before working in Saudi Arabia for about six months. He had not yet embraced Islam on his return in 1992 and married his first wife in a church near the family property at 50 Purdue Street in Cubao. Influenced by IDCP's weekly radio broadcasts, Santos began spending time at ISCAG's offices in the same neighbourhood, and he converted in 1993. His brother, Tyrone, followed in early 1994, adopting the name Dawud Muslim Santos. An ISCAG founder, Ahmad Geraspusco, also from Pangasinan, recruited Ahmed as a driver and general assistant.²⁸

In August 1995, Santos set up his own organisation, the Fi-Sabilillah Daawa and Media Foundation, with the help of another ISCAG officer, Abdullah Gacuan. Its stated objective was to "propagate the true essence of Islam and to correct misconceptions about Islam and Muslims".²⁹ Santos bought airtime to broadcast his views on regular radio and television slots and published a newspaper. These activities allowed him to establish contact with MILF leaders Salamat Hashim and Al-Haj Murad and to weave an increasingly intricate web of personal and organisational contacts into a firm support base. At its foundation was

an important Balik-Islam kinship alliance with the Abu Sayyaf Group.

Santos' ties with the ASG were likely substantial by January 1999, when he took a second wife, also a convert, named Nurain (formerly Loraine) Dongon, from Cagayan de Oro City in northern Mindanao. One of Nurain's three sisters, Zainab, is married to ASG leader Kadaffy Janjalani, while another, Amina, is the wife of Janjalani's second-in-command, Jainal Antel Sali, alias Abu Solaiman. Furthermore, a brother, Jaffar Dongon, is probably the ASG operative identified by one of the Valentine's Day bombers as Abu Tarik.³⁰

At the same time as marrying into the top ranks of the ASG, Santos consolidated his Arab connections, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca in March 1999, working with the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM) from June 1999, and becoming a "business partner" of the MER-C International foundation in March 2000. These relationships with organisations established by close associates of Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, a brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden and head of the IIRO in the Philippines between 1988 and 1994, boosted Santos's stature and access to funds, which he used to expand Fi-Sabilillah's Purdue Street office into a four-storey Islamic Centre.³¹

Santos was joined in 2001 by a shadowy but significant figure with his own Saudi and ASG connections, Sheikh Omar Lavilla. Formerly known as Reuben Lavilla, an Ilonggo convert with a degree in chemical engineering from the University of the Philippines, he had recently returned from Russia, where he is said to have taken part in the Chechen jihad, possibly marrying a local woman. Of particular value to Santos were Lavilla's qualifications as a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina, where he specialised in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and hadithic science, reportedly mastering all four Sunni schools of law. Lavilla lectured regularly to groups of about twenty followers at Purdue Street, emphasising the theme of *shirk* (idolatry) and the struggles against oppression of Muslims around the world. He drew heavily on the "sword verses"

²⁷ Many converts interviewed by Crisis Group had difficult family backgrounds; some appeared to be consciously rebelling against the strong Christian theme of the "holy family".

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Dawud Santos, Manila, 27 April 2005; Rodolfo B. Mendoza, Philippine Jihad Inc., unpublished manuscript, 2002. The third brother, Cyrus, is also a convert, reportedly living in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija.

²⁹ Philippine Jihad Inc., op. cit., p. 125.

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Manila, April 2005; "Malaya at Kusang Loob na Salaysay ni Gappal Bannah Asali" [an interrogation deposition], 7 March 2005. The youngest Dongon sister, Jihan, is married to an Ustadz Elias of Tawi-Tawi. Elias is a graduate of the Darul Hijra academy in Baguio, among whose incorporators is Abdullah Gacuan. The sequence of the Dongon sisters' marriages is unclear but might provide further clues about Santos's relationship with the ASG.

³¹ Philippine Jihad Inc., op. cit., and Philippine National Police, "Radical Islamic Reverts in the Philippines and their Networks", 10 November 2003.

of *surah al-Anfal* and *al-Tawbah*, and compared Jews to “animals who rape and steal”.³²

Lavilla also reinforced Santos’s ties with the ASG, having trained alongside Kadaffy Janjalani at the Darul Imam Shafi’ie academy in 1992. This institution, set up in Marawi City in 1989 by Khalifa’s IIRO, provided religious instruction combined with military and explosives training at the MILF’s Camp Busrah in Butig, Lanao del Sur. Lavilla and Janjalani may have received instruction in bomb-making directly from Wali Khan Amin Shah, a close associate of bin Laden’s and a key personality in Ramzi Yousef’s terrorist cell in Manila in 1994-1995.

But police interest in Santos seems to date only from November 2001, when complaints of persistent gunfire on his family property in Anda, Pangasinan, led a local judge to issue a search warrant. The closing off of the property to fishermen, who had always crossed it to reach the shoreline, had also aroused local suspicions, as did Santos’s eviction of the tenants and unusual comings and goings at all hours of the night. When municipal police raided the property early on the morning of 27 November 2001, they found about twenty young men sleeping in a temporary building and two pistols licensed to Santos. No resistance was offered, and the police made no arrests, but the suspicious activity continued and came to the attention of provincial and national police intelligence.³³

An incident in a Tarlac City bus station on 1 May 2002 led authorities back to Anda. Two men, Khalid Trinidad and Dexter Mayuno, were involved in a confrontation with police, who reported shooting Trinidad dead and seizing handguns and grenades from the pair. Under questioning, Mayuno pointed to the Santos property and a second site in San Clemente, Tarlac, as training camps of the previously unknown RSM. Over the next three days, teams using dogs recovered four assault rifles, two shotguns, two pistols, 22 rifles and fragmentation grenades, three Claymore mines and other bomb paraphernalia from the sites. Officials found an obstacle course, foxholes, outposts and bullet-pocked targets on the Anda property. Six men were arrested in Anda and two in San Clemente, about 100 kilometres to the south.³⁴

Santos was apparently in the early stages of an attempt to emulate the MILF’s training system in Mindanao, after participating with four other converts in a “special training course” at Camp Busrah six months earlier. Two of the RSM detainees – all released on bail after being charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives – described a 45-day program of Arabic and Islamic study in Anda, and physical and martial arts training, followed by more advanced instruction in guerrilla tactics and bomb-making, at the San Clemente site. According to another of the Anda suspects interviewed by Crisis Group, explosives training had not yet begun when the camps were broken up, but plans for an operation of some sort in Tarlac City or Manila were underway in San Clemente. Members of this cohort, which included Khalid Trinidad, Mayuno, and probably five other men reported to have fled the scene of the Tarlac City shooting, may have been on a test mission involving vehicle theft and kidnapping.³⁵

Led by Lavilla, who left Anda days before the raid, the RSM training program drew a mixed bag of converts, not all of whom were aware of its full implications. Santos, who had inherited the Anda property following his grandfather’s death in 1996, presented it to some of his Fi-Sabilillah followers as a utopian retreat where they could farm and practice an Islamic lifestyle free of the surrounding society’s corrupting influences. This had special appeal for the landless and for converts shunned by their families or experiencing other forms of alienation. But documents recovered at Anda revealed that some members of a first batch of fifteen recruits “backed out upon learning the true mission of the group”.³⁶

According to one Anda trainee, the immediate objective of the RSM, formally established at the Purdue Street compound on Santos’s return from Camp Busrah in early January 2002, was to divert military attention from the Basilan-based ASG.³⁷ Preparations for unprecedented U.S.-Philippine joint “Balikatan” exercises in the ASG stronghold began in October 2001, with U.S. Special Forces deploying to the island in February 2002. The

³² Crisis Group interviews, Fi-Sabilillah members who attended the lectures, Manila, April 2005.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, Anda, Pangasinan, April 2005, and Anda police blotter entry 1310, p. 408, 27 November 2001.

³⁴ Philippine Jihad Inc., op. cit., and Crisis Group interviews, Anda, Pangasinan, April 2005. Santos’s supporters claim that the weapons were either planted by police or licensed. The local village captain who accompanied the Anda search and has known Santos since childhood, refutes this allegation. The men arrested in Anda were Tyrone del Rosario alias Dawud Santos; Pio Abogne de Vera alias Ismael; Marvelo Cenar Egil;

Allan Nestor Borlagdagan alias Abdul Karim; Redondo Cain Delloso alias Habil Ahmad; Angelo Ramirez Trinidad alias Anis, brother of Khalid Trinidad. In San Clemente, they were Nino Palaganas Carino alias Mujahid, and Feliciano de los Reyes alias Abubakar Abdillah. The Anda village captain indicated to Crisis Group that about twenty other men left the camp on hearing news of the Tarlac City incident.

³⁵ Philippine National Police, op. cit., p. 9, and Benjie Villa, “Who was Khalid Amir Trinidad?”, *Philippine Star*, 11 January 2005. Tarlac City’s Luisita Mall was also mentioned as a possible target of the group. See Anda police blotter entry 1408, p. 480, 2 May 2002.

³⁶ Philippine National Police, op. cit., p. 9.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Manila, April 2005.

RSM may have been planning a diversionary strike in the northern Philippines with the help of JI operative Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi, who was arrested in Manila on 15 January 2002.³⁸ Santos must have temporarily scaled back his offensive ambitions after this major blow but several of his Anda trainees would resurface in actual or attempted bombings later.

On 13 October 2002, Santos presided as *amir* [leader] over the first Balik-Islam Unity Congress (BIUC). According to a senior Philippine counter-terrorism official, no more than twenty or 30 of the 100 delegates had militant leanings³⁹ but Santos was acclaimed as a victim of “discrimination” and “crucifixion” by the broad-based gathering that included two Muslim congressmen.⁴⁰

That support was indicative of a defensive structure of interlocking advocacy organisations that RSM members, including Santos until late 2005, have been able to use to shield themselves from police. Santos’s arrest was undoubtedly a major blow to the RSM but since it appears that his seven close associates detained at the same time did not belong to the original Anda core group, we should assume two things: first, that the RSM has continued to attract new blood, and secondly, that the surviving members of the original cohort are at large and potentially dangerous.⁴¹

IV. FOREIGN JIHADIS, ABU SAYYAF AND THE MILF

In 2004 and 2005, converts have carried out two bombings in the capital region that reflect the close ties they enjoy with the ASG, which directly handled them, their Indonesian mentors and the MILF commanders, who sheltered all three groups. The first attack, on 27 February 2004, resulted in the sinking of an inter-island ferry, *SuperFerry 14*, with the loss of 116 lives. It was the worst act of maritime terrorism in recent memory. The ASG claimed responsibility, and the self-confessed perpetrator, Redondo Dellosa, was arrested four weeks later. The second, on 14 February 2005, killed four bus passengers in Manila’s Makati business district and was coordinated with blasts in Davao and General Santos cities in the south. The Makati bomber, Angelo Trinidad – like Dellosa, a convert to Islam – admitted his guilt, as well as his ties to the ASG and JI. The story of how these alliances emerged shows the complexity of terrorist networks in the Philippines.

