Islam and Politics

Renewal and Resistance in the Muslim World

Amit Pandya
Ellen Laipson
Editors

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The Henry L. Stimson Center
1111 19th Street, NW, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: 202.223.5956
Fax: 202.238.9604
www.stimson.org

Radicalization of Muslims in Mindanao: The Philippines in Southeast Asian Context

Amina Rasul

There is debate regarding the nature of the recent rise of Islamic sentiment and Islamist politics in Southeast Asia. Some see in it an expansion of extremist ideology or terrorist groups following the events of 9/11, and related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Others maintain that extremists and/or terrorists are marginal to what is in fact a growing general interest in religion and a desire to bring Islam into the public sphere by infusing modern economic development and democracy with Islamic tenets and values. The first perspective ignores the plurality of Southeast Asian society as well as the plurality of Southeast Asian Muslims themselves, who base their identities on a complex mix of ethnic and religious elements. Painting all Southeast Asian Muslims as part of a "radicalization" process risks skewing any relationship the West would like to have with the region.

For Moro Muslims in Mindanao in the southern Philippines, the "war on terror" has compounded the conflict that has plagued the region for decades, in that it has allowed the government to label what is a long-fought push for autonomy as terrorist activities, fair game for counterterrorism campaigns. In actuality, the radicalization of Filipino Muslims, particularly those in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), finds its roots in a history of struggle against marginalization, poverty, and undemocratic regimes.

The conflict in Mindanao has killed scores of people and displaced more than half a million. A purely military solution to the insurgency, especially under the guise of the "war on terror," will not bring peace to the region, nor will it bring a solution to the poverty, lack of education, and lack of human security that plagues it. Moreover, addressing Islamic radicalism solely from a hard security perspective has risk of creating more extremism. What is needed is an appreciation for the diversity within Southeast Asian society and among Muslims, and a better understanding of the issues specific to each instance of Muslim rebellion, such as the one in Mindanao. This paper analyzes the democratization process in Muslim Southeast Asia in the context of increased radicalization within the Muslim communities.

Islam in the Region

Home to over 500 million people, Southeast Asia comprises multiple ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are predominantly Buddhist. Ancestor worship and Confucianism are also widely practiced in Vietnam. In the Malay Archipelago, people living in Brunei Darussalam, western Indonesia, and Malaysia mainly practice Islam. Christianity is predominant in eastern Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines. The Philippines has the largest Roman Catholic population in the region, followed very distantly by Vietnam. The countries of the region also display a range of political systems, including authoritarian, communist, democratic, and monarchial, all of which add to the regional diversity.

Muslims make up almost 50 percent of the regional population and can be found in all countries (see table 1). They are the majority in Malaysia; Brunei Darussalam, the only ruling monarchy in the region; and Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic state and fourth most populous country. They constitute significant minority populations in the democratic states of Cambodia, the Philippines, and Singapore; the communist regimes of Laos People's Democratic Republic and Vietnam; and of Thailand, a Buddhist constitutional monarchy. Muslim minorities live in East Timor, which is still building a parliamentary democratic political system following its independence from Indonesia in 2002. They also live in Myanmar (Burma), which has been ruled by a military junta since 1962.

Table 1: Muslim Population of Southeast Asia, 2006

Country	Total population (millions)	Muslim population (percentage)	Muslim population (millions)
Brunei Darussalam	0.4	67	0.3
Cambodia	13.3	7	0.9
East Timor	1	4	0.0
Indonesia	225.5	88	195.3
Laos	6.1	1	0.1
Malaysia	26.9	59	15.4
Myanmar (Burma)	51	15	7.6
Philippines	86.3	10	8.5
Singapore	4.5	16	0.7
Thailand	65.2	10	6.5
Vietnam	84.2	1	0.8
Total	564.4		236.0

Source: www.islamicpopulation.com.

In the West, interest in the influence of Islam in Southeast Asian has risen sharply since 9/11. This can be attributed mainly to the perception that Southeast Asia has become a major site of international and domestic terrorist activity, and that the causes of, and solutions to, terrorism are linked to Islamist politics in the region.[1] However, this broad-brush approach to the issues obscures the various factors that underlie the Islamic revival. It is important to consider the interplay between the rise of individual religiosity and growing democratization. Regardless of nationality, Muslim communities in Southeast Asia are experiencing a resurgence and reassertion of Islamic identity that is fostering greater individual religiosity. At the same time, the region is undergoing a process of democratization that is increasingly giving voice to the masses and revealing alternative centers of power and legitimacy.

