



THE PHILIPPINES

Quick Facts

Population: 109,180,815 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 300,000 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Tagalog 24.4%, Bisaya/Binisaya 11.4%, Cebuano 9.9%, Ilocano 8.8%, Hiligaynon/Ilonggo 8.4%, Bicol/Bicol 6.8%, Waray 4%, other local ethnicity 26.1%, other foreign ethnicity .1% (2010 est.)

GDP (official exchange rate): \$313.6 billion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated July 2020)

INTRODUCTION

Since 1972, the overwhelmingly Catholic nation of the Philippines has confronted long-running secessionist insurgencies from some portions of its Muslim community in the Southern islands of Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago. A combination of endemic corruption, failing state institutions, socio-cultural marginalization, crippling poverty, and low levels of human development has fueled demands from some Muslim community members for an independent homeland. The three primary groups which supported such a separation, meanwhile, are themselves divided along tribal and ideological lines.

Since 2002, the United States has increased military assistance to the Philippine government and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Furthermore, since 2004, the U.S. has deployed some 500 special forces personnel to the southern Philippines to provide intelligence support and training. That figure has more recently been reduced to just over 100 as a result of domestic successes by the country's security agencies in neutralizing key terrorist leaders and reining in various jihadist groups and insurgencies. Nevertheless, the AFP are hobbled by corruption, limited by outdated equipment, and often stretched too thin. These deficiencies have been ameliorated somewhat since the conclusion of the peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014, but the country still faces ongoing threats from other insurgent and radical groups.

Since 2015, the AFP has confronted Islamic State (IS) infiltration into Mindanao, as various local jihadist groups pledged allegiance to the transnational terror group. Meanwhile, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's almost single-minded focus on a controversial and bloody campaign against illegal drugs had served to distract his administration from the growing threat in the south, depleting finite security and intelligence community resources. As a result, the Philippines is today an increasingly weak link in Southeast Asia and a potential site for the establishment of an IS Wilayat (governorate).

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The Philippines lacks any truly broad-based Islamic movements. The Muslim Brotherhood is not strongly represented in the country, nor do the Philippines have any significant Muslim civil society organizations. There are three main organizations capable – to various degrees – of engaging in religious-inspired violence in the Philippines: The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). However, each is riddled with factionalism, leadership contests, and disputes over tactics. There is no national Islamist political party. Although the MNLF ostensibly acts like a political party, and will contest elections in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), it is weak and factionalized and since 2006 has not governed the ARMM. Since 2016, however, the Maute Group, also known as the Islamic State of Lanao (ISL), has transformed from a fringe family militia into a full-fledged terrorist organization – one that led the 2017 siege of Marawi under the flag of IS.

Moro National Liberation Front

Nur Misuari, a Manila-based Muslim academic, founded the MNLF in the early 1970s. For the following decade, the group served as the sole revolutionary organization for the portion of the Muslim community that felt politically disenfranchised. Though the MNLF was a predominantly secular ethno-nationalist movement, it included Islamist elements. The group received material and financial support from Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, whose “Green Book” espoused leftist Muslim anti-colonialism.¹ The MNLF was closely allied with the communist New People’s Army, which launched its own insurgency at the same time, prompting a declaration of martial law and a subsequent deterioration of the country’s security situation.

In 1976, Qadhafi attempted to broker a peace agreement between the factions, but the Philippine government showed little interest in granting regional autonomy in the country’s south. After the failed talks, the MNLF became internally divided and suffered significant battlefield losses. It never posed a serious military threat to the Republic of the Philippines again. In 1996, the MNLF and the Philippine government signed the Tripoli Accords, which established the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).² Nur Misuari became the governor of the region, which included only five provinces. Roughly 2,000 MNLF combatants were integrated into the AFP and the national police.³ The ARMM agreement was never fully implemented, however, and the region never achieved political and economic autonomy. Rampant corruption and inept leadership hobbled the ARMM, and these problems remain prevalent today.