Crisis Group previously outlined the origins of jihadi Indonesian involvement in the southern Philippines and the impact of JI-sponsored terrorism on the domestic peace process, and called on Manila and the MILF to implement a mechanism they agreed on in 2002 to weed out criminals in the MILF’s midst jointly.⁴² That mechanism, the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), was finally established in December 2004, and an unprecedented level of cooperation against jihadi elements was attained during 2005. But from a standing start, the cooperation still leaves much to be desired and is complicated by the proliferation of splinter factions on both the foreign jihadi and Moro sides.

A. JANJALANI’S MOVE AND THE RISE OF “FREELANCE” JIHADIS

Ironically, it is the very success of some counter-terrorist measures over the past four years that now makes the job of curbing foreign jihadi activity in Mindanao harder. First, as more arrests take place, organisational distinctions have blurred, and new alliances have come into being by force of circumstance. Secondly, the ASG, with its base in Sulu and Basilan, has been pushed by joint U.S.-Philippine military activity into parts of Mindanao traditionally controlled by the MILF.⁴³

³⁸ Philippine Jihad Inc., op. cit., p. 118. Al-Ghozi, together with MILF operative and fellow Afghan veteran Mukhlis Yunos, led the 30 December 2000 Manila bombings that killed 22. These were similarly in response to a government offensive in the south earlier that year.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Manila, January 2005.

⁴⁰ Samira Ali Gutoc, “Muslim legislators to converts: Unite against crucifixion”, at <http://www.bangsamoro.com/news>, 14 October 2002.

⁴¹ Santos’s seven associates, charged with rebellion alongside him in the Makati Regional Trial Court on 11 November 2005, are named as: Malik Alimuddin, Mursidi Balao, Ismael Idris, Bodot Abdullah, Anne Anover, Nurrurija Amdal Ibba and Hannah Santos – said to be another wife. Tarra Quismundo, “Only 1 of 8 terror suspects enters plea”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 11 November 2005.

⁴² Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit.

⁴³ This report, following local convention, uses the terms “Mindanao” and “southern Philippines” interchangeably to refer

A police crackdown across Southeast Asia since the exposure of the JI network in late 2001 has resulted in more than 300 arrests, including several men instrumental to JI's Philippine operations. Principal among these are:

- Nasir Abbas, who oversaw JI's Mantiqi III division embracing Mindanao, Sabah, Sulawesi and East Kalimantan, arrested in April 2003, now free and working closely with police;
- Ahmad Faisal bin Imam Sarijan, alias Zulkifli, head of JI's subdivision (wakalah) in Mindanao known as Wakalah Hudaibiyah (WakHud), arrested September 2003 off the coast of Sabah and reportedly returned to the Philippines for trial in 2005;
- Ahmad Saifullah Ibrahim, alias Hudzaifah alias Abraham, Zulkifli's deputy, arrested at the same time;
- Qomarudin bin Zaimun, alias Mustaqim, arrested June 2004 in Java; and
- Taufiq Rifqi, finance officer of Wakalah Hudaibiyah, arrested in October 2003 in Cotabato, Mindanao.

The last four were members of the first cohort that trained at JI's military academy in Mindanao, Camp Hudaibiyah, between 1998 and 2000. They formed the backbone of what other JI members termed the "structural" JI in the southern Philippines.

As arrests accelerated after the first Bali bombings in October 2002, command and communications between Mindanao operatives and the JI hierarchy outside the Philippines were disrupted. At the same time, a number of Java- and Sulawesi-based militants drew on wider networks to flee Indonesian law enforcement for the relative sanctuary of Mindanao (only Rifqi, of those listed above, was caught in the Philippines). The most important among this "non-structural" fugitive group – closely associated with the Malaysia-based Mantiqi I and its former leader Hambali, now in U.S. custody – are the Bali I bombers, Dulmatin and Umar Patek, who used a Darul Islam (DI) contact to reach Mindanao in April and February 2003 respectively.⁴⁴ There they hooked

to the main southern island of Mindanao, together with the Sulu archipelago that includes Basilan. The Mindanao mainland encompasses 21 of the Philippines' 79 provinces; Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are separate island-provinces in the Mindanao region.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group Report, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia*, op. cit., pp. 25-26. The DI contact, Ahmad Sayid Maulana, was captured by Malaysian Marine Police on the same boat as Zulkifli, Hudzaifah and five other militants while attempting to re-enter Sabah.

up with two other important JI fugitives, Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, a Malaysian, and Asep alias Darwin, an Indonesian, both of whom fled after JI bombed the Atrium Mall in Jakarta in September 2001.⁴⁵

Although Dulmatin and Umar Patek eventually linked up with the most senior remaining "structural" WakHud operative, Usman, also a Hudaibiyah class 1998 graduate, the pair established their own relationship with Abu Sayyaf commanders Kadaffy Janjalani and Jainal Sali, alias Abu Solaiman.

JI has never had a monopoly on jihadi Indonesian activity in Mindanao. Other offshoots of the old DI insurgency had independent relationships with MILF commanders, going back to before JI moved its training camps there from Afghanistan in 1994. Before the MILF's Camp Abu Bakar was overrun by the Philippines armed forces in 2000, it was home to three separate camps giving *tadri* (military training) to Indonesian recruits:

- Camp Hudaibiyah run by JI;
- Camp Al Fatih, mostly for fighters from Sulawesi, none of whom were JI. Initially this was run by the Makassar-based Wahdah Islamiyah, but after the conflict in Ambon broke out in 1999, it became the training centre for men from Laskar Jundullah. The leader of this camp was Syawal Yasin, an Afghan veteran; and
- Camp Ash Syabab, run by DI. The head of this camp was Muhammad Akram alias Syamsudin, an Afghan veteran who was arrested in July 2005 in Central Java.

After the 2000 assault, the training programs of all these organisations fell into disarray. DI faced particular difficulties. Its camp fell into Philippine army hands, funding dried up and DI leaders in Jakarta for reasons that had nothing to do with the military assault decided not to continue the training. Many DI fighters as a result joined with KOMPAK, an organisation they had worked with in Ambon, to continue the training in Mindanao. The DI-KOMPAK joint program, with KOMPAK providing the funds, began again in 2001. One of the first people sent, Asep alias Dahlan, was put in a MILF training camp near Palimbang, in Sultan Kudarat province in south western Mindanao.

The training, under the leadership of Abdullah Sonata, formerly head of the KOMPAK-Ambon office, picked up in 2002, with groups of ten to fifteen going for a four- to six-month training course. The recruits were from a variety of organisations, including DI, KOMPAK and local

⁴⁵ Marwan's young brother-in-law, Taufik alias Dani, was also involved in the Atrium bombing and is imprisoned in Jakarta.

groups from Poso. Beginning in mid-2003, Dulmatin and Umar Patek, the JI fugitives, served as instructors in this camp.

As JI's administrative structure collapsed with the breaking up of Wakalah Hudaibiyah, the lines between all these groups became blurred. While rivalries and personal differences appeared to continue at the leadership level (for example, between Zulkarnaen of JI and Aris Munandar of KOMPAK), it was a very different story on the ground in Mindanao. Dulmatin, Umar Patek, Marwan and other "non-structural" JI members were closer to KOMPAK and DI than to "structural" JI, while some JI members in Jakarta suggested that for all practical purposes, these men were operating on their own without reference to the larger JI organisation. In early 2005, accounts of Umar Patek's exploits in Mindanao appeared under an alias on a KOMPAK website.⁴⁶ Dulmatin's efforts to recruit Indonesian trainees as late as early 2005 reportedly were not restricted to JI, and he had grown so close to the ASG leadership that some suggested he had actually joined it.

To further confuse the picture, cooperation in the Philippines did not mean any ideological meeting of the minds in Indonesia. Some of the Indonesians, like Sonata, worked with the JI fugitives in Mindanao on recruitment and training. They differed, however, over suicide operations on Indonesian soil, such as those conducted by Noordin Mohamad Top and Dr Azhari, the latter killed in November 2005 in East Java. Sonata and his followers reportedly opposed them; the fugitives were actively supportive.

There are several implications of this ideological and organisational complexity. One is that militants who are far removed from whatever command and control structures continue to exist in Indonesia are not likely to be much influenced by them, notwithstanding their ability to communicate via satellite phone and internet. Another is that arresting, coopting or otherwise neutralising leaders in Indonesia does not guarantee changed behaviour among their followers in Mindanao. A third is that we may be seeing in Indonesia an increasing importance of personal networks among mujahidin in the Philippines, so that KOMPAK and JI people thrown together in an effort to escape the Philippine forces may be more inclined to act as a unit in a subsequent operation. Finally, funds raised by one of these organisations may find their way to another. Money that originated with a Saudi donor in 2004 went through KOMPAK to Dulmatin to buy arms for KOMPAK recruits. But apparently a few of

these weapons ended up via KOMPAK in the hands of Noordin and Azhari.⁴⁷

That said, it is striking how few Mindanao alumni have actually been drawn into bombing operations in Indonesia, especially given their numbers. A headcount of foreign jihadis passing through southern Philippine camps is still difficult. Former Mantiqi III chief Nasir Abbas estimated JI alumni alone at around 180 from 1995 to 2002 in a May 2004 deposition, but in a later book reduced the figure to about 140.⁴⁸ Some 100 of these attended short courses, introduced in 1999, of up to two months (*Daurah Askariah Asasiah-Palestine*), or of four to six months (*Daurah Askariah Asasiah-Yarmuk*).⁴⁹ At least 57 completed more comprehensive eighteen-month officer training at Mount Kararao's Islamic Military Academy, which took in its first seventeen cadets in September 1998.⁵⁰ Adding a batch of nineteen or twenty who graduated in April 2004 and others trained between 2003 and 2005, JI's Mindanao graduates now easily exceed 200. The numbers training independently through Mujahidin KOMPAK, Laskar Jundullah and other DI factions were far fewer through 2001. Between 2001 and mid-2005, for example, KOMPAK may have sent some two dozen men.

Whatever their activities in the Philippines, once the recruits return home, the majority disappear from view. This may be in part because the organisations that sent them see them as part of the next generation of leaders and are grooming them for longer-term strategic goals, because many were sent with the idea of taking part in the communal fighting in Ambon and Poso, and the conflicts in both places have waned, or because their immediate commanders generally disagree with the suicide operations. The Mindanao alumni, particularly those sent after 2000, may prove to be a long-term problem for the Indonesian government, but thus far, relatively few have participated in or assisted operations against Western targets after they returned home.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Jakarta, September 2005.

