
Abu Sayyaf

—
CENTER FOR POLICING TERRORISM
“CPT”

June 24, 2005
—

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FOR THE CPT

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Executive Summary

Abu Sayyaf is a terrorist bandit group operating in the southern Philippines. Members of the group typically engage in bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and extortions. These operations have been lucrative, allowing leaders to offer recruits high bounties and modern weapons. The group operates with the ideological underpinnings of extremist Islam and hopes to establish an independent Muslim state in the southern Philippines. In the past, leaders of the group, such as the colorfully named Commander Robot, sought great financial gain in addition to the extension of their religious goals. However, many of these leaders have perished or been incarcerated in recent years leaving Khaddafy Janjalani, the brother of the founder of the group, in control.

It is nearly certain, with his family history and his rumored allegiance to Jemaah Islamiyah (another Southeast Asian terrorist group), that Janjalani will authorize or encourage terrorist attacks over the next few months throughout the Philippines—possibly even in downtown Manila. The recent deaths of Abu Sayyaf members in a failed jailbreak prompted Janjalani and another leader, Abu Solaiman, to declare to the media that attacks were forthcoming.

Despite Philippine government assurances that the group's ability to operate in Manila and other cities have been greatly reduced, Abu Sayyaf has proven itself resilient in the past. The group has resurfaced after rumors of infighting, the capture or deaths of key leaders and a U.S.-assisted military offensive that reduced the group's numbers to dozens (according to military sources). Abu Sayyaf *will* be active over the next year, whether in metropolitan Manila or in the rural regions of the southern Philippines. The only question is whether— with their continued linkage to Jemaah Islamiyah— the group will move internationally, or whether Jemaah Islamiyah will establish a greater presence in the Philippines. Hopes remain, however, that the Philippine government can succeed in capturing Khaddafy Janjalani and put an end to Abu Sayyaf operations.

In recent years, participants in government informer and witness protection programs have compromised Abu Sayyaf. Still, despite the group's terrorist activities and extortion efforts, they remain protected by an angry, dispossessed native Muslim population.



Map acquired from World Factbook, www.cia.gov.

Abu Sayyaf

The State Department, in their annual report on terrorism¹, describes the organization as a “small, brutally violent Muslim separatist group operating in the southern Philippines.” Abu Sayyaf, “bearer of the sword,” broke away from Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1991 under the direction of Libyan-trained scholar Aburajak Janjalani.² (Janjalani is supposed to have been involved with Osama bin Laden during his time overseas.³) The core of this group was Filipinos who served in Afghanistan during the 1980s, and Osama bin Laden’s brother-in-law provided initial funding for the enterprise.⁴

The group asserts that its *raison d’etre* is the formation of an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines (Mindanao, specifically⁵.) However, as skeptical journalists⁶ and the State Department note⁷, their kidnappings, bombings, beheadings, assassinations, and extortions have frequently had financial benefits.

Abu Sayyaf members operate in and around the Basilan Province in the southern Philippines and are also active in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Occasionally, members conduct attacks and dispense propaganda in Manila⁸ and on the Zamboanga peninsula. In 2003, the group established a major presence in the city of Cotobato and on the coast of Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao. Members have also been known to travel outside the country, as the 2000 raid of a tourist resort in Malaysia proved.⁹

While United States government estimated in 2003 that Abu Sayyaf had between 200 and 500 members, the group’s current strength is unknown.¹⁰ (In 2002, Philippine officials suggested the group’s size had been reduced to dozens; subsequent attacks indicated their numbers were greater.) It is difficult to track the group’s numbers because of their mobility and flexibility. For example, at any moment Abu Sayyaf members might work with a sympathetic terrorist organization— and thus new recruits have been added to their roster.

¹ Through the 2003 publication, the report was entitled “Patterns of Global Terrorism”. The 2004 report, released in April 2005, is entitled “Country Reports on Terrorism”. Renditions of the reports are publicly available on the State Department website, www.state.gov.

² Abdurajak Janjalani received a scholarship as a young man to attend religious education overseas. In 1980, he traveled to Pakistan to pursue Islam as a muhajideen. At that point he allegedly came into contact with Osama bin Laden, and may have also met Muammar Ghadaffi of Libya: “Philippines: Abu Sayyaf at Heart of Islamic War...”, The Independent (London), August 29, 2000, pg.12.

³ “Deep are the Roots that Bind Terrorists,” Manila Standard, July 21, 2003.

⁴ Kuppasawamy, C.S., “Abu Sayyaf: The rebel group strikes again”, South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 1299. Available at www.saag.org.

⁵ “Philippines: Abu Sayyaf leader ‘Commander Robot’ interviewed on hostage situation,” Philippine Daily Enquirer, June 2, 2000.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

⁸ Lema, Karen L., “Abu Sayyaf Group Members Now in Metropolis,” BusinessWorld (Philippines), June 26, 2003.

⁹ “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

¹⁰ “Country Reports on Terrorism,” State Department, 2004, ppg. 93-94.

Abu Sayyaf originally focused on religious-based attacks. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, they began to abandon ideological mores in favor of profit-bearing operations.¹¹ But by August of 2004, as a *Time* magazine story reported, the group had moved from kidnapping-for-profit to genuine terror.¹² And government officials suspect the slew of recent bombings and incendiary public statements indicate a return by Abu Sayyaf to a more ideological, radicalized philosophy.¹³

That philosophy materialized in February of 2004, when a faction led by Khaddaffy Janjalani bombed SuperFerry 14 in Manila Bay (killing 132), and in March of the same year when Philippine police arrested a cell whose members were planning a series of bombings in metro Manila.¹⁴ Furthermore, in March 2005, twenty-three inmates were killed in a failed jailbreak led by Abu Sayyaf members— including the notorious Commander Robot and the intellectual head of Abu Sayyaf, Commander Kosovo.¹⁵ Janjalani and his supporters have promised retaliatory attacks.