Since 9/11, an obstacle to democratization throughout the region has been the subordination of human security[1] to traditional security interests. "Law and order" has been privileged above other national goals. Human rights groups have protested that the war on terrorism provides a new pretext for sweeping internal security acts that can be used against citizens who engage in legal, peaceful dissent,[2] and gives ailing Southeast Asian regimes new momentum to restore or increase draconian measures against local democratic opposition movements.

There are legitimate concerns that heightened religiosity, if not managed and channeled properly, could threaten the social and cultural pluralism that defines much of Southeast Asia. At the same time, it is equally important for policymakers to avoid viewing religiosity as a slippery slope leading only to extremism, violence, and terrorism. While militants in Pattani, southern Thailand, and in Mindanao, southern Philippines, exploit Islam to support their campaigns, Islamic organizations are also responsible for a range of peace- and community-building initiatives, such as health care, environmentalism, and expanding educational opportunities for all, including women.[2]

In Muslim majority states, Islam provides the basis of political legitimacy for the governments and their leaders. Southeast Asia is no exception: the governments of Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia are anchored in Islam, even as the former two strive to strengthen democratic spaces. In the Muslim minority communities of the Philippines and Thailand, there is an increasing demand from Muslim leaders for access to Islamic institutions such as

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[1] Human security, as defined by the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, includes "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want": "Often referred to as 'people-centered security' or 'security with a human face,' human security places human beings—rather than states—at the focal point of security considerations. Human security emphasizes the complex relationships and often-ignored linkages between disarmament, human rights, and development." Source: www.unidir.org/html/en/human_security.html; accessed January 25, 2009.

[2] Two examples of this are Muhammadiyah and Nadatul Ulama of Indonesia, the two largest Muslim organizations in the world.

shariah (Islamic law), *madaris* (Islamic schools), and *halal* practices (permitted by Islam) for food and services. For example, Muslim liberation groups in Mindanao have negotiated successfully for the implementation of *shariah* (although limited to personal and family laws) and *madaris* in the ARMM.[3] While these are available to Muslims, they are not imposed on citizens of other faiths.[3]

Southeast Asian Muslims are generally regarded as more moderate in character than their Middle Eastern counterparts, in part because Islam came to the region through traders rather than conquerors, and overlaid strong animist, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions.[4] While the majority of Southeast Asian Muslims are pluralistic, tolerant, and comfortable living under secular governments, there are communities that prefer a more fundamentalist system, closer to the conservative practice of Islam in countries such as Saudi Arabia. This diversity within the Muslim community is the result of the interaction between Islam and political, ethnic, and territorial issues which vary greatly across the region. Further, the aggressive Wahhabi proselytizing campaign funded by oil-rich Saudi Arabia, spread through mosques, schools, and Islamic social welfare organizations, has brought this fundamentalist form of Islam to many Muslim communities.[5]

Scholars generally agree that Muslims in Southeast Asia have gone through a long process of Islamization. Understanding this process is important in determining the current face of Islam in the region and understanding the nature of the radicalization of some of its population.

Radicalization and Democratization

There are two narratives regarding the rise of Islamism in Southeast Asia.[4] The first perpetuates the exaggerated account that Islamist extremists and terrorists have come to dominate the political terrain of Muslim Southeast Asia since 9/11. According to this school of thought, Muslims in Southeast Asia are increasingly embracing extremist religious interpretations that are largely militant in character. The second school of thought challenges

[3] According to the 2000 census, 5.1 percent of the total population is Muslim (4 million). However, this is contested by Muslim groups, which estimated the Muslim population to be from 8 to 12 percent (US State Department, *International Religious Freedom Report 2004*). Two and a half million Muslims live in Mindanao, which is the second largest island group in the Philippines. Its 23 provinces are now home to roughly a quarter of the country's population. The ARMM is the region of the Philippines, created by virtue of the Republic Act 6734 in 1989, composed of all the predominantly Muslim provinces: Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Marawi City, popularly known as "the Islamic City of Marawi." Despite this act, the government and insurgent groups have continued to clash in Mindanao. A peace agreement was signed between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front in 1996, but conflict continues.