In 2001, the MNLF executive committee voted to replace Misuari, who in turn staged a short-lived rebellion against the government. Misuari was arrested without formal charges and lived under house arrest until 2007. He secured release from formal government monitoring in 2008. The MNLF lost control of the ARMM government in the 2006 elections, and the organization largely fell into disarray. Though Muslimin Semma now formally heads the Executive Council, Misuari and his loyalists do not recognize his authority. In 2007, certain MNLF units took up arms again, joining forces with Abu Sayyaf.⁴ The organization has shed its secular image, now espousing a ‘light’ version of Islamism.⁵ Misuari courts controversy with public statements regarding relations between Manila and the Moro (a pejorative term for the local Muslim population and a derivation of the Spanish word Moors) community in the south, but has largely removed himself from the group’s activities.

The MNLF remains deeply factionalized and largely ignores the diverse political aspirations of Muslim community members. Some of these members are increasingly politically engaged, and the Philippine government is now more willing to address societal grievances – both trends that have eroded the MNLF’s relevance. Elements of the MNLF occupied parts of Zamboanga City in 2013, attempting to derail a peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF. Approximately 200 MNLF members fought AFP units, forcing the city to cease activity schools until the hostilities ended. Since that time, the MNLF

has waded into and out of the country's peace process.

The MNLF competes for support among the Tausig population in the Sulu area with members of Abu Sayyaf (ASG). Specifically, ASG's kidnapping and banditry draw the attention of the AFP, undercutting MNLF's political operations. The Duterte administration is apparently willing to discuss sources of the ongoing dispute with the MNLF, separate from ASG representatives. Some are concerned that this may lead to conflict escalation.⁶ Though the Filipino president has at times expressed openness to dialogue with the ASG,⁷ the government considers the group a terrorist organization. In stark contrast, the MNLF is seen as a legitimate stakeholder and its former leader, Nu Misuari, is Duterte's personal friend and has been invited to give talks at the presidential palace.⁸

Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the largest armed Islamist organization in the country. Salamat Hashim, a Muslim scholar educated at Egypt's Al Azhar University, broke away from the MNLF in 1978, thereafter formally establishing the MILF's headquarters in Lahore, Pakistan in 1984. The MILF considered itself part of the global *jihad*, inspired by the *mujahideen* that fought a religious war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁹ The MILF was far more Islamist than the MNLF; its avowed goal was to establish a homeland structured around political Islam.¹⁰ The MILF rejected the 1996 MNLF-government peace pact that established the ARMM, and benefited from mass MNLF defections from like-minded cadres who similarly opposed the deal.¹¹ By 1999, MILF members numbered over 11,000 and the group controlled vast swaths of central Mindanao.

Starting in 1996, members of *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), a regional al-Qaeda affiliate, began training their members alongside MILF combatants in MILF camps.¹² In 1997, the MILF and Philippine government, which had reached an autonomy agreement with the MNLF the previous year, began formal peace talks. When President Joseph Estrada was elected in 2000, however, the government reverted to a hardline stance against the group. Estrada ordered the country's military to resume operations against the MILF and succeeded in capturing its main base camp. Peace talks resumed in 2001 under Estrada's successor, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, following Estrada's ouster via a popular uprising. Nonetheless, in 2003, peace talks broke down and Philippine military personnel seized several large MILF camps.

Since the mid-2003 death of Salamat Hashim, the MILF has been led by its Chairman, Ebrahim Murad, and Vice Chairman, Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbintas. Murad has *de facto* accepted a broader autonomy agreement, aware that the MILF could not achieve its goals through conflict. Formal talks began in 2003, and in November 2007 a draft autonomy agreement over the MILF's "ancestral domain" was concluded.¹³ Nonetheless, lawmakers in Mindanao, the AFP and hardline cabinet members rejected the agreement in December 2007 and the country's Supreme Court found it to be unconstitutional in August 2008.¹⁴ The breakdown of talks led to attacks on villages populated by Christians in 2008 and 2009, assaults which left 400 dead and thousands displaced. A small Malaysian-led contingent of peace monitors withdrew from the Philippines at the end of 2009. Formal talks faltered in 2010 as President Arroyo completed her term in office.