1. Philippine Background

The Philippines encompass 300,000 square kilometers of land (an area slightly larger than Arizona); this region includes mountains with narrow and extensive coastal lowlands. Over 86 million people populate the 7,107 islands that comprise the country. 91.5% of the region's inhabitants identify themselves as Christian Malay, 4% as Muslim Malay and 1.5% Chinese. 92% of the population adheres to a Christian religion, and 5% are Muslim.¹⁶ Although these Muslims make up a tiny minority of the islands population, they are concentrated in a small portion of the country. And while the country's economy has grown steadily since 1999, poverty remains a stagnant problem in the Muslim south¹⁷ (and is exacerbated by a high population growth rate¹⁸).

The Philippines became a Spanish colony in the 16th century. This was two centuries after residents of the southern regions had been converted to Islam by Arab merchants. The resident Muslim population was nicknamed 'Moro' when the Spanish arrived.¹⁹ In 1898, the Philippines were ceded to America and by 1935 had become a self-governing commonwealth. Seven years later, during the Second World War, Japan occupied the

¹¹ Anthropology Professor Thomas McKenna describes Abu Sayyaf as more of a criminal than a political organization that uses the rhetoric of jihad: Schorow, Stephanie, "Philippines Terror Targeted – U.S. Troops Face Tangled Web of Foes," *Boston Herald*, February 17, 2002, pg. 5.

¹² Elegant, Simon, "The Return of Abu Sayyaf," *Time Magazine*, August 23, 2004. "a new leadership has abandoned the kidnapping that brought in millions of dollars in ransom. Now the group is returning to its Islamic roots and is using the familiar weapons of terror-bombing and assassination in an attempt to achieve an independent Muslim republic."

¹³ "Patterns of Global Terrorism," State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

¹⁴ "Country Reports on Terrorism," State Department, 2004, ppg. 93-94.

¹⁵ "22 Die as Police Storm Manila Jail," www.cnn.com, March 15, 2005.

¹⁶ Philippines Fact Book at www.cia.gov

¹⁷ Projections for 2005 suggest 26% of Philippine families will be in poverty. "Philippines", *Asian Development Bank*, Country Economic Review, December 2004, Section II A.

¹⁸ Philippines Fact Book at www.cia.gov

¹⁹ "Philippines: Abu Sayyaf at Heart of Islamic War...", *The Independent* (London), August 29, 2000, pg.12.

country, which fought back with American assistance. The islands regained their independence in 1946.

Rebellions against Spanish and American rule were a tradition in the southern regions of the Philippines. As early as the sixteenth century, the Muslims of the southern Philippines rebelled against colonial rule. That tradition extended through the centuries, gathering steam as Christian priests led armed rebellions against Spanish governors. In 1942, the People's anti-Japanese Army was founded by Luis Taruc. The People's Army was a forerunner of the modern Communist Party of the Philippines and their militant arm, the New People's Army. (The New People's Army is included on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations.²⁰) But Abu Sayyaf owes more to two particular rebel groups with very similar names: the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Independence Liberation Front.

2. Group History

Abu Sayyaf is not the first Muslim rebel group determined to establish an independent state in the southern Philippines. In recent times, two prominent rebel groups have agitated against the Philippine government, but were too secular and not fundamentalist enough for Abdurajak Janjalani.²¹ The first prominent modern group to oppose the Philippine government was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a group born out of Muslim agitation in the 1970s. The Moro population of the southern Philippines suffered under unjust and unmonitored land use laws exploited by the Christian majority of the region (who were aided by the military). Thus, some members of the community began minor armed revolts. In response, the Philippine government under Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law, and citizens were ordered to surrender their weapons.²² Nevertheless, militant Muslims suspicious of the government opted to rebel.²³ In 1976, the newly minted Organization of Islamic Countries brokered peace talks between the Muslim separatists, represented by the Moro National Liberation Front, and the Philippine government. A cease fire was agreed upon²⁴, with a promise of autonomy for the Muslim south made. A year later, however, the agreements broke down.

In 1978, a group broke away from MNLF, calling themselves the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (or MILF). Salamat Hushim, a founder of MNLF, was the originator of the split, and served as chairman until his passing in 2003. MILF members abandoned MNLF because they felt the group was too accommodating of government incentives and proposals.

²⁰ "Country Reports on Terrorism," State Department, 2004, pg. 92.

²¹ Bello, Walden, "Perspective," BusinessWorld (Philippines), March 7, 2002.

²² "Philippines: Abu Sayyaf at Heart of Islamic War...", The Independent (London), August 29, 2000, pg.12.

²³ Violence in the 1970s claimed an estimated 120,000 lives: Schorow, Stephanie, "Philippines Terror Targeted – U.S. Troops Face Tangled Web of Foes," Boston Herald, February 17, 2002, pg. 5.

²⁴ Text of the Tripoli agreement is available at http://www.ecmi.de/cps/documents_philippines_tripoli.html. Note the signature of Chairman Nur Misuari. MNLF was the lead representative of the agitated Muslim community.