[4] While the term is controversial, "Islamism" is used here as "a set of ideologies holding that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system; that modern Islam must return to their roots of their religion, and unite politically."

this narrative. One scholar recently argued that Muslim leaders in Southeast Asia are blending Islamic traditions and thought with modern economic development and democracy in an increasingly effective fashion. As a result, extremism—in particular violent *jihad*—appears to be on a downward trend.[6]

Another scholar, British political scientist John Sidel, argues that the influence of radical Islam in the region's politics has recently decreased significantly. This, he contends, is the reason a small minority has resorted to terroristic activities. "The turn towards terrorist violence by small numbers of Islamist militants," Sidel writes, "must be understood as a symptom of a reaction to the decline, domestication and disentanglement from state power of Islamist forces in the region."[7]

Unfortunately, the first narrative has dominated discussions on Southeast Asian Islam, and has created what many have called the "horrorist" account of the radicalization of Muslims in the region. This school of thought has deeply influenced many security and policy analysts, especially those from the West. With the attacks on the United States in 2001, the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, the Bali bombings in Indonesia, and the series of bombings in the Philippines in October 2002, Southeast Asia has become known as the second front of the "war on terror." The arrests of dozens of alleged al-Qaeda operatives in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore and the presence of groups such as the Jemaah Islamiah (JI), Abu Sayyaf, Laskar Jihad, and the Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM) seemed to the US-led coalition to be indicative of a new conglomerate of "terrorists," a new "axis of evil" bent upon the destruction of Western targets.[8]

While there can be no denying that there is a process of radicalization in the moderate and pluralistic Southeast Asian communities, it is important to stress that radical does not necessarily mean violent. There is a spectrum of actions that fall under the term "radical." The willingness to use or justify violence to attain religious or political objectives is one element that separates violent extremists from other radical Muslims.[9] This is an important distinction. It is equally important to differentiate between insurgency and terrorism. Terrorists deliberately and systematically target civilians in pursuit of nonnegotiable goals, and score relatively low on the other two indexes, reflecting their lack of legitimacy. Insurgent movements with negotiable demands, political infrastructure, popular constituencies, and territorial control are less likely to depend on terrorist tactics and are more readily held to account for their actions, especially when engaged in peace processes.[10] The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), insurgent groups in Mindanao that are discussed later, are examples of this.

The radicalization of Muslim communities is rooted in the need to survive, both physically and culturally, and has been shaped by reaction to the impact of the "intrusive West." This perceived intrusion, couched in terms of modernization and globalization, may have

brought technology, profitable trade, and economic development, but the rural and urban poor protest that they have not benefited. The gap between rich and poor has widened, and globalization is seen as a threat to a people's identity and culture, an imposition of Western "decadent," consumption-oriented market values that disregard and destroy traditional values. Modernization can be traumatic, particularly if forced and hasty, and the transformation away from tradition puts societies under deep stress. In this sense, Muslim communities are radicalizing in proportion to their failure to "modernize" themselves relative to their environments.[11]

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) secretary general Surin Pitsuwan notes that while Muslims need to know how to compete in an open society, they also need to be able to preserve their Islamic identity. While Southeast Asia is generally moderate, tolerant, and inclusive, and has seen great economic growth while enjoying relative political stability, this growth has been too fast for social institutions to adapt to or control. It has benefited some while marginalizing others, and has created a development gap in many countries. The situation is worse in areas such as southern Thailand and Muslim Mindanao, where Muslims have not participated in the growth process. For example, profits from the exploitation of natural resources in these areas have mostly benefited the capital towns, while increasing the cost of living in the local host communities.

In this age of globalization and information technology, the US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Abu Ghraib debacle have fed suspicions among Southeast Asian Muslims that Western (primarily US) authorities are deliberately targeting Muslims. Predictably, local Muslims have responded to this perceived threat within a spectrum of radicalization that includes everything from more public displays of personal piety and greater assertion of religious identity to outright violence and terrorism.[12]

Islam in the Philippines

Seafaring Muslim traders introduced Islam in the southern Philippines in the 14th century. In the 15th and early 16th centuries, four ethnic Moro states emerged in the southern Philippines:[5] the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao, the Bauyan Sultanate, and the Apat na Pangampong (the four principalities of Lanao). Each sultanate was independent, had sovereign power, and diplomatic and trade relations with other countries in the region; however, they were linked by their common religion, and shared customs and traditions, and through intermarriages among the royal families.

When the Spanish arrived in 1521, Muslims, through the sultanates discussed above, governed most of the islands. Spanish forces pushed the Muslims to Mindanao, the seat of the

[5] The Moro are indigenous inhabitants of the Philippines and comprise numerous ethnicities and languages.

sultanates where resistance against Spain was strongest. The Spanish colonization and the continued existence of the sovereign Islamic sultanates ushered in the parallel historical development between the Muslims and the colonized, Christianized Filipinos in the north. It is crucial to note that the Spanish government recognized the sovereignty of the sultanates and entered into treaty arrangements with them.[6] Even when the sultanates were at their weakest, the Spanish government respected the treaty arrangements.