Today, the MILF's strength has declined significantly relative to its peak in 1999-2000. In February 2011, as the administration of President Benigno Aquino, Jr. prepared to resume formal negotiations with the MILF, one of the most conservative religious commanders, Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato, quit the organization. Kato attracted the organization's more radical youth and formed the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) before dying of a heart attack in 2015 (the BIFF has since splintered into three different political organizations).¹⁵ The MILF received funding from Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf sources, although the exact scope of this aid is not publicly known. Outside money sources are thought to have dried up in recent times, forcing the group to find alternative sources of income closer to home. Notably, this includes an array of criminal activities, as the MILF engaged in extortion, a limited amount of kidnapping, and marijuana production throughout its existence.

Limited financial resources and sparse strategic options forced the MILF's leadership to negotiate with the Philippine government. It used the MILF's weaknesses and growing public pressure to successfully build consensus on both sides for a political settlement in 2012. The pact called for the creation of a semi-autonomous region named Bangsamoro that would grant greater political and economic separation from Manila. Fears of further political marginalization, held by some in the Muslim community, would be alleviated.¹⁶ Bangsamoro would replace the ARMM as the political unit in the southern island, and the agreement would allow international aid organizations and development groups to begin economic development.¹⁷

Yet, like prior "breakthroughs," discussions broke down in the summer of 2013. MILF representatives feared that government negotiators were preparing amendments to the initial pact, while the Philippine government believed Muslim community representatives would push for greater autonomy. The peace has held for the past several years, but tensions remain high. The election of Duterte has thus far been seen by many MILF leaders as a positive development because of Duterte's perceived flexibility compared to his predecessor. The tentative peace has allowed MILF segments to focus on internal issues that have increased group factionalism (including incidents of violence).¹⁸

The MILF works closely with Islamic clergy across Mindanao, deputizing them to serve as Islamic judges in the territory under its control. The MILF is the leading voice for the Maranao and Maguindanao tribes, as well as a handful of smaller tribes, such as the Yaccans on Basilan Island. The MILF has very little support among the Tausigs in Sulu or Tawi Tawi. It controls significant territory in Lanao del Sur, Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Sharif Kabungsan and Sarangani provinces, as well as territory in other southern Philippine provinces.

Despite all this, the MILF does not find itself in a particularly strong political position. The group provides little in the way of social services; it controls some *madrassas* and a small medical corps, but is not able to match—or compete with—the resources marshaled by the Philippine state. In some ways, the MILF actually alienates the very community it seeks to represent. The MILF is a largely horizontal organization, and individual base commanders often compete over turf; specifically, which villages they can tax. The peace process is also concerning; while some Muslim community members rejoiced over the agreed-upon pact in late 2012, the government has hesitated in finalizing all of its points and MILF commanders are increasingly anxious to resume combat operations.

Some extreme MILF elements, meanwhile, never accepted the peace process at all, and took action to discredit moderate MILF chairman Ebrahim el Haj Murad. The longer the peace process drags on, the more likely it is that hardliners will feel vindicated. The MILF has claimed to have 12,000 to 15,000 members, although circumstantial evidence suggests the organization is significantly smaller and weaker today.¹⁹

Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

The BIFF subscribes to an ultraconservative interpretation of Islam, similar to the Hanbali-*Wahhabbi* branch that is based in Saudi Arabia. It espouses the creation of an Islamic State in Muslim Mindanao. As early as 2008, Umbra Kato, a radical Saudi-trained preacher and former MILF member, unilaterally led violent raids against non-Muslim villages in central Mindanao in an attempt to sabotage peace negotiations between the government and the MILF leadership. The raids sparked an armed conflict with the AFP that displaced half a million residents of the area, though the conflict has subsided. A similar number of civilians were displaced during the siege on Marawi by IS elements in 2017.²⁰

After suffering a stroke in November 2011, Kato turned over the group's leadership to Mohammad Ali Tambako. Active in the Mindanao provinces of Maguindanao and Cotabato, the BIFF is among the most prominent groups to pledge allegiance to the so-called Islamic State.²¹ The exact nature of BIFF's relationship to the MILF is unclear; BIFF is believed to generate latent sympathy among many MILF members. Today, BIFF is considered as one of the major threats to Bangsamoro as the sub-state territory's

autonomy grows.