⁴⁸ Nasir Abas, Deposition, 4 May 2004 in Criminal Investigation Division, Indonesian Police, Case no. BP/07/V/2004/Densus 88 and Nasir Abas, *Membongkar Jamaah Islamiyah* (Jakarta, 2005).

⁴⁹ Indonesian interrogation depositions of Ahmad Faisal bin Imam Sarijan, alias Zulkifli, 11 May 2004, and Abdullah Zaini, alias Dzakwan, 2 August 2004.

⁵⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁵¹ As always, there are exceptions. Noordin Top and Azhari went to the Philippines in 1997; so, briefly, did Bali bomber Imam Samudra. Iwan alias Rois, the chief field operative of the Australian embassy bombing, trained there in 1999. Several JI instructors in Mindanao in the early years, most notably

⁴⁶ The website – now closed – was www.muhammad.com.

A second counter-terrorist “success” story that has inadvertently deepened the nexus between foreign jihadis, Abu Sayyaf and the MILF is the joint U.S.-Philippine “Balikatan” manoeuvres on Basilan island in 2002 and a more muscular version announced for Sulu in 2003 but not pursued. Although the Basilan exercises had a salutary effect on the island’s security climate, the ASG core group’s flight to the Mindanao mainland (by way of Sulu) brought it into more direct contact with militant MILF commanders seeking new alliances in the face of the moderate Al-Haj Murad’s rise to leadership. This territorial shift also allowed the ASG and its Balik-Islam associates to use JI’s most advanced training facilities at Camp Jabal Quba from about September 2003 to October 2004.

The Basilan-based ASG around Janjalani, Solaiman and Isnilon Hapilon is known to have collaborated with the island’s local MILF commanders, Amir Mingkong and Hamzah Sapanton,⁵² but its relocation from the periphery of MILF influence to its Maguindanao heartland in July 2003 opened new possibilities for both sides, as well as for foreign jihadis, and introduced a dangerous new element into the MILF peace process. As Crisis Group previously reported, Janjalani sought out a training partnership with the structural JI under Zulkifli in early 2001.⁵³ On 28 October 2001, Janjalani carried off the ASG’s first significant bombing for several years, in a crowded downtown Zamboanga City plaza, killing nine.⁵⁴ Following further bombings in Zamboanga outside the Armed Forces Southern Command headquarters and in two downtown department stores a year later, Zulkifli went to the city at the end of 2002 to consult with Janjalani on closer cooperation.⁵⁵

An important new partnership resulted in March 2003, when Zulkifli accompanied Mustaqim (one of WakHud’s two liaison officers) and two other JI operatives to an ASG camp in Patikul, Jolo island, in the Sulu chain south west of Basilan. Janjalani’s core group had drawn on

a kinship alliance with the local Abu Sayyaf commander in Patikul, Radullan Sahiron, to seek refuge from the joint U.S.-Philippines military operations known as Balikatan-02 on Basilan,⁵⁶ and it remained on Jolo until May 2003, when it again relocated, probably to avoid the threat of escalated U.S. intervention in Sulu.⁵⁷ Between March and May 2003, about 90 ASG recruits are thought to have received basic infantry training and instruction in map reading and weapons handling from Rahmat, alias Zaki, who was the top graduate of Camp Jabal Quba’s second batch of cadets. About 40 of the ASG recruits may also have been given explosives training. Another batch two graduate, Abdullah Zaini alias Dzakwan, fromjepara, Central Java taught infantry tactics, while, according to an eyewitness, Ahmed Santos taught Islam and martial arts. Most of the ASG’s top leadership were present during this training, including Janjalani, Solaiman, Hapilon, Sahiron and Ghalib Andang, also known as Commander Robot.⁵⁸

According to Gappal Asali alias Boy Negro, an ASG recruit who later took part in the Manila Valentine’s Day attack with Angelo Trinidad, the trainees also participated in a test mission. This was an ambush on a company-sized government force near the boundary of Patikul and Talipao towns on Jolo in which the infamous Abu Sayyaf Commander Mujib Susukan was mortally wounded.⁵⁹

Faturrahman al-Ghozi and Mukhlas, were also committed to bombing.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, Basilan, April 2002.

⁵³ Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Background*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁵⁴ Earlier efforts included a failed extortion attack on a Basilan hardware store in May 1999 and on a Basilan church the next month, which killed one. See Philippine National Police, “ASG Trained Bombers Revealed by Abdulmukim Edris”, and “Debriefing Report, A.O. Edris”, undated.

⁵⁵ Philippine National Police, “Debriefing Report, Taufiq Rifqi alias Amy Erza”, 13 November 2003. The 2 October 2002 attack outside Southcom killed three, including a U.S. serviceman involved in the “Bayanihan” activities that continued after the formal termination of Balikatan-02 in July. The twin supermarket blasts on 17 October 2002 killed seven.

⁵⁶ See Kit Collier, “Philippine conflict intensifies – but War on Terror it’s not”, *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, May 2003, p. 18. Sahiron is known as Commander Putol, a reference to the loss of his right arm as a Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) fighter in the 1974 Battle of Jolo. Putol’s MNLF credentials are remembered on Jolo, where he continues to enjoy some popular support. Putol’s marriage to Abdurajak Janjalani’s widow after the ASG founder’s death in December 1998 provided his younger brother Kadaffy’s entrée in Patikul, and ultimately, therefore, JI’s.

⁵⁷ The Pentagon first announced an intention to “disrupt and defeat” the ASG in Sulu via an “open-ended, no-holds-barred” combat operation in February 2003; it was reaffirmed during Philippine President Macapagal-Arroyo’s state visit to Washington in May 2003, but subsequently abandoned. See “It’s combat, not exercise, for U.S. troops”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 February 2003, p.1; and “Why are we in Jolo?”, editorial, *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2003.

⁵⁸ Philippine Army, G-2, “Summary of the Partial Tactical Interrogation Report on Rohmat alias Zaki/Hamdan/Akil”; Indonesian interrogation deposition of Abdullah Zaini alias Dzakwan alias Jessy Panda alias Hani, 2 August 2004; “Sinumpaang Salaysay [ni] Roland Ulla” [affidavit of Roland Ulla], Quezon City, 1 June 2004. Ulla was among the hostages seized by the ASG from Sipadan, Sabah in April 2000. He escaped in June 2003.

⁵⁹ Philippine National Police, “Malaya at Kusang Loob na Salaysay ni Gappal Bannah Asali” [interrogation deposition], 7 March 2005. Mujib’s father was the renowned MNLF Commander Susukan Taug, one of the elite “Batch 300” sent for Malaysian training with Al-Haj Murad in 1970 and said to

Since this occurred on 18 February 2003, before the arrival of the JI instructors, it suggests that the foreign jihadis were incorporated into an ongoing program.⁶⁰ Asali indicates that he was taught the use of landmines, timing devices, kung-fu and a variety of automatic weapons by Rahmat, although he does not distinguish between the training he received on Jolo, and at Jabal Quba, where the future Manila bombers and their JI mentors were to reunite.

In early May 2003, Rahmat was appointed permanent liaison to Janjalani by Zulkifli and left for the Zamboanga peninsula with the ASG leader and a large group of his men, while Dzakwan returned to Camp Jabal Quba to resume training the third batch of JI officer cadets. At some point during an extended, months-long march across the peninsula, Janjalani and Rahmat's group, which included Abu Solaiman and Isnilon Hapilon, was joined by Angelo Trinidad, dispatched to Mindanao by Sheikh Omar Lavilla. Trinidad had fallen under Lavilla's influence in 2001, when he began attending lectures at Ahmed Santos's Fi-Sabilillah foundation, and was thoroughly indoctrinated in the need to fight the worldwide oppression of Muslims. Lavilla told him only that Trinidad would be taking a "vacation" in the south.⁶¹

From the Zamboanga peninsula's southern coast, Janjalani and Rahmat travelled across the Moro Gulf to Palimbang in early July 2003, where their estimated 50 to 60 men linked up with a local outlaw group known as Abu Sofia. This band, which roams the hinterlands of Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani provinces, gained notoriety for the kidnapping of a Korean prospector in 2002 but also provided a kinship link to the MILF. This may have been a factor in the group's movement into southern Maguindanao province the following year – with significant consequences for MILF internal unity – but in the meantime, Rahmat set about organising a reciprocal training program for the ASG recruits at Jabal Quba.

While Janjalani's group secured its positions in Palimbang in alliance with two Abu Sofia leaders, Rahmat proceeded directly to a JI safehouse in Cotabato City managed by WakHud head Zulkifli. Transport from Palimbang was arranged for Janjalani, Abu Solaiman, and Alhamzer Manatad Limbong (Commander Kosovo, a cousin of Janjalani's) using the cars of Jordan Abdullah and Sammy Abdulgani. The latter two were arrested nine months later,

have been the first to shoot down a government fighter plane during the Battle of Jolo. Crisis Group interview, Jolo, July 2003.

⁶⁰ "Sayyaf's Mujib Susukan killed in Jolo encounter", *Today*, 21 February 2003, p. 1.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Angelo Trinidad, Manila, 29 April 2005.

exposing WakHud's finances and MILF ties.⁶² Isnilon Hapilon remained in Palimbang. After a week in Cotabato City, Rahmat accompanied the other ASG leaders to Jabal Quba. At around the same time, in mid-August 2003, Zulkifli met with senior WakHud officers Hudzaifah, Mustaqim and Usman (the latter two handling liaison), and Taufiq Rifqi, before setting out for Sabah for discussions on taking over responsibility for Mantiqi III.⁶³

Zulkifli's and Hudzaifah's capture en route on 9 September 2003 and Rifqi's on 2 October mark a turning point in the relationship between Indonesian and local militants. Zulkifli's decision to pursue an aggressive strategy of cooperation with the ASG and MILF, stepping up the tempo of bomb and arson attacks on southern cities from March 2002, may have reflected a decline in JI's capacity to operate independently as arrests accelerated from late 2001, mostly outside the Philippines. The primary focus of the "structural" JI in Mindanao remained building up its strength for the struggle in Indonesia, but given fewer numbers and more intense counter-terror activity, survival necessitated a closer working relationship with its hosts.⁶⁴

All the more so as Mustaqim, and then Usman, assumed control of Wakalah Hudaibiyah with little effective oversight from the crumbling mantiqi structure. The third batch of JI officer cadets completed training in April 2004, but according to Rahmat, most were still at Jabal Quba nearly a year later, when he was captured.⁶⁵ In addition to teaching *tafsir* (Koranic exegesis) and the history of the Prophet at the JI military academy, Rahmat remained closely involved with his ASG and Balik-Islam charges at the Mount Kararao site, instructing them in explosives and martial arts, until, in October 2004, Kadaffi Janjalani's group moved once again south to the Datu Piang area of Maguindanao province.⁶⁶

⁶² See Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit., pp. 19, 25.