Not much changed until 1986 when, in one of President Aquino's first acts, the Philippine government negotiated a cease fire with several of the rebel groups, including the MILF and MNLF. A year later, the MNLF dropped its demands for independence and accepted autonomy from the government, but the MILF would not follow suit, as they were unwilling to abandon their demands for independence. Shortly thereafter, though, MNLF re-adopted MILF's separatist agenda.

In 1990, the Philippine government managed to establish an autonomous region in the south without MNLF's assistance. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao incorporated four provinces and was established with two governors and a unicameral legislature. The powers of the region were limited largely to local economic affairs, along the lines of the initial 1976 Tripoli proposal. In 1996, MNLF signed a peace accord with the government, and the group's leader, Nur Misuari, was rewarded with one of the two governorships of the region. Members of MILF, however, viewed the transaction as a betrayal of Muslim aspirations. In 2001 Nur Misuari led a failed uprising against the government, was jailed, and a different MNLF leader was installed in his place as governor.

Meanwhile, as MNLF was cooperating with the Philippine government, MILF remained a destabilizing force in the south. Senior leaders of the group were Islamic clerics who place an emphasis on stringent Islamic law and *jihad*. By 2003, the group had 12,000 members, 9,000 firearms and a slew of hi-tech communications equipment.²⁵ (In 2000, although government forces captured the group's primary camp, the majority were allowed to escape.) MILF is linked through training operations with Jemaah Islamiyah, a multi-national Southeast Asian terror organization listed by the State Department as a terrorist threat.²⁶ Additionally, MILF members are alleged to have trained in Al Qaeda's Afghani camps and are also suspected of aiding and abetting Abu Sayyaf operations. Attacks conducted in 2003 by MILF killed over 100—²⁷ triggering a response from the United States— and in March 2005, Admiral William Fallon of the United States' Pacific Command suggested labeling MILF a terrorist organization (the Philippine government opposed that action²⁸).

Out of the tradition of MILF and MNLF grew Abu Sayyaf. The group split from the Moro National Liberation Front in the early 1990s. Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, the group's founder, envisioned a more radical organization. After several years of terrorist activities, they were included among the State Department's list of terrorist organizations in 1997.²⁹ Janjalani was killed in a firefight with Philippine police in December of 1998. Since then, the group devolved into regional factions, only recently appearing to come under the control of his brother, Khaddafy Janjalani.

²⁵ Kuppasawamy, C.S. "The Moro Islamic National Front imbroglio", South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 765. Available at www.saag.org.

²⁶ "Country Reports on Terrorism," State Department, 2004, pg. 92.

²⁷ Kuppasawamy, C.S. "The Moro Islamic National Front imbroglio", South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 765. Available at www.saag.org.

²⁸ Abuza, Zachary, "MILF and GRP Served Notice," The Counterterrorism Blog, March 31, 2005.

²⁹ "Patterns of Global Terrorism," State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

In 2001, Philippines presidential spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao described Abu Sayyaf as a kidnapping gang and suggested they had split over money squabbles.³⁰ (More likely, the group fell into regional factions as a necessity.) The most prominent factions of the group served under Janjalani's brother Khaddafy; others served under the aforementioned Commander Robot and Commander Kosovo or operated quasi-independently throughout the southern Philippines.

3. Brief Bios

Many of Abu Sayyaf's most notorious leaders have been caught or killed since the Philippine government began to recognize the group as a terrorist entity. However, some, like Khaddafy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman, are still at-large. What follows are brief biographies of the members of the group most frequently mentioned in the media.

Commander Robot

Ghalib Andang was a former bodyguard for southern Philippine politicians and is best known in the Western media for his role as a leader of the Sipidan abduction of 2000 when the Burnhams, an American couple, were abducted. His *nom-de-guerre*, "Commander Robot," is supposedly derived from his ability to moonwalk as a child.³¹ Former captives of the rebel leader remember him for his cruelty that manifested itself via brutal rapes and executions,³² and he was described by former acquaintances as a child bully who once punched a teacher.³³

Andang joined Abu Sayyaf after he assembled his own sizable bandit group. Eventually, he was on a par with Khadaffy Janjanlani in rank-of-command and operated primarily in Basilan. During a U.S.-led military offensive in 2002, Andang led one group of Abu Sayyaf guerillas while Khadaffy Janjalani directed the other in an attempt to avoid capture.³⁴

His brother was captured in 2002—roughly a year before Robot himself was arrested by the Philippine military. His capture in late 2003 was heralded by government officials as a step toward the lifting of travel advisories by foreign governments.³⁵ After over a year in prison he funded the failed jailbreak in the spring of 2005 that led to his death.³⁶

³⁰ Abuza, Zachary, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah," The National Bureau of Asian Research, (14)5, 2003, pg. 52.

³¹ "Philippine President Announces Release of Hostages," The Washington Post, September 20, 2000.

³² Sto. Domingo, Bernadette, "They should've killed him," BusinessWorld, December 11, 2003.

³³ "Commander Robot, Fugitive and Investor," The Straits Times, June 14, 2002.

³⁴ "U.S. Allows Hi-Tech Tools Against Abu," Manila Standard, July 1, 2002.

³⁵ "Good Spying Nets Robot," Manila Standard, December 9, 2003.

³⁶ "Robot Funded Taguig Jailbreak, Says DOJ," Manila Standard, March 19, 2005.