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

The ASG vacillates between terrorism and criminality. It was founded in 1991 by a veteran of the Afghan *mujahideen*, Abdurrajak Janjalani, apparently with seed money from al-Qaeda.²² Concomitantly, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, Muhmmmed Jamal Khalifah, moved from Quetta, Pakistan—where he ran a branch of the *Rabitat* (Muslim World League)—to the Philippines.²³ From 1991 to late 1994, Khalifah ran branches of two Saudi charities, the Muslim World League and the Islamic International Relief Organization, in Mindanao and Sulu. Philippine security forces considered both charities to be conduits of aid for Moro secessionist groups.

From 1991-1995, Abu Sayyaf carried out a spate of bombings, assassinations and kidnappings against non-secular targets, including churches and Christian missionaries in Sulu province. Following a loss of support from al-Qaeda in 1995, the group reverted to criminality, becoming synonymous with bold kidnapping attacks. The most famous of these included the April 2000 raid on the Malaysian island of Sipidan and the May 2001 assault on the Philippine resort island of Palawan. Together, these attacks netted ASG some 50 foreigners, whom the group held for ransom.

Between 2000 and 2001, the ASG took some 140 hostages, among them schoolchildren, teachers, priests and western tourists, and was responsible for the death of 16 captives. However, starting in 2003, the ASG – in conjunction with members of the Indonesian-based JI – resumed a campaign of terror, and the group's focus reverted to political violence. Subsequently, between 2004 and 2007, the few kidnappings perpetrated by the group resulted in executions, not ransoms. By early 2005, several top JI leaders were protected by the ASG while living in Jolo. An August 2006 AFP campaign, which was supported by a contingent of U.S. special forces operators, led to a sustained offensive against the ASG that lasted through mid-2007. Two key ASG leaders were killed during this time, and the ASG was weakened as a result. From 2007 to 2010, the ASG reverted to kidnapping schemes in its activities.²⁴

The group's current leadership is fragmented. Isnilon Totoni Hapilon, the group's hardline commander on Basilan, remains prominent. The ASG is estimated to have between 300 and 400 fighters, but is often supported and bolstered by disaffected MNLF combatants and gains members who have been radicalized elsewhere.²⁵ The ASG has increased its kidnappings since 2007, frequently beheading individuals for whom ransom is not paid.²⁶ Maritime attacks on private vessels near Sulu province have also become a common form of violence. Nonetheless, the ASG targets U.S. forces when possible, such as with the October 2009 IED attack in Jolo that killed two U.S. Special Forces soldiers. ASG forces and leadership remain primary targets of the AFP and U.S. forces, but have successfully avoided some raids. Hapilon made global headlines when he publicly swore allegiance to ISIS in 2014.²⁷ Hapilon was recognized as ISIS' designated leader in the Philippines in early 2016 with the new name of Sheik Mujahid Abu Abdullah al-Filipini. Hotspots of ASG activity have emerged as targets of ISIS recruitment.²⁸ Some speculation exists regarding how closely ASG and ISIS are affiliated, but the existence of any ties at all represents a troublesome development for the AFP.²⁹

The ASG enjoys support in the Philippines, but this backing is not particularly strong. There is some support for the group in the Sulu archipelago (particularly Jolo Island), though this is largely due to clan and kin-based sociocultural dynamics. The group itself is not wildly popular, nor does it have a positive message or social agenda; the ASG simply has an anti-Christian, anti-state, and anti-American identity. Most of its kidnapping victims appear to be Christian. On the few occasions that the ASG has kidnapped Muslims, it has tended to execute them for working on U.S.-funded projects. When the ASG receives foreign funds, kidnapping ceases and bombings resume. This cyclical pattern limits the group's appeal, making it attractive to only a small segment of ethnic Tausig society. By and large, the ASG is rejected by both Muslims and Christians because of its conduct. To date, no authoritative polling has been done to quantify ASG support in any part of the Philippines.