⁶³ This account of Rahmat's activities is taken from his interrogation, which coincides with open source reports of Janjalani's departure from Jolo in May 2003 and landing at Palimbang on 5 July 2003, and Taufiq Rifqi's description of Rahmat's movements in his own deposition. See Jim Gomez, "Indonesians trained Abu in Jolo Camp", *Manila Times*, 7 April 2004.

⁶⁴ Sidney Jones, op. cit., p. 175.

⁶⁵ Zulkifli reckons the third batch (2002-2004) at twenty members; one may have died or failed to graduate in the period after his arrest. Indonesian interrogation deposition, 11 May 2004.

⁶⁶ Angelo Trinidad names some of the ASG he trained alongside at Mount Kararao as Abu Haisham, Abu Omar, Abu Habil and Shudais, as well as Boy Negro and Abu Jamil, alias Alex Alvarez, whose real name is Amil Hamja Ajijul. He also

B. MILF FACTIONALISM AND U.S. INTERVENTION

It is not clear what prompted the move on this occasion but this third major locus of JI-ASG-MILF cooperation quickly became more explosive than those in the Sulu archipelago or Mount Kararao. The jihadis' new host, Sheikh Amelil Umbra (Commander Kato), was a volatile maverick who controlled the MILF's 109th Base Command (redesignated the 105th shortly thereafter). His relations with the MILF leadership had been strained since at least 1999-2000, when, as commander of the 206th Brigade based at Camp Omar ibn al-Khatib, he launched provocative forward movements that resulted in the loss of this major MILF stronghold and helped precipitate the disastrous "all-out war" of April-July 2000.⁶⁷

Within days of the jihadis' arrival, Kato was again on the offensive, as a series of tit-for-tat killings between followers of the governing Ampatuan clan in Mamasapano town and local MILF men escalated into a major confrontation in early November 2004. The hostilities were defused by the small International Monitoring Team (IMT) from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference that began deploying in Mindanao on 9 October 2004, but the turmoil and, possibly, the knowledge that the 105th Command was in disfavour with the MILF leadership engaged in the peace process may have been factors in the government's decision to take a drastic new step in its war on terror in southern Maguindanao.⁶⁸

Since Balikatan-02, U.S. forces based in Zamboanga City have continued monitoring terrorist movement via unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) surveillance and electronic communications intercepts, in partnership with Philippine forces, as their role evolves from training to "advice and support" and, in particular, "intelligence-operations

places Dulmatin at the site, whom he knew as "Abu Alib". All communication with the MILF and JI was through Rahmat. Crisis Group interview, Trinidad, Manila, 29 April 2005.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat, January 2005. Camp Omar occupies a ten-square-kilometre plateau at the boundaries of Datu Piang, Talayan and Shariff Aguak municipalities in southern Maguindanao province. In September 1999, Kato's men established checkpoints on the national highway and occupied a strategic hill overlooking the Shariff Aguak town hall. In early February 2000, they took over the Talayan town hall. A government counter-offensive captured Camp Omar on 17 February with heavy MILF losses; Kato was reportedly summoned by Salamat Hashim and temporarily demoted. See "Capture of Camp Omar cripples MILF combat capability in Maguindanao", *Mindanao Times*, 23 February 2000; Ben Cal, *Gallantry in Mindanao: Preserving the Republic* (Quezon City, Mabuhay, 2000), pp. 8-10.

⁶⁸ Kit Collier, "Precarious peace in Mindanao", *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, December 2004-January 2005, p. 16.

fusion".⁶⁹ On 19 November 2004, signals intelligence indicated the presence of senior ASG and foreign jihadi figures in a hut in a remote village in Datu Piang, and military air strikes on the target were authorised. Rahmat suffered shrapnel injuries to the face and later confirmed that Kadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman were among six others in the house, which was said by a local ceasefire monitor to be owned by a MILF unit commander named Franco.⁷⁰

Although the MILF lodged an official protest with the IMT, its tone was less aggrieved than might have been expected after such a dramatic show of force. At exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur the following month, an important advance was made with the final activation of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), on a six-month interim basis. Conceived two and a half years earlier as a means of "isolating and interdicting criminal syndicates" and "lost commands" that had repeatedly complicated the peace process by sheltering in MILF-controlled areas, the AHJAG had been a dead letter, while the foreign jihadi presence grew.⁷¹ Initial cooperation centred on small-time kidnapping rackets, but within two weeks of the 21 December 2004 agreement, the mechanism's relevance for the 105th Command's labyrinthine terror ties was again underscored.

On 9 January 2005, the most serious breach to date of the July 2003 government-MILF ceasefire occurred when company-sized MILF forces overran army detachments in Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak. The attacks were led by Ustadz Abdul Wahid Tundok and Abdul Rahman Binago, unit commanders under Amelil Umbra, in apparent retaliation for the death of Binago's brother three days earlier in an encounter with government forces in

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, U.S. military advisers, Zamboanga City, 2003-2005. This tighter counter-terrorist "sensor-shooter loop" is enshrined in the April 1998 document "Doctrine for Joint Special Operations". See Gordon Corera, "Special Operations Forces take care of war on terror", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, January 2003, pp. 44-45.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Cotabato City, 24 November 2004. The monitor, a MILF appointee to the area's Local Monitoring Team (established pursuant to the 2001 Tripoli Agreement), confirmed that the immediate area's residents were "MILF combatants". The military announced that Janjalani, Hapilon and "JI members led by Mike Usman" were among the targets, while MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu and MILF ceasefire panel chair Benjie Midtimbang categorically denied an ASG or JI presence at the site. See "Military pounds JI-Abu meet; 10 killed", *Philippine Star*, 21 November 2004, pp. 1, 10; "Sayyaf head escapes bombing, seen in Sultan Kudarat", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 25 November 2004, p. 21.

⁷¹ For the text of the 6 May 2002 agreement conceptualising AHJAG, see Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit., Appendix D.

Palimbang.⁷² This brother, Bedis Binago, was a leader of the Abu Sofia group that had facilitated the relocation of Rahmat and the ASG leadership to the Mindanao mainland eighteen months before and had an ongoing relationship with ASG elements in Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani provinces, particularly Isnilon Hapilon.⁷³

Manila and the U.S. took advantage of MILF discomfiture at the 105th Command's ill-discipline to launch a second set of air strikes on 27 January 2005. A ranking U.S. military adviser, who observed the operation in the field from a Philippine Army battalion headquarters, confirmed to Crisis Group that Dulmatin was the principal target and was definitely in the area, in Datu Piang's Butilen marsh.⁷⁴ Despite the lack of concrete results, official MILF reaction was restrained, suggesting that with the activation of AHJAG, some degree of intelligence coordination was finally taking place, and the action had tacit MILF consent.

A new set of rules was clearly in place with the MILF, as a third series of air strikes on 14-15 April 2005, again within Kato's base command in Talayan town, was combined, for the first time, with ground operations aimed at confirming "high-value" kills. Although there were minor clashes with MILF forces, rebel protest was muted, and, just five days later, negotiating teams in Port Dickson, Malaysia, announced that agreement had been reached on fifteen "consensus points" relating to the central question of Muslim "ancestral domain". This was not quite as sensational as the parties' press releases would have it but it did indicate that substantive progress in the peace talks was now possible, side-by-side with direct military action against terrorists in MILF territory.⁷⁵ On 23 April,

government negotiators turned over a long-awaited list of 53 terrorist suspects to the MILF at an AHJAG meeting in Davao City.⁷⁶

The stage was set for a full-scale ground offensive against Janjalani's group, now said to be harbouring both Dulmatin and Umar Patek, and it commenced on 1 July 2005. In an unprecedented gesture of cooperation, the MILF agreed to evacuate some 280 men belonging to its 104th and 105th Commands from the towns of Guindulungan, Talayan and Datu Saudi Ampatuan, to allow government troops unfettered movement.⁷⁷ Pursuit operations dragged on with few tangible results for three months, after which it was announced that the group had once more evaded capture.

An even more remarkable turnaround – and possible harbinger of an open split within the MILF over the issue of terror ties – came a week later. Long dismissive of the JI question, MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu announced on 9 October 2005 that the 105th Base Command had been "deactivated", beginning the previous April, and two of its sub-commanders – likely Tundok and Binago – were indefinitely "suspended".⁷⁸ No such public disciplinary action had ever before been taken by the MILF central committee against an entire territorial command, and questions inevitably arise as to why it should have been taken at that time and against that command.

⁷² "Lider sa Sofia tigbak", *Sun Star General Santos*, 13 January 2005; "21 killed in clashes between AFP, MILF", *Manila Times*, 11 January 2005.

⁷³ The name "Bedis" resonates in the Muslim nationalist imagination like those of Commanders Putol and Susukan. The original Abdul Rahman Bedis was an Ilocano Balik-Islam whose role in the early MNLF struggle is so celebrated that the MILF named its military academy, established in 1987, in his honour. Crisis Group interview, Pigkawayan, North Cotabato, December 2003.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group conversation, senior U.S. military adviser, Zamboanga City, 2 February 2005. Disturbingly, the officer's Philippine counterpart, Southcom commander Lt. Gen. Alberto Braganza, who insisted that Dulmatin was killed in the airstrike, appeared not to recognise his name during planning of the operation.

⁷⁵ Although the exact language of these consensus points on the "concept, territory and resources strands" of the ancestral domain question remains confidential, the text released by a government negotiator suggests its skeletal nature: "Acknowledgement of the birthright of the Bangsamoro people to call themselves as such and the affirmation of the right of other indigenous peoples to free choice; The right to self-governance of the Bangsamoro people rooted in their distinct political and cultural history;

The ARMM [Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao] as a part of the core of the Bangsamoro homeland; Adherence to international humanitarian law and human rights instruments in upholding the rights of the Bangsamoro people; A mutually-acceptable definition of ancestral domain and ancestral land consistent with [government] statutes and the MILF position, and that ancestral domain does not form part of the public domain [a source close to the MILF demurs, rendering this point as: The parties agree to the definition of ancestral land as indicated in paragraph 5 of the MILF position paper]; A joint determination of the extent of the Bangsamoro ancestral domain by means of technical data, map gathering and joint research; The Bangsamoro people's right to utilise and develop the resources within their ancestral domain and ancestral lands".