Commander Kosovo

Alhamsar Limbong, a cousin of the Janjalani brothers,³⁷ participated in the kidnapping of the Burnhams and several foreigners in 2001— then masterminded the SuperFerry bombing in the spring of 2004. Witnesses say it was Commander Kosovo (so named for his reputed participation in the Kosovo conflict) who beheaded American hostage Guillermo Sobero. He was arrested, along with five others, in 2004 with materials and plans to initiate a series of bombings in Manila.³⁸

Abu Sabaya

After the 2002 death of Abu Sabaya (ne: Aldam Tilao), many observers felt Abu Sayyaf would be permanently crippled. As spokesman for the group, many felt he wielded more power and influence than nominal-head Khaddafy Janjalani. Sabaya was among those terrorists tagged with a \$5 million bounty by the United States and was implicated in 13 kidnapping cases (including the Burnhams). Sabaya trained in Saudi Arabia as a younger man, and was described by experts as the planner and director of the group's kidnapping operations. His death did not cripple Abu Sayyaf after all, but may have eased the way for Janjalani to exert more executive influence in the group.³⁹

Commander Global

Nadzmie Sabtulah has been described as Abu Sayyaf's intelligence officer and political strategist, and was among the bandits that kidnapped several foreigners in Malaysia in the year 2000. At that time he was tagged with a 100 million peso reward for his capture (and was successfully apprehended a year later⁴⁰). He was killed in the failed prison escape of early 2005.⁴¹

Abu Solaiman

Jainal Sali, popularly known as Abu Solaiman, was an Abu Sayyaf leader who claimed responsibility for bombings that killed 13 and wounded 100 in Davao, Makati, and General Santos City on a Valentine's Day.⁴² He is Khadaffy Janjalani's spokesman and operations chief— and often employs radio waves to promise violence.⁴³ During the recent jailbreak attempt, Solaiman was in telephone contact with Ghalib Andang. He was also, along with Khadaffy Janjalani, among the six men charged in the 2004 SuperFerry

³⁷ "Philippines Abu Sayyaf Leader Alive, Vows Revenge for Jail Deaths," Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 2, 2005.

³⁸ "Charges Laid Versus 6 Abu Sayyaf Suspects," BusinessWorld, April 7, 2004, pg. 12.

³⁹ "On My Own: Abu Sayyaf icon's death a blow to Muslim terrorists," Filipino Reporter, July 4, 2002, pg. 36.

"Abu Sayyaf 'will hit back using Islam': Setbacks will only serve to fuel the militancy of Filipino bandits who will use any platform that suits them, experts say," The Straits Times, June 22, 2002.

⁴⁰ "AFP Satisfied With Results of Bounty Program," BusinessWorld, June 5, 2002, pg. 11.

⁴¹ "Rebel Leader Caught in Philippines," BBC News, July 9, 2001, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1429569.stm

⁴² Baguiro, Luz, "JI Bomb Expert Nabbed in Philippines," The Straits Times, March 23, 2005.

⁴³ "Freedom and Responsibility," Manila Standard, March 8, 2005.

bombing,⁴⁴ as well as one of the five men with a \$5 million bounty on his head from the American government.⁴⁵

Witnesses say Solaiman ordered hostage Martin Burnham's execution during a joint military rescue attempt by United States and Filipino forces.⁴⁶ Following his escape, Solaiman took refuge in the caves and jungles of a northern region of Zamboanga.⁴⁷

Khaddafy Janjalani

Brother of late founder Abdurajak and incarcerated Hector, Khaddafy Janjalani has been described by the State Department as a nominal leader of the Abu Sayyaf group, but his influence has undoubtedly grown over the years with the recent deaths of Commanders Robot, Global and other group leaders. Recently, he met with members of other Southeast Asian terror groups— perhaps to discuss joint operations.⁴⁸ Intelligence reports have even speculated that Janjalani is now the head of Jemaah Islamiyah's Philippine branch.⁴⁹

Commander Putrul

One-armed Radulan Sahiron is a horse-riding Abu Sayyaf leader based in Patikul with an estimated 40 followers. He is on a United States Defense Department's list of most-wanted terrorists and was involved in the Malaysian kidnappings.⁵⁰

4. Tactics

Abu Sayyaf has engaged in a series of abductions, bombings, religious killings and extortions. In the group's early years, under the leadership of Abdurajak Janjalani and the financial assistance of Osama bin Laden, their actions primarily consisted of ideologically-based killings— motivated by doctrines of *jihad* and often targeting foreigners and Christians. 1991 marked Abu Sayyaf's first major terrorist attack: a grenade killing of two foreign women.⁵¹ In 1992, in addition to the bombings of the Zamboanga airport and several Roman Catholic churches, a floating Christian bookstore in Zamboanga was bombed.⁵² A Davao City cathedral was bombed in 1993, killing 7,⁵³

⁴⁴ Osorio, Elisa, and Yap, Karl Lester, "6 Abu Sayyaf Members Charged for Ferry Blasts," Business World(Philippines), October 12, 2004.

⁴⁵ "Abu Sayyaf leader vows to free Philippines hostage," Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 30, 2002.

⁴⁶ Banagudos, Rey Louis, "Abu Sabaya ordered Martin Burnham killed," BusinessWorld, June 24, 2002.

⁴⁷ "Abu Regroups on 3 Fronts," Manila Standard, June 17, 2002.

⁴⁸ "Singapore Daily Reports Abu-Sayyaf-Jemaah Islamiyah Meeting in Philippines," The Straits Times, February 7, 2005.