When Spain turned the Philippines over to the United States in 1898, in essence it ceded what it did not own. The Muslim sultanates waged wars against American colonization, but were forced to retreat once again. The American government followed the Spanish strategy and also entered into treaties with the Muslim sultanates, successfully neutralizing the wars with a combination of force and political negotiations.[7]

As the American government prepared to give independence to the Philippines, Muslim chieftains gathered on March 18, 1935, in Dansalan (now Marawi City) and petitioned the US president not to include them in the new republic. The Muslims preferred to remain under US rule, recognizing that they would become second-class citizens if made part of the Catholic Philippines. Their petition was ignored. The Catholic majority gained their independence and control over the Muslim territories.

The inauguration of the Filipino republic therefore presented a paradox. On the one hand, it was able to establish a state and a semblance of an identity. On the other hand, while the new republic tried to consolidate its newly found sovereignty, the Moros, who had nothing in common with the Christianized Filipinos, tilted toward independence instead of integration. Animosity defined the relationship between the Muslims and the Christians because of wars waged by the sultanates against the Spanish colonial government, who used Christianized natives to fight the Muslims. This historically parallel development of the Christian-dominant Filipino nation and the insulated Muslim sultanates gave the rebellion its ideological character: the Muslim insurgents called for the realization of a separate Moro nation in contradistinction with that of the Christianized Filipino nation.[13] The ideology of the Moro rebellion has always maintained that the Moro nation has to be separate from the Philippine nation because it was illegally annexed to the Christian-dominant Filipino nation.

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[6] Examples of treaties with the Sultan of Sulu include these: 1646 treaty of peace with Sultan Nasir ud-Din, 1737 bilateral alliance treaty with Sultan Alim I that provided for permanent peace in the region, 1754 peace treaty with Sultan Muiz ud-Din, 1851 treaty with Sultan Mohammad Pulalun surrendering his sovereign rights (contested by the historian Saleeby who pointed out turning over its sovereignty is not in the Tausug version of the treaty), 1878 treaty with Sultan Jamal ul-Alam making Sulu a protectorate of Spain but retaining sovereignty. Source: C. A. Majul, *Muslim in the Philippines* (Manila: University of the Philippines, 1999).

[7] On August 20, 1899, the Bates Treaty, which would uphold mutual respect between the United States and the Sultanate of Sulu and respect Moro autonomy, was signed.

In addition, the Moro sultanates ruled for 500 years, the longest of any group in the history of the Philippines. This provides proof of early attempts at state formation and nation building by Muslims. Islam, therefore, stands on record as responsible for the first political institution, the first institutional religion, the first educational system, and the first civilization in the Philippines. This claim is the historic underpinning of the current liberation movements of the Moro Muslims in Mindanao.

The Current Economic, Social, and Political Predicament of the Bangsamoro

The term Bangsamoro (the Moro People) generally refers to the 13 ethnolinguistic Muslim tribes in the Philippines (Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Yakan, Iranun, Sama, Badjao, Kalibugan, Kalagan, Sangil, Palawani, Molbog, and Jamamapun), which, according to contested census data, comprise less than 5 percent of the Philippine population and around 15 percent of the population in Mindanao. The government's Office of Muslim Affairs estimates the Muslim population to be at least 8 percent of the total population and protested the undercounting by the National Census Office (see table 2). The Moros are currently settled in western and southern Mindanao, Sulu, and in southern Palawan.

"Moro," Spanish for "Moor," was considered a derogatory term until adopted by the MNLF as the political identity of the Muslim tribes. The Bangsamoro have distinct cultures, speak different languages, and are varied in their social formation, but share a common belief in Islam. In contrast, Muslim converts, or "Balik-Islam," do not consider themselves Bangsamoro.[8]

[8] Balik-Islam (those who have returned to Islam) identify themselves as "reverts" because they say that Islam was the religion of their forefathers before Spain Christianized the archipelago. Thus, they are returning to the faith of their ancestors.

Table 2: Distribution of Muslim Population by Ethnic Group and Region, 2000

Region	Maranao	Maguindanao	Tausug	Yakan	Iranun	Other	Total
Data from the National Census Office Census of Population and Housing							
Non-Mindanao (%)	5.04	1.45	2.34	0.33	1.21	20.96	5.52
Mindanao (%)	94.96	98.55	97.66	99.67	98.79	79.04	94.48
Number (thousands)	1,036	1,008	918	155	154	583	3,854
Data from the Office of Muslim Affairs							
Non-Mindanao (%)	23.82	19.02	17.58	32.01	29.75	45.93	26.25
Mindanao (%)	76.18	80.98	82.33	67.99	70.25	54.07	73.74
Number (thousands)	2,334	2,011	1,504	732	357	1,411	8,349

Over the last decade, both poverty and armed conflict in the ARMM have propelled hundreds of thousands of peaceful Muslims to leave the area and establish communities outside Muslim Mindanao, or to leave the country. The Muslim diaspora is spread all over the Philippines, with a tiny mosque now ensconced in each province and city. The Office of Muslim Affairs estimates that over 2 million Muslims now live outside Mindanao. The largest community is in the metro Manila region, where Muslim traders have become visible in the pearl and DVD trades.