The Islamic State

The disturbing infiltration of IS into Muslim Mindanao was on full display in May 2017, when IS-affiliated groups carried out a months-long siege on Marawi, the country's largest Muslim-majority city. The offensive underscored the growing threat posed by local, regional, and global terror franchises. IS command provided direct support to local *jihadi* groups, which in turn laid siege to Marawi.³⁰

This dynamic reflects three inter-related factors. First, as IS faced mounting setbacks in the *caliphate's* heartland of western Iraq and eastern Syria, its leadership encouraged and aided global supporters to conduct spectacular terrorist attacks and establish franchises in Muslim-majority areas abroad.³¹ Second, the deadlock in peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF in light of the Mamasapano massacre has created a permissive environment for the resumption of violence. And third, President Duterte's preoccupation with his war on drugs and negotiations with communist rebels has drawn his administration's focus away from the peace process with moderate Muslim separatists.³²

The Philippine government has sought assistance from its immediate neighbors to expand intelligence-sharing and joint patrols along shared borders. Traditional allies like the United States and Australia have provided intelligence, weapons and logistical support, despite Duterte's tirades. The U.S. Department of Defense likewise has deployed special forces to assist the AFP.³³ New strategic partners such as China have offered intelligence and equipment. The Duterte administration has revived peace negotiations with the MILF by advocating a revised Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). Duterte also declared martial law across Mindanao, raising concerns over basic human rights and civil liberties. The years-long martial law was replaced in early 2020 by "a state of emergency" which still gives security forces significant leeway to apprehend suspected terrorists. In fact, governmental counterterrorism authorities appear to be expanding; the passage, in mid-2020 of a draconian anti-terror law permitting security forces to carry out extended preventative detention and wiretapping while lifting penalties against wrongful apprehension has given Philippine security forces maximum legal space to step up operations.³⁴ Nonetheless, regional reconstruction and containment of the threat posed by IS cells and sympathizers remains an uphill battle – one that requires sustained cooperation with, and assistance from, regional and international partners.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Islam came to the Philippines via Yemeni traders in the late 14th century who spread the religion throughout the Malay and Indonesian archipelagos. Subsequently, Spanish colonization, lasting three centuries (from the 16th to the late 19th), led to brutal clashes, and some Muslim community members took pride in their resistance to colonial domination. When the Philippines became an American colony in late 19th century, the Moros continued their fight for independence (the southern Philippines was pacified after U.S. military intervention).

At the end of World War II, when the U.S. was preparing Philippine independence, Muslim community leaders requested that the United States give them their own independent homeland. The U.S. never acknowledged this request, and the Republic of the Philippines remained whole. Muslim community members would eventually become the minority in the territory they occupied due to human migration.

Today, the Philippines are 80.6% Catholic, 5.6% Muslim, and 2.7% evangelical Christian.³⁵ However, Islam is the fastest growing population in the Philippines, and its growth is fueled by the "*Balik Islam*" ("return to Islam") movement – which has created significant Philippine converts from Christianity to Islam.

Such conversion takes place through two general processes. Philippine people may convert while working overseas in the Middle East with financial reasons in mind (since being a Muslim can lead to better job opportunities).³⁶ The other, which takes place in the Philippines, is via the network of *Balik Islam* centers scattered primarily in the country's cities. For instance, of the 1,890 *madrassas* in the Philippines,

only 1,000 or so are in Mindanao; the remainder is spread across the rest of the country. The center of *Balik* Islam is in the northern city of Baguio, on Luzon Island. Much of the funding for *Balik* Islam's *dawa* (proselytization) work comes from the Gulf.³⁷ *Balik* Islam preaches a *Salafi* interpretation of Islam, and encourages followers to live in exclusive parallel communities.³⁸ A radical fringe of *Balik* Islam, known as the Rajah Solaiman Movement, has worked closely with the ASG and has been implicated in a number of terrorist acts.

Two major organizations lead the *Balik* Islam movement: the Islamic Wisdom Worldwide Mission (IWWM) and the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG). Both have been substantially funded by Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf sources. The IWWM is the successor of a front foundation used by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law, Mohammed Jamal Khalifah, who was forced out of the Philippines in late 2004.³⁹ ISCAG was established in the mid-1990s in Saudi Arabia by a group of primarily *Balik* Islam converts. ISCAG is a rapidly growing NGO and has been featured in the press, due to its rapid expansion and sponsorship of mosque and *madrassa* construction. ISCAG has come under scrutiny by state authorities after its original head, Humoud Mohammad Abdulaziz al-Lahim, was forced out of the Philippines in April 2002 on allegations of sponsoring terrorism. ISCAG remains a focus of the state's investigative efforts to explore ties to violent extremism.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The Philippine government has a mixed record of relations with its Muslim citizens. Some in the country's Catholic majority are deeply suspicious of its Muslim minority. This has translated into structural discrimination within the national economy. A developed religious identity in the Muslim community has inspired both legitimate political advocacy and violent extremism. As a result, the state pays closer attention to Moro concerns. The 2014 agreement signed by the government and the MILF included guarantees of greater political access and stronger political autonomy, a structure set to finalize by 2022. Islamic courts for family law are active in the country's south. Mosque and *madrassa* construction generally proceed unhindered.