⁴⁹ "Philippines Abu Sayyaf Leader Alive, Vows Revenge for Jail Deaths," Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 2, 2005.

⁵⁰ "U.S.-backed Troops Nab Abu Adviser", Filipino Reporter, October 7, 2004, pg. 22.

⁵¹ "Abu Sayyaf Group: Al-Harukatal Islamiyah", International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism. Available at www.ict.org.il

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ *ibid*

and language researcher Charles Walton was abducted and held for 23 days.⁵⁴ The following year, three Spanish nuns and a priest were kidnapped.⁵⁵

Starting with a notorious raid, the activities of Abu Sayyaf began to shift toward the acquisition of funds. Among their headline-grabbing operations was a kidnapping of 21 people (including 10 Western tourists) from a resort in Malaysia. In 2001 another mass kidnapping of three United States citizens and seventeen Filipinos from a Filipino resort garnered media attention around the world— particularly when the rescue operation achieved only partial success.⁵⁶ Such abductions have netted the group millions of dollars.

The group has, however, returned to more blood-shedding activities. A sample of recent Abu Sayyaf activities: March 30 2004— six Abu Sayyaf members planning to bomb a shopping mall were arrested with explosives; August 2004—Abu Sayyaf created an urban assassination squad dubbed “The Fisibillah;” February 2005— three bombs in Manila and other cities killed 8 and wounded 100.⁵⁷

Abu Sayyaf members split into territory-based groups in order to accomplish their goals. This has the benefit of keeping the group active and difficult to track despite any arrests or deaths of key leaders. (It also has some negative attributes, however: at times, different factions have fought among themselves.⁵⁸)

In recent years, members have been compromised by local citizens tempted by financial assistance from the Philippine government⁵⁹. In response— and as a warning to foreign interference— Abu Sayyaf has turned to random acts of terror to cow the local population.⁶⁰

The group, due to windfalls from kidnappings and extortion, is not limited by their rural and poverty-stricken homeland. New recruits are outfitted with laptop computers, satellite phones and other hi-tech appliances.⁶¹ Weaponry is also no problem, as military officials have reported the group is in possession of sophisticated rockets and plentiful firearms. Critics have suggested that Abu Sayyaf purchased its weapons from the Philippine

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

⁵⁷ “Terror Alert out for Philippines,” www.cnn.com, March 24, 2005.

⁵⁸ “Philippines: Moro National Liberation Front fighters join Abu Sayyaf rebels,” [Philippine Daily Inquirer](http://www.philippine-daily-inquirer.com), September 12, 2000.

“Hostages in Clear, But Not Estrada,” [The Australian](http://www.theaustralian.com.au), September 11, 2000, pg.28.

⁵⁹ Manila civilians overhear terrorist bragging about the SuperFerry bombing, provide information leading to his arrest, and a hostage in the witness protection program identifies Abu Sayyaf murderer: “Terrorist Leader’s Boasting Led to Discovery of Manila Bomb Plot,” [The Australian](http://www.theaustralian.com.au), World, pg. 9.

⁶⁰ A Christian farmer is randomly seized and beheaded: Poole, Oliver, “Tired Troops Welcome U.S. Advisors...” [The Daily Telegraph](http://www.thedailytelegraph.com), February 9, 2002, pg. 21.

⁶¹ “Philippines: Last Abu Sayyaf hostage escapes, placed under army custody”, [BBC Worldwide Monitoring](http://www.bbc.com), June 13, 2003.

military; this is unlikely as MNLF had their own weapons-making facility⁶² and thus Abu Sayyaf would have made an ideal customer. (The group is also said to be connected to black markets in Manila.⁶³) The Philippine military, however, speculates that weapons employed by several militant groups in the southern region come from caches lost in combat operations during the 1970s.⁶⁴

5. Funding

Abu Sayyaf has been described by the State Department as “Largely self-financing through ransom and extortion.”⁶⁵ Ransom monies paid for the release of hostages has yielded several millions of dollars,^{66 67} while more traditional extortion efforts have been a steady source of income for the group.⁶⁸

Bin Laden-brother-in-law Mohammad Jamal Khalifa, a former senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon and operator of the Peshawar office of a Saudi-based charity, Muslim World League, was dispatched to the Philippines in 1988 to recruit for the war in Afghanistan. While in the Philippines, Khalifa established the offices of MERC International and two local non-governmental organizations: Islamic Wisdom Worldwide and the Daw’l Immam Ali Shafee Center. Through these organizations, Khalifa funneled money to extremist groups in the region. He also created the Al Maktum University in Zamboanga as well as a branch office of the IIRO, a Saudi organization. All of the projects were located in MILF zones or targeted urban population centers.⁶⁹

In the late 1980s, Khalifa established the International Relations and Information Center. This outfit offered the funding behind a 1995 plot to explode United States passenger planes.⁷⁰ Organizations and charities controlled by Khalifa also built mosques and schools Abu Sayyaf-friendly areas. In 2001 the Philippine government froze Abu Sayyaf accounts, as well as those of Islamic charities funding terror. Researchers explain this is not entirely accurate; charities under other names have simply stepped into the terrorism-

⁶² Kuppasawamy, C.S. “The Moro Islamic National Front imbroglio”, South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 765. Available at www.saag.org.

⁶³ Lema, Karen L., “Abu Sayyaf Group Members Now in Metropolis,” BusinessWorld (Philippines), June 26, 2003.