Recent available data on the number of Balik-Islam in the Philippines indicate that it is a rapidly growing phenomenon. While they may be denominated as converts to Islam, without exception, none wants to be called a convert. They insist on being designated as Balik-Islam rather than converts. The Office of Muslim Affairs estimates that at least 20,000 Balik-Islam, or "reverts" as they like to be called, live in traditionally Catholic Luzon.

The specific character of armed Muslim rebellion in the Philippines is rooted in their struggle for sovereignty, first against the colonialism of the Spanish and then the Americans, and later against "colonization" by the newly independent Philippine government itself. The MNLF and the MILF, which have both fought for independence of the Moro nations, share a strong ethnic identity permeated by Islam and nurtured by centuries-old resentment about stolen sovereignty, subjugation, and marginalization.[14]

Further, the Moro insurgency is a fight against the oppressive poverty and lack of development of the Muslim communities in Mindanao. The historical details therefore underpin the elements of what is known as the "Bangsamoro Problem," although Muslims prefer to call it the "Manila Problem." The elements of the Bangsamoro/Manila Problem can be understood in the following contexts.

Economic Marginalization and Poverty

Muslim Mindanao has been described as the poorest of the poor. Indeed, human development indicators clearly show that ARMM lags behind the rest of the Philippines in almost every aspect of development. The Human Development Index (HDI) in three separate years (1997, 2000, and 2003) shows that while Lanao del Sur improved slightly, the four other ARMM provinces have been stuck at the lowest levels of HDI in the entire country (see table 3).

Political Domination and Minoritization

As minorities in a predominantly Christian nation, the Moros feel the need to defend their identities both as Moros and as Muslims. This fear has become more pronounced since the events of 9/11. Not only are the Muslims a demographic minority, they are also underrepresented in national political institutions. Ideally, minorities can defend their rights through

Table 3: Bottom 10 Provinces in HDI Ranking, 1997, 2000, and 2003

1997		2000		2003	
Province	**HDI**	**Province**	**HDI**	**Province**	**HDI**
Sulu	*0.336*	*Sulu*	*0.351*	*Sulu*	*0.301*
Lanao del Sur	*0.415*	*Tawi-Tawi*	*0.390*	*Maguindanao*	*0.360*
Maguindanao	*0.416*	*Basilan*	*0.425*	*Tawi-tawi*	*0.364*
Tawi-Tawi	*0.430*	*Maguindanao*	*0.461*	*Basilan*	*0.409*
Basilan	*0.439*	Ifugao	0.461	Masbate	0.442
Ifugao	0.452	*Lanao del Sur*	*0.464*	Zamboanga del Norte	0.446
Lanao del Norte	0.470	Agusan del Sur	0.482	Sarangani	0.448
Agusan del Sur	0.482	Samar	0.511	Western Samar	0.469
Samar	0.493	Lanao del Norte	0.512	Eastern Samar	0.474
Sarangani	0.494	Sarangani	0.516	*Lanao del Sur*	*0.480*

Source: Rasul, *Broken Peace?*

Note: Muslim-dominant provinces are in italics.

democratic processes and institutions. Unfortunately, Muslims and other minorities in the Philippines have even been denied participation in electoral processes.

The persistent and recurring problem of electoral fraud orchestrated by national political leaders has defined elections in the ARMM. The high illiteracy and poverty levels, prevalence of armed conflict, weak media presence, and struggling civil society have made it easy for political operators to manipulate the elections. During the May 2007 national elections, local and foreign observers in the ARMM witnessed anomalies, such as election-related violence, statistically improbable electoral outcomes, vote buying, wholesale vote padding, and padding of the voters' lists, indicated by massive increases in voting populations in the region.[15] The commissioner in charge of Muslim Mindanao, Virgilio Garcillano, was accused by opposition leaders of directly manipulating the elections for President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. A taped conversation between them, known as the "Hello Garci tapes," in which he can be heard assuring the president of results, was widely aired. When congressional hearings on the matter were held, Garcillano went missing for several months.