⁷⁶ Edith Regalado, "Gov't gives MILF list of JI members", *Philippine Star*, 25 April 2005, p. 30. The list includes 31 Indonesians, 21 Filipinos belonging to the ASG, Pentagon Gang and Abu Sofia (but not the MILF), and one Malaysian – Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, head of the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, also reportedly sighted with Janjalani's group in southern Maguindanao. Crisis Group correspondence, October 2005.

⁷⁷ A new mechanism, JMAC, was established to coordinate the repositioning of the MILF forces. See "Joint Monitoring and Assistance Centre, GRP-MILF CCCH/AHJAG Press Statement", 22 July 2005.

⁷⁸ "MILF claims disciplined guerrillas on suspected terror links", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 October 2005.

The timing was clearly related to the second Bali bombings of 1 October 2005, and the subsequent U.S. announcement of a \$10 million reward for the capture of Dulmatin (and \$1 million for Umar Patek).⁷⁹ A mounting body of evidence links the 105th Command to both the structural JI and these high-profile fugitives. Rahmat, captured at a government checkpoint in Datu Saudi Ampatuan on 16 March 2005, confessed that 105th subcommanders Baguinda Alih and Malad (the Base Command's logistics chief) had sheltered him in Datu Piang and Mamasapano, and a "Kaji Wahid" – almost certainly Abdul Wahid Tundok – had facilitated housing for his and Janjalani's group. Rahmat claimed that at the time of his arrest he was en route to a meeting with Kaji Wahid in Talayan to arrange a new safe haven following the 27 January air strikes. He confirmed having met Dulmatin just days earlier, while under Commander Malad's protection in Mamasapano.⁸⁰

The arrest of three Indonesians in Zamboanga City in mid-December 2004, and of the former head of the KOMPAK-Ambon office, Abdullah Sonata, on 6 July 2005 in Jakarta, provided further insight into the significance of the Dulmatin-Patek operation in Mindanao.⁸¹ The Indonesians – Muhammed Yusop Karim Faiz alias Muhammed Saifuddin, Didi Residiana alias Didi Gepeng alias Ted Yolanda and Mohammad Nasir Hamid – were captured along with their Balik-Islam guide, Muhajir de la Merced, on their arrival by inter-island ferry. Faiz, from Klaten, Central Java, and a 1991 alumnus of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir's Ngruki Pesantren,⁸² was reportedly carrying \$21,000 donated by a Saudi whom he knew from study in Mecca. The money was destined for Dulmatin and initially was supposed to have been carried by Sonata.⁸³

Three more Indonesians, all reportedly recruited by Sonata, were arrested on 9 June 2005 by Malaysian authorities in Tawau, Sabah as they were getting ready to leave for Mindanao. At least two others, possibly named Ahmad alias Qildan and Abu Nida, may have slipped through the net into Mindanao.⁸⁴ As KOMPAK recruits, they may not have been heading to train with Dulmatin, but they certainly would have established contact with him and his associates.

The continuing activity of the JI fugitives explains some of the reluctance of the MILF to support further ties. An additional explanation for the MILF's cooperative official stance on the 105th Command lies in the progress of peace negotiations. Following the "breakthrough" of April's consensus points, an eighth round of exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur on 20-21 June extended the interim AHJAG guidelines for another year, and a ninth round on 15-16 September resulted in a new consensus on the "governance strand" of the ancestral domain question.⁸⁵ The next step, optimistically anticipated by early 2006, would be signature of formal "Implementing Guidelines on the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the Tripoli Agreement on Peace", completing the three-cornered Tripoli framework agreed upon in 2001 and elevating negotiations from the non-binding technical working group to full panel-to-panel level.⁸⁶

A final explanation for the central committee's disciplinary action against the 105th Command, however, suggests the first of three significant flies in the ointment of the peace process. As Crisis Group previously argued, MILF internal unity since the death of founding chairman Salamat Hashim in 2003 depends partly on a delicate ethnic balance between Maguindanaon and Maranao-dominated

⁷⁹ The bounties were announced on 7 October, and in Dulmatin's case is second only to those on Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (\$25 million each). Kabalu publicly acknowledged Dulmatin and Patek's presence in Mindanao on the same day: see "Bali bombing mastermind in RP – MILF spokesman", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 7 October 2005.

⁸⁰ Philippine Army, G-2, "Summary of the Partial Tactical Interrogation Report on Rohmat alias Zaki/Hamdan/Akil", undated.

⁸¹ "Two Indonesian suicide bombers identified", *Manila Standard Today*, 9 September 2005. Extensive and incriminating email correspondence between Sonata and Patek was recovered on Sonata's arrest.

⁸² Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°20, *Al-Qaeda in South East Asia: The case of the "Ngruki Network" in Indonesia*, 8 August 2002 (corrected 10 January 2003).

⁸³ *Tempo*, 16 October 2005. Residiana, from Sukabumi, West Java, is an Australian embassy bombing suspect and DI veteran of the Poso conflict, who helped Ring Banten leader Kang Jaja recruit embassy suicide bomber Heri Golun. See Crisis Group

Report, *Recycling Militants in Indonesia*, op. cit., p. 29. The Zamboanga arrests were not announced for two months: see Joel Francis Guinto, "Car bomb attacks foiled as JI, Abu terror suspects fall", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 February 2005.

⁸⁴ Simon Elegant, "On the trail of the Bali bombers", *Time*, 17 October 2005, p. 26; "Two Indonesian suicide bombers identified", *Manila Standard Today*, 9 September 2005.

⁸⁵ "Joint Statement", Kuala Lumpur, 16 September 2005. Exploratory peace talks hosted by Malaysia began in March 2003, following the suspension of formal negotiations a year earlier and a "back-channel" meeting in May 2002. See Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit., pp. 7, 32.

⁸⁶ The 22 June 2001 Agreement on Peace between the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] and the MILF, signed in Tripoli, Libya, established a three-point agenda embracing a security aspect, a humanitarian and rehabilitation and development aspect, and an ancestral domain aspect. Implementing Guidelines on the Security Aspect were signed in Putrajaya, Malaysia on 7 August 2001, and Implementing Guidelines on the Humanitarian, Rehabilitation and Development Aspect, at Putrajaya on 7 May 2002.

commands.⁸⁷ Although the evidence of collusion between foreign jihadis and the Maranao and Iranun 101st, 102nd and 103rd Base Commands is just as strong, and longer-standing, than the 105th's own terror ties – encompassing now well-established activity in Camps Hudaibiyah, Jabal Quba and Busrah – MILF leaders have taken no public action, either unilaterally or through AHJAG, to curtail it. Politically, it is far easier for the Maguindanaon-controlled leadership to impose sanctions, real or feigned, against fellow-Maguindanaon commanders like Kato and Tundok than against the Maranao, which would pose a greater risk of a split in the MILF's ranks.⁸⁸

A perceived lack of transparency also casts a shadow over negotiations in Malaysia. Partial leaks of the April and September consensus points have undermined mutual confidence and fuel growing opposition from the same quarters that resisted the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF: Christian Mindanao politicians led by Celso Lorenzo-Lobregat of Zamboanga and Daisy Avance-Fuentes of South Cotabato.⁸⁹ Finally, the August 2005 election of Zaldy "Datu Puti" Ampatuan as governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao – the first non-MNLF regional governor since the 1996 pact and scion of a traditional clan at odds with MILF militants – complicates the peace process in at least three ways. First, it signals the impermanence of any settlement that may be reached with the MILF. Secondly, any MILF attempt to lock in a permanent territorial claim, as the MNLF failed to do, will be resisted by the Ampatuans and their Muslim allies, as well as Christian die-hards. Thirdly, what amounts, for many MNLF loyalists, to the effective abrogation of the 1996 agreement may drive some of them to seek new alliances with the Philippines' evolving terror coalition.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Background*, op. cit. pp. 9-12.

⁸⁸ Other Base Commands including the 104th and 108th have also had dealings with individuals on the order of battle provided through AHJAG. ASG, Abu Sofia and Mujahidin KOMPAK activity around Palimbang would certainly require the protection of the 104th Command. A Crisis Group source indicates that Tundok is facing a MILF military tribunal, but aside from Kabalu's 9 October 2005 statement cited above, the MILF has remained silent on the issue.

⁸⁹ See Al Jacinto, "Formation of Islamic state for MILF bucked", *Manila Times*, 26 October 2005. Celso's late mother and predecessor as mayor of Zamboanga City, Maria Clara Lobregat, together with South Cotabato Governor Avance-Fuentes and former Sarangani Representative Lualhati Antonino, then known as Congress' *Tres Marias* (Three Marias), led opposition to the 1996 pact and succeeded in restricting funds for its implementation.

⁹⁰ This prospect may be heightened by renewed hostilities on Jolo since 11 November 2005, with the government simultaneously targeting ASG and MNLF forces under Lupah

V. THE SUPERFERRY AND VALENTINE'S DAY BOMBINGS

The terrorist attacks on *Superferry 14*, and on a bus in Makati on Valentine's Day 2005 illustrate the links among Philippine and Indonesian jihadist groups. Both were apparently executed at the primary direction of ASG leaders Kadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman by Balik-Islam converts connected to Ahmed Santos's Rajah Solaiman Movement and trained by JI operatives under MILF protection. The two crimes, however, present a study in contrasts. While the 14 February 2005 bus bombing that killed four and wounded 64 has resulted in the Philippines' first successful conviction for murder in a JI-linked case and generated no significant Muslim activist opposition, the Superferry case has gone nowhere.⁹¹ Instead, activists have rallied to the cause of the self-confessed bomber responsible for an act of terrorism second in the region only to Bali in terms of numbers killed.

Arrests followed both attacks fairly quickly. Abu Solaiman and Janjalani claimed credit for the 27 February 2004 Superferry bomb, which caused the 10,000-ton vessel to burn and partially sink in Manila Bay with the estimated loss of 116 lives.⁹² Police detained Redondo Cain "Habil Ahmad" Dellosa on 22 March after he was heard openly boasting of his role in the attack and was positively identified by former ASG hostage Roland Ulla.⁹³ Dellosa, an Ilonggo convert who was among the six suspects held after the May 2002 raid on Ahmed Santos's training camp in Anda, admitted placing 3.6 kilograms of TNT concealed in a television set in a cabin aboard the ferry, before

Sug State Revolutionary Committee (LSSRC, embracing Sulu) chairman Khaid Ajibon. Ajibon's vice chairman, Tahil Sali, is the son of another legendary MNLF commander, the late Usman Sali. Tahil is related by marriage to the ASG's Radullan Sahiron. While jailed MNLF founder Nur Misuari has reportedly made efforts to limit fraternisation between LSSRC and ASG forces, existing bonds are likely to tighten in the heat of battle. Crisis Group interviews, Jolo, July 2003. The stakes on Jolo are also being raised by the presence of U.S. troops on the island since early September 2005, said to be engaged in civic action under the ongoing Bayanihan program.