⁶⁴ “Extremist Weapons May Not Have Been Sold to Military,” Deutsche Press Agentur, July 21, 1994.

⁶⁵ “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” State Department, 2003, ppg. 114-115.

⁶⁶ Philippines military says Abu Sayyaf received \$10M for the release of Western tourists kidnapped from Malaysia: “Hostages in Clear, But Not Estrada,” The Australian, September 11, 2000, pg.28.

Other reports suggest \$17M paid in ransom by the Libyan government for the release of hostages in 2000: “Philippines: Abu Sayyaf at Heart of Islamic War...”, The Independent (London), August 29, 2000, pg.12.

⁶⁷ “Flushed with an estimated US\$25 million (S\$45.5 million) in ransom payments, the Abu Sayyaf bought machine guns, M-16 automatic rifles, rocket launchers and speedboats [in 2000].”: “Guns Not Enough for War on Terror Network,” The Straits Times, February 24, 2002.

⁶⁸ “Suspected al-Qaeda Terrorist, Wife Nabbed in Sarangani Raid,” Manila Bulletin, December 28, 2002.

⁶⁹ Abuza, Zachary, “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah,” The National Bureau of Asian Research, (14)5, 2003, pg. 26.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, pg. 27.

funding void. Some centers, like the Daw'1 Immam Al Shafee Center, remain in operation.⁷¹

In 1995, Khalifa was expelled from the Philippines: thus, when he left, Abu Sayyaf lost their primary source of funding. However, the spate of attacks since then indicates the group has found a way to be financially self-sufficient.

6. Training

Training for Abu Sayyaf members comes from both domestic and international sources. A former Filipino hostage, Rolando Ulah, claimed Indonesian Islamic militants taught recruits how to make cell phone trigger-bombs and other implements,⁷² and a report from the *Manila Times* on October 11, 2001, described the presence of several Indonesian militants and two Afghanis trainers within Abu Sayyaf. Furthermore, explosives expert Fathur Rhoman al-Ghozi provided members with essential terrorist-skills.⁷³

A co-founder of the group, Edwin Angeles, said in 1995 that new recruits were sent to Pakistan and Afghanistan for religious and military training.⁷⁴ That practice has diminished as the Philippine government and world community have become more aware of Abu Sayyaf and its practices. In 2004, the Philippine-based spiritual educator of the group, Abraham Jumdaini, was arrested. He was charged with using religion to indoctrinate recruits.⁷⁵

7. Recruiting

Often, temporary help comes from other rebel groups within the Philippines. Reports indicate former Autonomous Region governor and MNLF chairman Nur Misuari and his renegade group have merged with Abu Sayyaf.⁷⁶ Also, The Rajah Solomon movement assisted the group during the SuperFerry bombing.

Abu Sayyaf targets young men who live in poverty with little to look forward to (or do). Recruits are offered 30,000 pesos and a rifle, according to Basilan governor Wahab Akbar⁷⁷— a powerful inducement to men with no careers or opportunities to look forward to.

⁷¹ *ibid.* pg. 28.

⁷² Untitled, [The Toronto Star](#), April 7, 2004. News section, pg. A19.

⁷³ Schorow, Stephanie, "Philippines Terror Targeted – U.S. Troops Face Tangled Web of Foes," [Boston Herald](#), February 17, 2002, pg. 5.

⁷⁴ "Radical Filipino Group Linked to Mideast," [The Jerusalem Post](#), April 11, 1995.

⁷⁵ "U.S.-backed Troops Nab Abu Adviser," [Filipino Reporter](#), October 7, 2004, pg. 22.

"In Brief," [PNG Post-Courier](#), September 29, 2004, Section Asia News pg. 12.

⁷⁶ Kuppasawamy, C.S., "Philippines: The U.S. campaign against Abu Sayyaf", [Southeast Asia Analysis Group](#), paper no. 498. Available at www.saag.org.

Borlangan, Mark, "ARMM Chief Faces Slew of Charges," [BusinessWorld](#), November 21, 2001.

⁷⁷ "Armed Civilians to Fight Abu Sayyaf," [Manila Standard](#), June 16, 2001.

8. The Philippine Government and Abu Sayyaf

The Philippine government prosecuted group members and hunted for them in southern jungles for years prior to the September 11th attacks.⁷⁸ However, MILF was a much larger force in the region, and the New People's Army a more consistent terrorist threat that not much progress was made. Abu Sayyaf committed their first major assault in 1995, and only began to step up the size and breadth of their operations toward the end of the twentieth century. After September 11, 2001, when the United States declared its intent to root out Abu Sayyaf, the Philippine government made the elimination of the group a priority.⁷⁹ The country's National Security Advisor, Norberto Gonzalez, described Abu Sayyaf in 2002 as "by far the most dangerous group in the country."⁸⁰

The Philippine government—in addition to teaming up with the United States in 2002 for a six-month-long offensive—has passed legislation aimed at inhibiting Abu Sayyaf's financial assets, and has offered reward programs and witness-protection to individuals electing to offer information about the group. In late 2001, the Philippine government passed an anti-money laundering law in response to American requests to freeze terrorist financial assets. The law has been ineffective as the government admitted its inability to track Abu Sayyaf funds.⁸¹ However, the reward and witness-protection programs have proved a success—being cited as the key to the captures of several Abu Sayyaf members.⁸²

The military's credibility in efforts against Abu Sayyaf has endured a few public-relations headaches. Some observers, like former American hostage Gracia Burnham, declared elements of the Philippine military were assisting Abu Sayyaf,⁸³ another former

⁷⁸ Nearly 200 Abu Sayyaf members are arrested or surrender in the summer and early fall of 2001 after a government drive against the bandit group: Payuno, Manolette C., "High Court OK's Abu Sayyaf Trial in Taguig," BusinessWorld, August 16, 2001, pg. 11.