This lack of genuine political participation and representation has an impact on the allocation of resources. Without a significant number of leaders of national stature to lobby for adequate budgets, the Muslim provinces lag behind in the allocation of fiscal resources. Looking at budget appropriations, the ARMM fares poorly when compared with other regions. The Analysis of the President's 2005 Budget, prepared by the Congressional Planning and Budget Department of the House of Representatives, noted that the ARMM

received comparatively less in terms of regional allocation from 1992 to 2002. The figures for 2002, in fact, show that it received the lowest allocation of all, only 3 percent of the total.[16]

Discrimination

Another catalyzing force for radicalization and extremism among Filipino Muslims is anti-Muslim bias, which has caused exclusion of the minority from economic development, education, jobs, and business opportunities. A 2006 survey showed that a third of Filipinos have a negative opinion of Muslims. A 2007 survey, commissioned by the United Nations, showed that 55 percent of Filipinos think "Muslims are prone to run amok," 47 percent think "Muslims are terrorists or extremists," and 44 percent believe that Muslims "harbor hatred toward non-Muslims."[17] The 2005 *Philippine Human Development Report* (PHDR) revealed that a considerable percentage (between 33 and 39 percent) of Filipinos are biased against Muslims.[18] The PHDR further states that 46 percent of the Christian population would prefer to hire Christian male workers, and 40 percent would prefer Christian female domestic helpers. Only 4 percent would prefer to hire a Muslim male worker and 7 percent Muslim female domestic helpers.[19] Clearly, discrimination affects access to opportunities.[20]

Moro Resistance and Mobilization

The Moro National Liberation Front

The worst episode of Muslim-Christian conflict in the Philippines was carried out by the administration of then-president Ferdinand Marcos. In March 1968, at least 28 Moro army recruits were killed in the infamous Jabidah massacre on the island of Corregidor. The training was in preparation for Philippine military operations to invade Sabah, Malaysia, an area claimed by the Sultanate of Sulu. Moros viewed this operation as an attempt to provoke war between Sulu and Sabah, both Muslim regions. According to a Senate exposé initiated by then-senator Benigno Aquino, military authorities ordered the entire company killed because they rebelled against their military handlers. The authorities wanted to ensure that none could survive in order to expose the plan. However, one escaped and told all to Senator Aquino.

The exposed massacre provided a focal point for Muslim secessionists. Marcos declared martial law to deal with this and other threats to the state. This declaration became the impetus for Muslim groups to come together to defend themselves against the state's military operations, which were perceived to be a move to eliminate the Muslims. Consequently, in the early 1970s the MNLF was organized under the leadership of Nurullaji Misuari, a professor at the University of the Philippines.

Armed conflict between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the MNLF officially ended with the signing of the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) on September 2, 1996. The agreement was welcomed by millions of Mindanaoans, tired from decades of strife.

Twelve years later, the FPA has not delivered the promised peace, and both sides have accused each other of bad faith in its implementation. Armed conflict has broken out between some groups of the MNLF and the Philippine military. In fact, MNLF chair Nur Misuari was arrested in 2001 on a charge of rebellion and was only released on bail this year. As rebellion is a nonbailable crime, the question arises as to why it took the Philippine government seven years to determine that the evidence against Misuari was weak. The conflicts between the MNLF groups and the government, amidst mounting criticism of the poor implementation of the 1996 FPA,[9] has forced the Organization of Islamic Conference to step in and facilitate a tripartite review of the implementation of the FPA. The results of the review process will be released shortly.[10]

Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front was organized by the late Ustadz Salamat Hashim, who broke away from the MNLF hierarchy because of ideological differences and leadership squabbles with Misuari. In 1983, Hashim announced the separate presence of the MILF.

The MILF, dominated by the Maguindanaons (one of the ethnolinguistic Moro tribes), asserts an Islamic ideology that is distinct from the more secular tendency of the MNLF. The MILF is currently the largest Muslim secessionist group in the country, with membership conservatively estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000. Its original objective was to secede from the Philippine Republic and transform Mindanao into an independent Islamic state. MILF rebels are largely distributed in central Mindanao, particularly in the provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, and to a lesser extent in western Mindanao.

The Philippine government, under former president Fidel V. Ramos, initiated negotiations for peace with the MILF. A government panel was created to explore terms with the MILF in September 1996, and meetings were held to discuss cessation of hostilities. The agenda included the following issues: ancestral domain, displaced and landless Bangsamoro, destruction of property, war victims, human rights issues, social and cultural discrimination, corruption, economic inequities, and widespread poverty.

[9] According to the MNLF commanders who have gone back to the jungles of Sulu, the government has violated the FPA, thus justifying their return to conflict.