The January 2015 Mamasapano massacre – in which 44 members of the Philippine police Special Action Force (SAF) were killed during an encounter with MILF members – torpedoed peace negotiations. During a separate operation, Filipino Special Forces tried to capture Marwan, a Malaysian bomb-maker, who took refuge in a MILF controlled area, sheltered by the BIFF.

Following the incident, there was an immediate collapse in public and legislative support for the passage of the BBL, the legal framework for the establishment of a Muslim-led sub-state entity. The upshot was a years-long deadlock in peace negotiations. The protracted peace process similarly has weakened the MILF's battlefield preparedness, driving some of its more hardline rank-and-file to join *jihadi* actors such as the Maute Group.⁴⁰

Contacts between the Philippines and the broader Muslim world are extensive. The country has observer status in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or (OIC), has increased the number of pilgrims it sends on the *hajj*, and has allowed foreign aid organizations, *dawa* organizations, and Islamist charities to have access to the country.⁴¹ The presidential administration in Manila likewise has an office of Muslim affairs, and Muslims are increasingly making political inroads as candidates beyond the southern provinces.

Some Muslim community members in Mindanao and Sulu are angry at the loss of their ancestral domain to migration, heavy-handed government responses to secessionist movements, and the slow implementation of various peace pacts. Some are also concerned that the government's extensive counterterrorism cooperation with the United States has hardened government elements against any type of compromise. The election of Rodrigo Duterte may again prove significant. Duterte hails from Mindanao and his primary base of support is concentrated there. Despite his reputation as a political wild

card, the Philippine population generally considers the early years of Duterte's administration to have been successful. However, his populist persona and penchant for quick action have created concerns about the rule of law in the country.

The administration's anti-drug campaign remains popular with the broader public, but legal groups, opposition parties, and human rights organizations have expressed concern. Duterte's populism is accepted by some in the south, who hope that, as a local and as a politician less interested in optics, he will push forward the peace process to greater stability.

The peace agreement between the MILF and the government enjoys some national support, especially among moderates in the south. The agreement dissuades MILF elements from engaging in conflict, while joint operations with the United States and improved operational capability have isolated the ASG. The government's footing has improved over the past decade, as it has used security assets in a more efficient manner, diversified the socio-economic tools used to assist development in the south, and used political dialogue to ease intergroup tensions. Nevertheless, insecurity will continue to define portions of the Philippines and terrorism, especially by the ASG, will remain a focus of AFP. However, the state's positive steps to date can be expected to deliver continued benefits into the future.

In early 2019, Muslim-majority regions of Mindanao held two referendums on the creation of a new autonomous political entity following the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). Voters from various Muslim-majority municipalities and provinces decided on the establishment and exact composition of the proposed territory.

The first referendum was held on January 21st, covering the cities of Isabela and Cotobato, as well as the five provinces composing the ARMM. The second phase was held on February 6th, involving the provinces of Lanao del Norte and North Cotobato along with other municipalities that separately petitioned to join the Bangsamoro. The referendum was broadly peaceful and deemed to have been fair and credible by independent international observers. The referendum saw the ARMM, North Cotabato, and the major city of Cotobato become the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), with Lanao del Norte and certain villages near Cotobato and North Cotobato voting against joining the BARMM.⁴² The new political entity will enjoy significant autonomy; it can create *sharia*-based courts and judicial institutions, enjoy fiscal autonomy (remitting only a quarter of internal revenue to the national government, instead of the 40% provided by other national regions), as well as close to \$1.5 billion in automatic federal appropriations and assistance. The national government, however, will retain control over security services, currency, and foreign policy.⁴³ In late February 2019, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) was officially inaugurated. The body, which is dominated by MILF leaders and drawn from Duterte's nominees, is tasked with steering the transition and laying down the institutional foundation for the BARMM, which will hold its first elections in 2022. Throughout 2020, both the BTA and the national government primarily focused on addressing the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, though it remains to be seen whether sustained tensions will arise over the newly-passed anti-terror law, which could disproportionately target Muslim minority groups and opposition activists in Mindanao.⁴⁴