⁷⁹ Brigadier General Edilberto Adan admits Abu Sayyaf a new entry into his military reports: Cohn, Martin Regg, "U.S. Hot on Cold Trail of Asia Terror," Toronto Star (Ontario Edition), November 3, 2001, pg. A07.

Initially, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo described Abu Sayyaf as bandits, not terrorists: "Abu Sayyaf are Bandits – Arroyo," Gulf News, October 21, 2001.

⁸⁰ Kuppasawamy, C.S., "Abu Sayyaf: The rebel group strikes again", South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 1299. Available at www.saag.org.

⁸¹ Abuza, Zachary, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah," The National Bureau of Asian Research, (14)5, 2003, pg. 64.

⁸² Two former Abu Sayyaf bandits turn state witness, assist in the capture of Fawaz Zi Ajjur: "Philippine President Presents Al-Qa'idah-linked Suspect to the Press," Philippine Star, April 1, 2005.

"AFP Satisfied With Results of Bounty Program," BusinessWorld, June 5, 2002, pg. 11.

Former Abu Sayyaf members identify former spiritual advisor: "U.S.-backed Troops Nab Abu Adviser," Filipino Reporter, October 7, 2004, pg. 22.

Manila civilians overhear terrorist bragging about the SuperFerry bombing, provide information leading to his arrest, and a hostage in the witness protection program identifies Abu Sayyaf murderer: "Terrorist Leader's Boasting Led to Discovery of Manila Bomb Plot," The Australian, World, pg. 9.

⁸³ Kuppasawamy, C.S., "Abu Sayyaf: The rebel group strikes again", South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 1299. Available at www.saag.org.

hostage claimed that troops took bribes from the group.⁸⁴ Regardless, the military has become very effective in capturing leaders and rank-and-file members via intelligence operations, the placement of bounties and force. Commanders Robot, Global, Kosovo, and Abu Sabaya headline a list of rebel leaders captured since 2002.

In the early summer of 2005, the Philippine police declared that Abu Sayyaf's ability to carry out major terrorist attacks in key urban centers of the country was negligible.⁸⁵ This has not deterred Abu Sayyaf spokesman Abu Solaiman from promising fresh violence within the country, however.⁸⁶ Time will tell whether Abu Sayyaf can, as Solaiman pledged, continue to carry out the type of terrorist assaults that have captured the world's attention.

9. Abu Sayyaf and Foreign Terrorist Groups

Abu Sayyaf members interact with members of MILF⁸⁷ and other regional Islamic rebels. But the group also has ties to the international terror network.

As mentioned, early in Abu Sayyaf's existence, funding was provided by Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law. Members of the group served alongside bin Laden in Afghanistan,⁸⁸ and for years new recruits were sent to train at Al Qaeda camps.⁸⁹ Bin Laden also visited the island in the late 1980s and may have encouraged Janjalani to create his own terrorist group.⁹⁰ The group, however, is not *directly* linked to Al Qaeda, as United States officials have acknowledged.⁹¹

The group is closer to Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian terror group with its own ties to Al-Qaeda. JI members were known to travel to the Philippines for training at MNLF's facility before it was overrun by government forces, and members also provided explosives training to Abu Sayyaf.⁹² Research suggests JI established a foothold in the

⁸⁴ Gargan, Edward A., "Priest Says Philippines Troops Take Rebel Bribes," Newsday, January 31, 2002. Nassau and Suffolk edition.

⁸⁵ "Philippine Police: Abu Sayyaf's ability to carry out major attacks now 'almost nil'," Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 27, 2005.

⁸⁶ Pelovello, Roy, "Abu Targets Churches on Holy Week," Manila Standard, March 18, 2005.

⁸⁷ "Singapore Daily Reports Abu-Sayyaf-Jemaah Islamiyah Meeting in Philippines," The Straits Times, February 7, 2005.

Indonesian explosives expert Fathur Rhoman al-Ghozi trained Abu Sayyaf members after undergoing training himself with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Schorow, Stephanie, "Philippines Terror Targeted – U.S. Troops Face Tangled Web of Foes," Boston Herald, February 17, 2002, pg. 5.

Interviews with some members of the group suggest the presence of Abu Sayyaf members in Afghanistan may simply be the stuff of legend: Lakshamanan, Indira A.R., "Fighting Terror Expanding Operations," The Boston Globe, January 26, 2002, pg. A8.

But terror experts suggest otherwise: Richardson, Michael, "Roots of Qaeda go Deep in Asia," International Herald Tribune, January 21, 2002, pg. 2.

⁸⁹ "Radical Filipino Group Linked to Mideast," The Jerusalem Post, April 11, 1995.

⁹⁰ Cohn, Martin Regg, "U.S. Hot on Cold Trail of Asia Terror," Toronto Star (Ontario Edition), November 3, 2001, pg. A07.

"Guns Not Enough for War on Terror Network," The Straits Times, February 24, 2002.

⁹¹ Lakshamanan, Indira A.R., "Fighting Terror Expanding Operations/Philippines," The Boston Globe.