⁹¹ Tarra Quismundo and Luige del Puerto, "It's death for three bombers", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 October 2005.

⁹² Arlyn de la Cruz and Tarra Quismundo, "We bombed ferry, claims Abu Sayyaf", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 February 2004. Janjalani frankly admitted that three extortion demands had been ignored by the ferry's owners, the Aboitiz family's WG&A company.

⁹³ Kimina Lyall, "Loose lips sink Manila bomb plot", *The Australian*, 31 March 2004; Jaime Laude and Christina Mendez, "Ex-hostages tag Abu suspects", *Philippine Star*, 7 April 2004.

disembarking. The timed device went off an hour after departure.⁹⁴

Makati bomber Angelo Trinidad, an Anda classmate, confirms reports that Dellosa received “special training” in bomb-making from JI at Mount Kararao in 2002, spending about six months at the site after jumping bail on charges of illegal possession of weapons and explosives in Pangasinan.⁹⁵ Five other members of a suspected cell planning a further “Madrid-level attack” and led by Commander Kosovo were arrested in Manila in swift succession, but Ahmed Santos eluded capture when the Fi-Sabilillah compound was raided on 26 March 2004.⁹⁶ One of the five, Walter “Abdulwali” Villanueva, an Ilocano convert, allegedly told police that Dellosa had assembled the Superferry bomb in Villanueva’s house the night before the attack.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, for eight months after the event Manila denied that the Superferry attack was a terrorist incident, and nearly two years later, trial proceedings have yet to begin.

The rapid resolution of the Makati bus bombing, by contrast, demonstrated the reality of the JI-Balik-Islam nexus to the public for the first time. Two of the convicted perpetrators, Angelo Trinidad and Gappal Asali, like Dellosa, were trained by JI at Mount Kararao. According to Trinidad, their Camp Medina site, near Jabal Quba, was defended by a MILF cordon about two kilometres distant, commanded by an Iranun officer codenamed “Zero-Five.” Rahmat was their principal instructor, mentor and intermediary; an Abu Haider also provided training.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Simon Elegant, “The return of Abu Sayyaf”, *Time Asia*, 23 August 2004. Abu Solaiman and Janjalani claimed credit for a suicide bombing rather than a delayed detonation.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Trinidad, Manila, 29 April 2005. This may conflict with Ulla’s recollection that Dellosa spent two years with his captors on Basilan and Jolo (May 2001-June 2003), though Ulla’s public remarks were imprecise.

⁹⁶ Two of the five, Walter Villanueva and Marvin Vincent “Abdulatif” Rueca, were converts and the others – Kosovo, Abdulrasid Bajeng Lim and Radzmar Sangkula Jul – ASG suspects. Kosovo was allegedly in possession of 36 kilograms of TNT.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, a senior Philippine investigator, Manila, 19 April 2005. Dellosa is said to have used the home of Julian “Ibrahim Mutuc” Kessel earlier that night before being moved on by Kessel’s wife. Kessel, from Alaminos, Pangasinan, was arrested on 19 November 2004 on suspicion of involvement in the February 2003 Cotabato airport bombing, as well as the Superferry. Trinidad told Crisis Group that Kessel was one of about four converts who trained alongside Ahmed Santos at Camp Busrah in December 2001.

⁹⁸ Although Abu Haider is a common name, this could be the same individual identified as the ASG bomb-maker for the 2 October and 17 October 2002 Zamboanga attacks. Both made use of unexploded air-force ordinance recovered from the battlefield in Jolo, and detonated with an alarm clock switch.

And Asali left the camp for Manila in January 2004, while Trinidad stayed on in Mindanao until October. Two weeks after his own return to Manila, Trinidad rendezvoused with Ahmed Santos, who informed him of “a program for [a] one ton [bomb]”, not to be put at risk by other premature activity.⁹⁹

The sequence of mobile phone calls Asali received following Trinidad’s return provides insight into authority relations among the three groups directly involved in the Makati operation: JI, Abu Sayyaf and RSM. According to Trinidad, Ahmed Santos opposed plans for a small bus bomb because it would compromise his more ambitious plot – a Bali-scale car bombing of the L.A. Café, a popular nightspot in Manila’s Malate tourist district.¹⁰⁰ But Santos was overridden. Abu Solaiman contacted Asali in October 2004, asking if he was “up to the task ahead”. Asali, who fancied himself Rahmat’s favourite, then received a call from his mentor, who told him not to be surprised at his mission because it was “for the sake of Islam, Allah, and all oppressed Muslims” and instructed him that Trinidad and Gamal “Tapay” Baharan, an ASG liaison close to Abu Solaiman and earlier included in the Superferry indictment, would join him in the mission.¹⁰¹

A first attempt to blow up a bus, “hurried” by Abu Solaiman, failed on Christmas Eve 2004.¹⁰² A series of increasingly impatient messages ensued, from Trinidad, then Baharan, then Abu Solaiman, who sent a short

His real name is given as Madznul Abdullah Ladja. “Debriefing Report, A.O. Edris”.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Trinidad, Manila, 29 April 2005; “Malaya at Kusang Loob na Salaysay ni Gappal Bannah Asali”, 7 March 2005. Asali returned to his native Zamboanga from March to June 2004, staying with ASG operatives Abdullah Ajijul and Amil Hamja Ajijul alias Alex Alvarez. Abdullah had recruited Asali in 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Trinidad; Philippine National Police, “Balik-Islam Personalities Involved in the Makati Bombing on 14 February 2005 and in other Bombing Operations”. 600 kilograms of unmixed explosives to be used in this car-bombing were recovered from a safe-house at 5B Lilac St., Fairview, Quezon City, on 23 March 2005.

¹⁰¹ This account comes from Asali’s 7 March 2005 confession. He was the first of the four accused Makati bombers to plead guilty and turn state’s witness. Crisis Group field notes of hearing before Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 60, Manila, 18 April 2005. On Baharan’s senior ASG role, see Philippine National Police, “Revelations of Noor Mohamad Umug”, undated.

¹⁰² Trinidad fetched the two kilograms of black powder from Asali’s home in Maharlika village, where it was stored in a biscuit tin, on the afternoon of 24 December 2004. Another convert and Anda batch-mate of Trinidad’s, Allan “Hakim” Borlagdatan, was arrested for the attempted attack. He and a police officer were killed when Borlagdatan allegedly tried to escape custody on 27 December 2004. A previous ASG bus bombing in Manila killed two on 18 October 2002.

text message to Asali in Tausug: “*pahil-pahil mu sadja in hinang*” (you’re letting the job slip). Finally Rahmat called again on 12 February 2005. The next evening, Trinidad collected three kilos of “Milo” (TNT), three “yosi” (Tagalog slang for cigarettes, meaning blasting caps), a cell-phone detonator and other paraphernalia from Asali.

Trinidad and Baharan boarded an air-conditioned bus carrying about a dozen passengers around 7:30 p.m. on 14 February. Baharan sat in the second row, while Trinidad, holding the bomb, sat at the rear. They rode the short distance from Guadalupe to Ayala, in the heart of the business district, before climbing down near a busy interchange and walking away. Trinidad then detonated the charge by mobile phone.¹⁰³

One hour earlier, two near-simultaneous explosions killed three bystanders outside a General Santos City shopping mall and a twelve-year old boy at a Davao City bus terminal. Abu Solaiman was jubilant, claiming responsibility for all three attacks, which, he said, were in retaliation for a military offensive against combined ASG and MNLF forces on Jolo, where fierce fighting had erupted again on 7 February 2005. Planning for the Valentine’s Day bombings had begun much earlier, of course, but this clear effort to identify a joint JI-ASG-MILF project with the broader legitimacy of the MNLF cause underlines Abu Solaiman’s skill as a propagandist and the dangers posed by terrorist exploitation of united front tactics.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Trinidad, Manila, 29 April 2005; “Malaya at Kusang Loob na Salaysay ni Elmer Andales y Juntilla”, 15 February 2005. Andales was the bus conductor that night.

¹⁰⁴ MILF elements may have played a more direct role in the Mindanao bombings than in Makati. Again, the 105th Base Command is at the centre of the allegations. According to Rahmat’s confession, the 14 February 2005 attack in General Santos City was carried out by an alias, Abdul Rahim, on the orders of an Abdul Basit of the 105th Command. This could be Abdulbasit Usman, who would then also be implicated in a 12 December 2004 attack on a General Santos market that killed sixteen, as well as Zulkifli’s 21 April 2002 bombing in General Santos that killed fifteen. The same document indicates that the Davao City Valentine’s Day bombing was conducted by men under the 105th’s Baguinda Alih. The operations were planned and financed by Abu Solaiman and Janjalani; Rahmat was present at the conception. See “Summary of the Partial Tactical Interrogation Report on Rohmat alias Zaki/Hamdan/Akil”, op. cit. For more on Abdulbasit Usman, see Crisis Group Report, *Southern Philippines Backgrounder*, op. cit., pp. 20-21. Government prosecutors, on the other hand, have charged another Abdul Basit – the son of ASG commander Isnilon Hapilon – together with Abdul Menap Mentang and Abdul Rahman Camili, in the Davao Valentine’s attack. Mentang and Camili earlier faced charges in connection with the major

VI. UNITED FRONT TACTICS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND URBAN COUNTER-TERRORISM

As practitioners of asymmetric warfare, small numbers of terrorists can only achieve disproportionate political impact through external “force multipliers”. These include the opportunism, naivety or incompetence of opponents, fellow-travellers and interested third parties – notably attention-seeking politicians, community spokespeople, and sensationalist media disseminating incendiary views. These amplifiers of the terrorist presence provoke often demagogic demands for censorship or indiscriminate repression. To succumb to these calls is to play into the terrorists’ hands, granting them and their apologists the very victim status they seek.

There has been little systematic analysis of such terrorist “multiplier effects,” and the terminology is still lacking to express these concepts in ways that do not risk further polarising opinion.¹⁰⁵ In this conceptual vacuum, popular explanations of terrorist recruitment fall back on abstract generalities like poverty or alienation that smack of early attempts to understand the related phenomenon of social revolution. Contemporary discussion of terrorism’s enabling political environment is so underdeveloped one might think nothing was learned from a century’s increasingly sophisticated thought on how social-revolutionary organisations actively mobilise mass support to undermine more powerful enemies.