[10] According to Randolph Parcasio, chair of the MNLF panel for tripartite review.

Former president Joseph Estrada later broke off negotiations and declared an all-out-war policy against the MILF, resulting in the displacement of some 500,000 to 800,000 Muslim civilians in central Mindanao in 2000. The government's decision to give up peaceful negotiations in favor of military action was widely criticized by Mindanao leaders, civil society, and the Catholic Church.

The peace negotiations between the government and the MILF, which started in 1996 after the signing of the agreement with the MNLF, resulted in an agreement on ancestral domain (the Moro claim on the land that they occupy, including the right to control their own economic resources and govern themselves). Facilitated by Malaysia, the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) was scheduled for a high-profile signing ceremony on August 5, 2008, in Kuala Lumpur. The MOA-AD contains general principles concerning, among others things, Bangsamoro identity and rights, the establishment of a genuine self-governance system appropriate for them, the areas to be placed under this self-governance system, and the protection and utilization of resources found therein. Unfortunately, the Philippine government withdrew its support for the MOA-AD, and the signing did not take place.

In response to the petition of Christian local government officials to stop the signing of the MOA-AD, the US Supreme Court issued a restraining order on August 4, a day before the MOA-AD was to be signed in Kuala Lumpur. Fighting erupted less than 24 hours after. On October 14, the Supreme Court declared the MOA-AD unconstitutional. From August 4 to October 14, more than 100 people were killed, and over 600,000 civilians became internally displaced. The government washed its hands of the MOA-AD, disbanding the government negotiating panel.

A closer look at the Moro insurgency in the Philippines has shown that the conflict in Mindanao, while it can be seen through a religious lens, has few parallels with global Islamist *jihadist* ideologies and movements. It is clear that the liberation movements remain focused on their struggle for self-determination and are therefore primarily local. Those looking at the conflict in the southern Philippines should therefore be very cautious about taking its religious character out of the context of the specific historical, political, and ethnic issues that underpin the conflict, or the local struggles and politics that structure it.[21]

Conclusion

The radicalization of Muslim communities in the Philippines must be understood in the context of the process of democratization. After years of dictatorial rule, the country transitioned to a democracy after a "people-power" revolution ousted Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. This democratic transition and attempts at consolidating it have become problematic at best. Democratic institutions remain weak, electoral democracy continues to be fragile,

and social inequality persists. This is especially true with the ARMM. The democratic deficits experienced by the ARMM are a microcosm of the problematic democracy of the entire country.

Existing US policies and strategies seem to be fanning the fire of extremism rather than arresting it. The Philippine experience with its Muslim rebellion shows that a military solution is not enough to neutralize radicalism. A security-based approach to the problem will be at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive, given the West's lack of appreciation for the diversity of Islamic movements in Southeast Asia and its disregard for their underlying roots.[22] If a military solution did not work in the past, what strategy can best neutralize the growing radicalization of Muslims in the Philippines and other conflict-affected communities in Southeast Asia?

Over the last three years, roundtables organized by civil society[11] in the ASEAN countries have analyzed the situation and proposed the following recommendations:

- Build a strong coalition of partners and provide them with support. Partnering with Muslim communities is probably the best way to counter or prevent extremists from accessing widespread audiences. These partners must be able to facilitate dialogue between the militants and government, bridge the gap between the Muslim community and the government, and truly represent the needs of the Muslim communities they claim to represent.
- Help the silent majority of progressive and moderate Muslims gain the upper hand in the contest for Muslim hearts and minds. Central to this task is creating a strong international network to unite the fractured voices of moderate Muslims. Southeast Asia is unique in the Muslim world in that there is already in place a dense structure of moderate Muslim institutions. Such institutions can be instrumental in developing and disseminating a moderate narrative that contradicts the radical narrative.
- Governments need to support a justice system and economic development that will benefit the masses. For the majority of Muslims in the region, poverty is a major problem, particularly in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Mindanao. The conflict zones in Southeast Asia are rich in natural resources, but remain poor and underdeveloped. The extraction of these resources by foreign investors or nonlocal businesses poses a conflict of interest as to who benefits from the riches.

[11] Examples are the regional conferences organized by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) and its ASEAN partners: "Islam and Democratization in Southeast Asia: Prospects and Challenges" and "The Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Southeast Asia," both organized by PCID in 2005; 3rd Regional Conference: Islam and Democracy, March 20–22, 2006, Institute of Study of Ummah and Global Understanding, Kuala Lumpur; "Democracy and Democratization: Challenges and Prospects in Southeast Asia," December 5–7, 2005, International Center for Islam and Pluralism, Jakarta.