ENDNOTES

1. On October 7, 1971, Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi stated that if "the genocide still went on against the Muslims in the Philippines," he would assume responsibility" for protecting them. That year he established the Islamic Call Society (ICS) to support Islamic revolutions around the world. The ICS became a major force in Libyan foreign policy-making and had offices not just in Africa, but also in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Khadhafi, through the ICS, became the major patron of the MNLF. See Saleh Jubair, *Bangsamoro: A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, 3rd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: IQ Marin SON BHD, 1999), 150.

2. The ARMM was established on November 6, 1990 by Republic Act 6734. It was legally possible to do so because of the promulgation of a new constitution in 1987 that allowed for the establishment of autonomous regions.
3. Deidre Sheehan, "Swords into Ploughshares," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 20, 2001, 30-31. This USAID program is known as the Livelihood Enhancement and Peace Project. For more on this project, see Dan Murphy, "Filipinos Swap Guns for Rakes," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 5, 2002.
4. Veronica Uy, "Duereza to MNLF: Deal with Malik," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 16, 2007.
5. Zachary Abuza interviews with MNLF leaders, Sulu, Zamboanga and Cotabatao, June 2007.
6. Alexis Romero, "Duterte eyes separate talks with Nur Misuari," *Philippine Star*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/11/09/1642085/duterte-eyes-separa...>
7. Pia Ranada, "Duterte to Abu Sayyaf: 'Let's Talk.'" *Rappler*, July 28, 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/208358-duterte-abu-sayyaf-lets-talk>.
8. "Duterte Meets Nur Misuari in Malacañang for a 'Short Talk,'" *CNN Philippines*, February 27, 2019, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/02/26/Duterte-Nur-Misuari-meeting-Malacanang.html>.
9. Salamat Hashim, *The Bangsamoro Mujahid: His Objectives and Responsibilities* (Mindanao, Bangsamoro: Bangsamoro Publications, 1985), 18-19.
10. Derived from the MILF's old webpage, <http://morojihad.stcom.net/milf.html>.
11. Rasmia Alonto, "Interview: We Assert our Legitimate Rights to Self-Determination, That Is, Independence," in Salamat Hashim, *Referendum: Peaceful Civilized, Diplomatic and Democratic Means of Solving the Mindanao Conflict* (Camp Abu Bakre As-Siddique: MILF Agency for Youth Affairs, 2002), 45; Rigoberto Tiglao, "Hidden Strength: Muslim Insurgents Shun Publicity and Grow in Power," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995.
12. Indonesian National Police (INP), "Interrogation of Mohammad Nasir bin Abbas," Jakarta, Indonesia, April 18, 2003.
13. In addition to the five provinces of the ARMM, the MILF demanded an addition 1,478 villages, while the government contended that only 618 villages were majority-Muslim. Ultimately the two sides agreed on 712 villages. See "Philippines in 'Separatist Deal,'" *BBC*, November 15, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7096069.stm>.
14. Manny Mogato, "MILF: Peace Talks now in 'Purgatory,'" Reuters, August 31, 2008.
15. MILF Admits Major Split Ahead of Talks," Agence France Presse, February 5, 2011, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/bangsamoro-islamic-freedom-fighters-assume-isis-mantle-in-the-philippines-troubled-south/>.
16. For an overall account of the pact, see Whaley's "Philippine Government Signs Pact with Muslim Rebels," from the *New York Times*, October 15, 2012.
17. See the World Bank's plans for FASTRAC (Facility for Advisory Support for Transition Capacities) in the Philippines at www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/04/29/moro-islamic-liberati...
18. Noel Tarrazona, "How Philippine militants internal conflict affects peace," *Asia Times*, November 16, 2016.
19. Rigoberto Tiglao, "MILF Boasts Bigger, Better Army," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 9, 2000.
20. "The Battle of Marawi: Death and Destruction in the Philippines," Amnesty International, November 17, 2017. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA3574272017ENGLISH.PDF>.
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