Lenin wrote 85 years ago that such enemies could only be vanquished by thoroughly exploiting each “rift” and “conflict of interests” among them and taking advantage of every opportunity of winning a mass ally, “even though this ally is temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional”.¹⁰⁶ This insight formed the basis for several generations of successful “united front” politics by left-wing revolutionaries, whose advances in the Philippines only faltered when they disregarded Lenin’s advice and stood aside from the 1986 “People Power” revolt.

Subsequent splits in the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) have seen a significant migration of organisational talent to a new cause: Balik-Islam. Solidarity work with Muslim separatists in the south has a long

Davao City blasts of March and April 2003 but were ordered released by a Davao court in January 2005. See Edith Regalado, “Gov’t official witness in Davao V-Day bombing?”, *Philippine Star*, 6 April 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group was reticent, before the first Bali bombings, to label JI “terrorist”. Crisis Group Briefing, *Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1977), pp. 550-551.

pedigree on the country's revolutionary left, part of what could still be Asia's most entrenched united front "machinery". Vocal support for Balik-Islam terror suspects and opposition to such proposed government measures as an anti-terrorism law or national identification system – held to discriminate against Muslims – are natural extensions of these efforts to a new and dynamic social "sector".¹⁰⁷ The convert sector offers unique opportunities for community organising and high-profile agitation close to the centre of political power, Manila.

The principles of Balik-Islam united front work parallel those of the decades-long communist insurgency – except that the identity politics at its heart is even more combustible than the old politics of class. At the same time, it is more inchoate, since "self-starting" identities do not require, nor are they susceptible to, centralised command structures on the classical Leninist model. While *Fi-Sabilillah* and later the *Rajah Solaiman Movement* may be considered the "vanguards" of militant Balik-Islam, and *Ahmed Santos's Balik-Islam Unity Congress* their most obvious front organisation, they must manoeuvre within a looser constellation of potential allies, who ultimately answer to their own sponsors, not the core group around Santos.

The bases for broad unity, however, are the same: government human rights violations – now re-framed as ethno-religious discrimination – and opposition to U.S. imperialism, in the guise of the war on terror. A left-wing activist closely involved in constructing a new Balik-Islam umbrella organisation told Crisis Group that the constituency's "fragmented" nature and lack of any common political program render human rights issues the "primary catalyst" for bringing scattered convert coteries together.¹⁰⁸ Naturally, most participants in these front-

building enterprises are not conscious supporters of RSM attacks. This would obviate their utility as a bulwark and decoy. It suffices for the purposes of the vanguard within that at least some in the outer circles of the movement remain in wilful denial about such activity, until such time as their own radicalisation may lead them to embrace it.

Security forces' frequent failure to distinguish between hard-core elements actively engaged in violence and fellow-travellers performing ancillary work, or even passive associates, has always been central to insurgent recruitment. It nourishes the strong sense of persecution that binds the Balik-Islam community internally and to its Muslim and leftist allies. And unlike the brutalisation of rural activists in remote villages, raids, arrests and law-enforcement overkill in urban centres where converts congregate are readily publicised. To the extent that civil society networks expose genuine misconduct and exert pressure for reform, this is, of course, to be welcomed. What often goes unacknowledged, however, is that these same networks may simultaneously serve the purposes of the Philippines' evolving terror coalition.

This principally involves campaigns to undermine the distinction between a small criminal minority and the wider community in which they take refuge, in the name of their common Muslim identity. An ironic mirror image of the indiscriminate police practices that activists decry, this presents an urban analogy to the problem the armed forces face in separating foreign jihadis from their MILF hosts (and the MILF from its own civilian mass base). In both cases the only solution is good human intelligence applied with operational finesse. All too often, however, Philippine security forces take procedural shortcuts and end up doing much of their enemies' propaganda work for them.

The bloody suppression of a Manila prison uprising on 15 March 2005 is illustrative. The abortive jailbreak, led by Commander Kosovo – captured a year earlier in the post-Superferry crackdown – led to the deaths of 22 inmates when police stormed the overcrowded Bicutan facility, near Maharlika village. As much as the level of force employed, what enraged Muslim opinion were the circumstances under which prisoners had been detained.

¹⁰⁹ Most among the 129 Abu Sayyaf suspects held in Bicutan and among those killed had yet to face trial. Many, particularly members of the so-called "Basilan 73", had been detained almost four years earlier under a "state of

¹⁰⁷ Despite advice from United Nations experts, draft anti-terrorism bills pending in the Philippine Congress for over a decade remain far from satisfactory. Overly broad definitions of terrorism in the current drafts – House Bill 4839 and Senate Bill 2137 – unite a wide range of opponents. Yet effective legislation is imperative to overcome such problems as terrorist suspects jumping bail on lesser charges like illegal arms possession.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, Dasmariñas, Cavite, May 2005. This activist is aligned with the "Rejectionist" (RJ) wing that broke away from the CPP from 1992, specifically the Central Mindanao Region (CMR) and the Anak Mindanao (AMIN) party. These have been especially active in Balik-Islam and Muslim solidarity work. "Reaffirmists" (RAs), who support CPP leader Jose Maria Sison, explicitly adopted an instrumentalist approach to human rights work in the mid-1990s and cooperate closely with such groups as the Moro-Christian People's Alliance and *Suara Bangsamoro* through the RA-aligned *Karapatan* organisation. For an RA view on human rights work, see Rafael Baylisis (former CPP secretary

general), "Ilang Punto Hinggil sa Usaping 'Human Rights'", speech given on 18 July 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Three prison guards and two inmates were also killed at the outset of the uprising on 14 March 2005, as was a police officer during the storming of the prison the following day after protracted negotiations.

lawlessness” declared on that island, which allowed the arrest without warrant of anyone identified, sometimes on unreliable accusations, as a “co-conspirator, associate or agent” of the ASG.¹¹⁰

The ambiguities thrown up by dubious arrest procedures, prolonged detention without trial, and apparent police brutality gave Abu Solaiman a significant propaganda coup. His threat to bring war to “Manila’s doorstep” coincided with the burial in a single common grave in Maharlika of notorious ASG Commanders Kosovo, Robot, and Global, together with nineteen others. All were celebrated without distinction as “martyrs”, according to Congressman Mujiv Hataman, a prime mover behind Balik-Islam united front work.¹¹¹ Abu Solaiman drove the point home in a telephone interview: “They kept saying that we make no distinctions between civilians and non-civilians, but look at what they did”.¹¹²

VII. COUNTER-TERRORISM AND NEW THREATS

The constantly changing coalitions among terrorist groups in the Philippines pose a number of new or escalated threats to the country and the wider region. The combination of the funding, expertise and ideological fervour of foreign jihadists – overwhelmingly Indonesian – with local knowledge, networks and manoeuvrability continues to be lethal. Partnerships between JI and related groups, on the one hand, and ASG, RSM, Abu Sofia and MILF commanders, on the other, also benefit from an operational environment unique in South East Asia. The Philippines is the region’s weakest state – effectively a failed state in parts of the south where JI fugitives and others find sanctuary. From these enclaves successive Indonesian cohorts replenish losses but also increasingly share know-how and undertake joint operations with local insurgents in exchange for protection. These operations are now more likely than ever to extend beyond Mindanao, thanks, not least, to JI-trained militant converts.

As an unintended side-effect of regional counter-terrorism measures, including widespread arrests in Indonesia, improving border control in Sabah and actual or anticipated U.S. military manoeuvres in the Sulu archipelago, more of these foreign jihadis appear to be staying in Mindanao and strengthening ties with local insurgents.

This presents some serious dangers. The first is of continuing skills transfers between foreigners and locals, leading to more deadly attacks on urban targets. The second is that such attacks will undermine the domestic peace process, reducing the influence of moderates in the MILF and consolidating an alternative centre of separatist gravity around JI-linked militants. Even if MILF moderates temporarily hold their own to conclude a comprehensive peace treaty with Manila in 2006, the limited concessions within a weakened executive’s gift are unlikely to mollify more radical commanders like Amelil “Kato” Umbra, who may then break openly with Murad’s leadership.¹¹³

Breakaway MILF radicals will find ready allies not only in the ASG and RSM, but also in foreign jihadis now more inclined to adopt the Moro struggle as their own. This is the third danger. Indonesian jihadis are divided as to whether attacks on civilians in places like Bali and Jakarta, outside conflict zones, are licit in Islam. Such attacks will undoubtedly continue, but this dispute may presage a shift in emphasis to the Philippines, which has already suffered

¹¹⁰ This procedure was authorised by then Justice Secretary Hernando Perez in a memorandum dated 13 July 2001. Many Basilan arrests were based on affidavits executed by ASG informants Salih Omar, Ben Aurain and Hatta Saiddan, placing named co-conspirators at the ASG’s Punuh Muhadji camp on Basilan during a mass kidnapping incident in March 2000. In several instances these witnesses later withdrew their accusations, allegedly for monetary considerations, even testifying on 16 August 2001 that their entire original affidavits were invalid. Primary documents in Crisis Group’s possession; Crisis Group interviews in Basilan, April 2002.

¹¹¹ Jocelyn Uy, “22 Abus buried as ‘martyrs’ – shrouded in white cloth to signify purity”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 17 March 2005, p. 1. Hataman represents the AMIN party in Congress.

¹¹² Arlyn de la Cruz, “Kosovo took orders from us, says Abu leader”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 17 March 2005, p. 1.

¹¹³ A Philippine Army brigade commander estimates that at least 3,000 of the MILF’s 12,000 regulars would fight on after any likely autonomy agreement. Crisis Group interview, Tacurong, Sultan Kudarat, January 2005.

almost as many casualties in JI-related bombings as Indonesia itself. From a jihadi perspective, the Philippines is Asia's ultimate crusader nation, an intimate American ally that subjugates its Muslim minority with the active aid of the U.S. military. Mindanao is Islam's historical high-water mark, the farthest frontier of the Muslim world; Rajah Solaiman and Manila's Muslim converts are a reminder of what might have been – and, in the jihadi imagination, what can still be.