- Support homegrown democracy building. It is critical to show that Islam is a source of democratic values. Whether the twin forces of radicalization and democracy will ultimately collide or coexist, and whether democratic conditions can integrate Islamists into plural social and political structures, remains to be seen.[23]
- There is a need to be sensitive to the diverse historical and cultural contexts of Muslim communities in the region. While democracy and Islam may be compatible, the kind of democracy the region adopts should be specific to the needs and aspirations of the Islamic communities concerned. In attempting to make sense of these contexts, it is critical that one distinguish between Islam as a moral creed and ethical code—seen by the vast majority of Muslims as necessary to govern everyday life—and Islam as a clarion call to arms from a small majority on the fringes. The corollary to this is the need to support Muslim schools, both private and public, to provide not just religious and Arabic training but worldly skills and knowledge as well. However, governments should be aware of Muslim sensitivities before attempting to design a policy affecting the way Muslims practice their faith. By formally recognizing the *madrasah*'s contribution to the society and affording the same respect to this institution as do Muslims, the government can unlock doors and move toward forging greater understanding and cooperation with the Muslim community.
- There is a need to better understand the character of the radicalization of Muslims in the region. The problem cannot be addressed by myopic strategies that further isolate Islam and Muslims. As a major religion with about 230 million adherents in Southeast Asia, Islam will remain a vital socioreligious, sociocultural, and political force that contributes directly or indirectly to regional stability. It is crucial to recognize and support the potential of Islam to become a civilizing force for peace, stability, progress, harmony, and prosperity.[24]

Those interested in the Southeast Asian region must realize that Muslims view global events through a particularistic lens (as do other local peoples in the world). It is therefore imperative for everyone—analysts, media, or governments—to have a proper appreciation for the specific national and ethnic contexts that shape this world view. Yet, despite the diverse nature and expression of political Islam in Southeast Asia, it should also be clear that, whatever the national and local context, Islam is gaining strength politically and will likely remain a major point of reference for Muslims in Southeast Asia who are seeking to locate their place in a rapidly modernizing and globalizing world.

Notes

Political Islamist Movements: The Case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

1. The definition for Islamist movements employed here is adopted from the analytical introduction to Diaa Rashwan, ed., *The Spectrum of Islamist Movements* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiller, 2007), pp. 13–22.
2. One of the seminal works that has recorded the inception and development of the Muslim Brotherhood is Richard Mitchell's *The Muslim Brotherhood*, Abdul-Salam Radwan, translator (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1977).
3. Several editions of *Epistles of the Martyred Imam* have been published both inside and outside Egypt. The last edition was supervised by the Brotherhood in Egypt as *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Banna* (I'dad al-Basa'ir lil-Buhuth wal-Dirasat. Dar al-Tawzi' wal-Nashr al-Islamiyya: al-Qahira, 2006). *Memoirs of the Mission and the Missionary* was originally published by Hasan al-Banna as *Mudhakkirat al-Da'wa wal-Da'iya* (Al-Maktab al-Islami: Beirut, al-Tab'at al-Rabi'a, 1978).
4. The text of these documents is available www.ikhwanweb.com/, the official website of the Muslim Brotherhood.
5. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fil-Tariq* (Dar al-Shuruq: al-Qahira, Tab'at muta'adida, 1964).
6. Hasan al-Hudaibi, *Du'at La Qudat* (Dar al-Tawzi' wal-Nashr al-Islamiyya: al-Qahira, 1977).

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11. Rasul, 2007, op. cit.
12. Liow, 2008, op. cit.
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14. Rasul, 2006, op. cit.
15. N. Marohomsalic, "ARMM: Electoral Basket Case" (Manila: Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, 2007).

16. A. Rasul, *Broken Peace? Assessment of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement* (Manila: Magbassa Kita Foundation Inc., 2006).
17. Ibid.
18. Philippine Human Development Network and the United Nations Development Programme, *Philippine Human Development Report 2005: Peace, Human Security and Human Development* (2005).
19. Ibid, p. 55.
20. Rasul, 2006, op. cit.
21. J. C. Liow, *Muslim Resistance in Southern Thailand and Sounthern Philippines: Religion, Ideology and Politics,* Policy Report (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2006).
22. M. Kamal Hassan, "Islam in Southeast Asia Today," in *Conference on Eastern-Western Dialogue*, pp. 1–16 (Madrid: Casa Asia, 2003).
23. Liow, 2008, op. cit.
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2. Nationwide surveys conducted by Afghan think tanks between September 2005 and August 2008 in Afghanistan.
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