JI's Darul Islam roots mean the primary focus and long-term goal will always remain an Islamic state in Indonesia. But fighting the "near enemy" on home soil has already required periods of exile (*hijra*) in Malaysia and Afghanistan for much of JI's first-generation leadership. Both experiences fundamentally reshaped the contours of Indonesian Islamic militancy. The fourth danger is of a new generation of Mindanao *muhajirin* (exiles) not only wreaking havoc on the Philippines' delicately-poised peace process, but, emboldened by their disproportionate impact on this "far enemy", again returning to employ the more ruthless methods of the foreign battlefield at home.¹¹⁴

The good news is that every terrorist "link" is simultaneously a potential point of vulnerability. There is much to be learned from more sophisticated theories of social revolution and counterinsurgency in this respect. Counter-terrorist strategy has thus far tended to focus on "cutting off the head", expending vast resources on the hunt for a few high-profile ringleaders, while neglecting the sociological and symbolic aspects of the terrorists' operating environment that make links possible. These imperatives need not be in conflict but the enormous financial rewards at stake in the capture of a Janjalani or a Dulmatin discourage cooperation between investigators and agencies, according to a senior Philippine officer, and the dogged accumulation of in-depth intelligence about wider "support networks".¹¹⁵

While most Filipinos are still profoundly ignorant about the foreign jihadis in their midst, Indonesian interrogators rarely bother to pursue detailed questions about captured operatives' MILF or ASG associations. Despite the rhetoric of regional cooperation, most national security agencies retain a parochial outlook. Detailed understanding

of the relationships between foreign jihadis and local hosts is essential if the links are to be broken at their weakest point, rather than inadvertently reinforced. As these links proliferate, so do the opportunities to unravel the Philippines' evolving terror coalition.

¹¹⁴ Counterbalancing the pull of JI's roots in "local jihad" at home is the powerful salafi-jihadi tradition of the *ahl al-thughoor*, warriors defending the periphery of the Islamic world, or reclaiming territories lost to Islam. The Philippines features prominently as such in al-Qaeda discourse. See Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London, 2004), pp. 53, 112, 312; Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, "Joining the Caravan? The Middle East, Islamism and Indonesia", Lowy Institute for International Policy, Paper 05, 2005, p. 115.

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Manila, April 2005.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Philippines' small minority of terrorist converts resembles the threat of "home-grown" terrorism looming in developed countries since the 7 July London bombings. Like second-generation Muslims in Western Europe or Australia, converts move inconspicuously through their own urban landscapes but may also experience a deep sense of difference. This paradoxical combination can make them ideal recruits for foreign jihadis. The crucial difference in the Philippines is that this new threat is embedded in a civil war, and militant converts possess powerful domestic as well as regional and global allies.

The MILF's internal dynamics have hitherto supported a role for foreign extremists, as moderate and militant factions contend for influence over the movement's direction. But as he consolidates his authority and peace talks in Kuala Lumpur finally broach substantive issues, the moderate Al-Haj Murad – under intense pressure from Manila and Washington to end MILF relations with JI – is beginning to constrict the foreign jihadis' room for manoeuvre. Their investment in diversified ties with the ASG and its convert operatives will become more significant as this process continues.

For foreign jihadis, closer ties with the ASG provide an insurance policy against the peace process. Should Murad succeed in pressuring militant commanders to end their protection of JI and like-minded groups, the outsiders will become more dependent on the ASG for shelter and on converts to carry out high-profile attacks in the urban north. President Gloria Arroyo's diminishing political capital, die-hard Christian opposition to concessions in the south, enmity between the Ampatuans and MILF militants and a crumbling MNLF peace pact all militate against an early and sustainable settlement with the MILF, however. If the peace process drags on interminably, or if a final agreement fails to satisfy a significant number of MILF commanders, the JI-ASG-RSM alliance might form the nucleus of a longer-term extremist insurgency.

For Saudi funders, Filipino converts are attractive because, unlike their Muslim-born counterparts, they come to Islam without the cultural "accretions" (*bid'a*) of the indigenous southern tribes. Filipinos who renounce Christianity are, ideally, remade anew as a theological blank slate upon which Wahhabi doctrine can be inscribed wholesale. At the same time, their past identification with Christianity enables them to reach out more effectively to erstwhile brethren.

In addition to their links with the ASG, JI and the MILF, militant converts also benefit from a wider support network in civil society, which in a series of concentric circles,

moving outwards from the RSM, operates with varying degrees of guile and innocence. For many members of the broad Balik-Islam community, shared identity overrides questions of criminal complicity. When a Muslim brother or sister is taken into custody on terrorism-related charges, or otherwise falls foul of the authorities, Balik-Islam activists mobilise loudly in their defence, sometimes expressing indifference to guilt or innocence.

This power to mobilise is enhanced by the migration of experienced left-wing activists to the Balik-Islam cause since the splintering of the CPP in the early 1990s. Although these radicals do not necessarily share RSM's jihadi agenda, they see opportunities for community organising, solidarity work and anti-government militancy in the converts' widespread sense of alienation. This is deepened by the perceived injustices of Manila's urban counter-terror campaign – cases amplified by the activist infrastructure and portrayed as anti-Muslim in essence.

Whether this strategy succeeds is ultimately up to the Philippine government, whose law enforcement measures too often play into militant hands by subordinating procedural justice to careless counter-terrorism. Properly understood, counter-terrorism and respect for human rights are complementary, not in conflict, for they share the objective of protecting the innocent by prosecuting the guilty.

To better achieve this objective, the authorities should:

Exchange and integrate comprehensive databases on persons of interest with other countries in the region, so that Philippine and Malaysian officials have a keener appreciation of JI and like-minded groups, and Indonesians and Malaysians know enough about the MILF and ASG orders of battle to ask jihadi detainees the right questions. These databases should emphasise cohort and kinship connections and actual or potential antagonisms.

Pass an anti-terrorism law in the Philippines. To reduce well-founded fears that such a law could be abused, given the pattern of arbitrary and incommunicado detention that has characterised government efforts to address the problem to date, it should contain safeguards such as limits on pre-trial detention, regular judicial review of individual cases, and guarantees of access to legal counsel. If carefully crafted in consultation with civil liberties experts, such legislation could reduce law enforcement shortcuts and the incidence of false arrests and bail-jumping.

Provide for a single national identification system, as prevails in Malaysia and Singapore.

Accelerate the judicial process in Philippines terrorism cases and ensure that trials are transparent and evidence is made public. Bring Ahmad Faisal, alias Zulkifli, and Ahmed Santos to trial as matters of priority.

Expand the mandate of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) to cover MILF and MNLF personnel in collusion with identified terrorist groups or individuals. The MILF should be required to provide a full accounting of disciplinary action taken against commanders with proven terror ties, as well as its own list of terrorism suspects (thus far, it has only endorsed Manila's list).

Create a new senior cabinet-level position in the Philippines overseeing the peace process, empowered to liaise and build consensus with key stakeholders in Congress, the security forces, local politicians and civil society groups, and to manage a full-time, permanent peace panel with enhanced diplomatic status.

Jakarta/Brussels, 19 December 2005

APPENDIX A

MAP OF THE PHILIPPINES

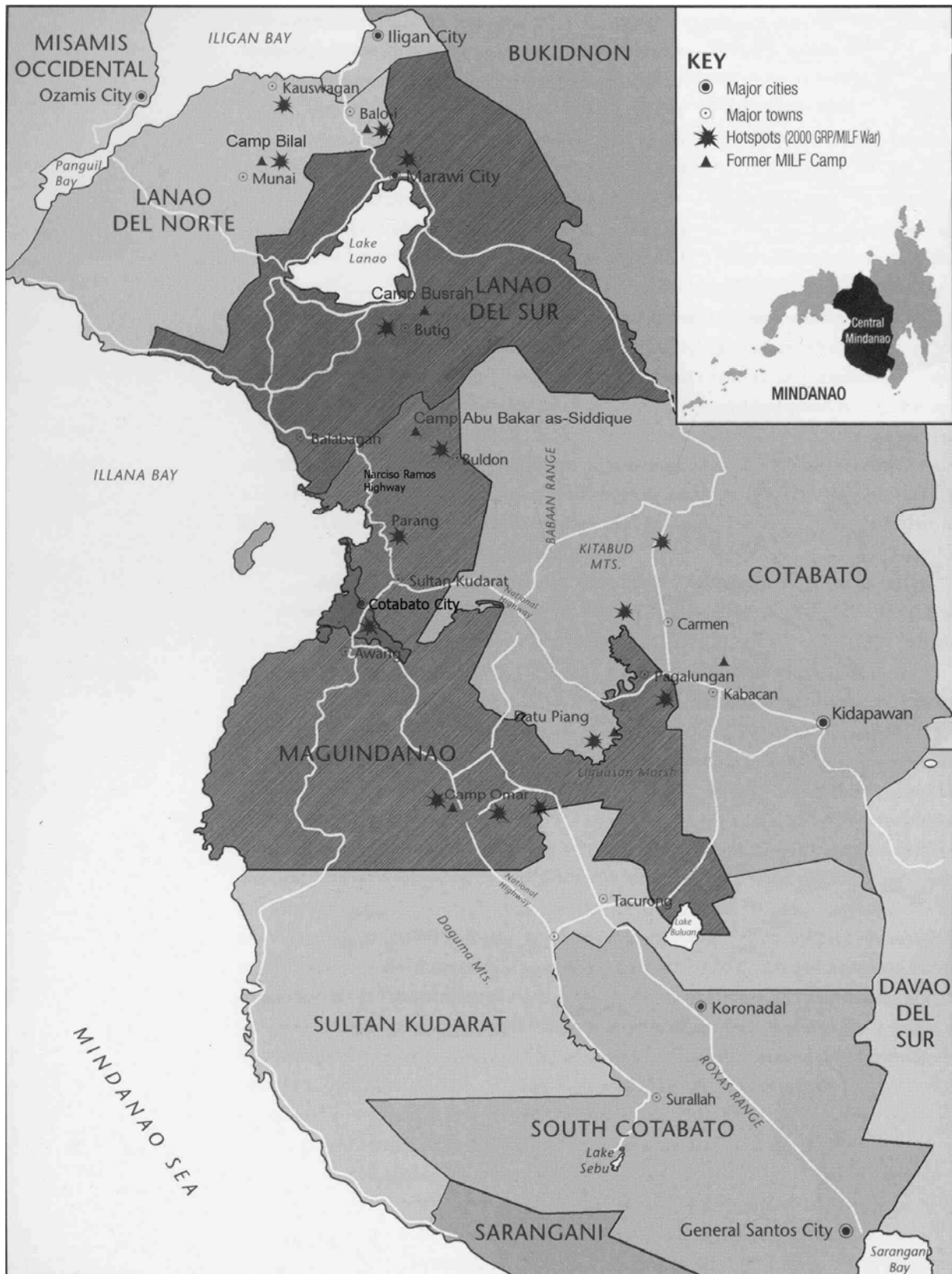


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APPENDIX B

MAP OF MINDANAO



Map based on original version in *'Mindanao on the Mend*, co-published by Anvil Publishing and Southern Philippines Center for Arts and Ecology (SPACE).

APPENDIX C

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 110 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates fifteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bishkek, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Pretoria, Pristina, Quito, Seoul, Skopje and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

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December 2005

APPENDIX D

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