⁹² Baguiro, Luz, "JI Bomb Expert Nabbed in Philippines," The Straits Times, March 23, 2005.

Philippines in 1994, and has grown to trust Abu Sayyaf as a reputable extremist ally.⁹³ In fact, Khaddafy Janjalani once met with their senior members in early 2005 during a gathering of Southeast Asian terrorist chiefs.⁹⁴

A final element of concern is the ease with which members of Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah and other terrorist groups travel among the islands and countries of the Southeast Asian region.⁹⁵

10. U.S. Assistance

In 2002, 650 United States troops were deployed to the Philippines, prompted by the events of September 11, 2001. After the infamous attacks, the United States took international action to combat terror—and Abu Sayyaf became a priority target. While US officials acknowledge that the group is not directly linked to Al Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf's tentative links to the organization—in addition to their terrorist activities—have made them a legitimate target in the War on Terror.⁹⁶ Late in 2001, the group was targeted with an executive order to freeze financial assets, and the United States withdrew officials from Mindanao and issued travel advisories.⁹⁷ (The United States government also provided \$100 million in military and civilian aid to the Philippines.⁹⁸)

The operation, based in Zamboanga, lasted for 6 months and was a joint exercise between the Philippines and the United States. US troops were in the region to train light reaction companies of the Philippines military, supply night warfare equipment and guide 7,000 Filipino troops in operations against Abu Sayyaf.⁹⁹

The operation netted an American hostage, Gracia Burnham, evacuated wounded soldiers, reopened a key airfield and, according to the Philippine government, reduced the core of Abu Sayyaf from 800-1000 members to dozens.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ “Singapore Daily Reports Abu-Sayyaf-Jemaah Islamiyah Meeting in Philippines,” The Straits Times, February 7, 2005.

⁹⁴ “Singapore Daily Reports Abu-Sayyaf-Jemaah Islamiyah Meeting in Philippines,” The Straits Times, February 7, 2005.

⁹⁵ An anonymous JI member is reputed to have described regional travel as easy, and described a path from Balikpapan in Kalimantan Timur to Manado in Sulawesi, then to Sangihe island, and from there to Mindanao by boat: “Singapore Daily Reports Abu-Sayyaf-Jemaah Islamiyah Meeting in Philippines,” The Straits Times, February 7, 2005.

⁹⁶ Lakshamanan, Indira A.R., “Fighting Terror Expanding Operations,” Boston Globe, January 26, 2002, pg. A8.

⁹⁷ Kuppasawamy, C.S., “Abu Sayyaf: The cause for the return of U.S. troops to the Philippines?,” Southeast Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 417. Available at www.saag.org.

⁹⁸ “In Basilan’s Jungles, Military Closes in On Guerillas Holding 3 as Hostages,” The Seattle Times, December 27, 2001, pg. A3.

⁹⁹ Kuppasawamy, C.S., “Abu Sayyaf: The cause for the return of U.S. troops to the Philippines?,” Southeast Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 417. Available at www.saag.org.

¹⁰⁰ Kuppasawamy, C.S., “Philippines: The U.S. campaign against Abu Sayyaf,” Southeast Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 498. Available at www.saag.org.

The United States has offered substantial financial rewards for information leading to the arrest of Abu Sayyaf members. In May of 2002, for instance, up to \$5 million was offered for information leading to the arrest of Khaddafy Janjalani and four of his top officers.¹⁰¹ Those five leaders were indicted by the United States Department of Justice for their roles in the kidnapping of the Burnhams and 19 others in 2001.¹⁰²

Today, the United States continues to monitor the situation in the Philippines and has considered expanding their operations by including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front on their list of terrorist organizations.

11. Future Developments

United States ambassador Francis Ricciardone described Abu Sayyaf at the end of 2002 as a “spent force”, but warned they were easily replaced. The problems, he suggested, were endemic and not fixed by force of arms alone.¹⁰³ Many of the problems are economic. In the Asia Development Bank’s analysis of the country’s socio-environmental performance, the Philippines lagged well behind comparable nations in human development. Some areas of the predominantly Muslim regions of Mindanao were described as comparable to the poorest regions of Asia and Africa.¹⁰⁴ While the poverty rate of the Philippines lags at 26%, in southern Mindanao the rate reaches 50%.¹⁰⁵ Until those inequities are addressed, young men will be enticed and motivated to join groups like Abu Sayyaf.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ “U.S. Announces Counter Terrorism Rewards Program Targeting Abu Sayyaf Group Terrorist Leaders”, Embassy of the United States of Manila Press Release, May 29, 2002. Available at usembassy.state.gov.

¹⁰² “Five Leaders of the Abu Sayyaf Group Indicted for Hostage-Taking of Americans and Others in the Philippines,” U.S. Department of Justice Press Release, July 23, 2002. Available online at www.usdoj.gov.

¹⁰³ Kuppasawamy, C.S., “Philippines: The U.S. campaign against Abu Sayyaf,” Southeast Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 498. Available at www.saag.org.

¹⁰⁴ “Philippines: Country Performance Assessment,” Asia Development Bank, December, 2003. Section C: Assessment of Socio-environmental performance. " 12. According to the 1999 UN Human Development Report, the Philippines ranked 77th out of 174 countries in terms of human development, as measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), a significant improvement from 82nd in 1998. In comparison with regional comparators, however, the Philippines lags in terms of human development. The Philippine Human Development Report for 2000 indicates that provincial and regional HDIs have tended to follow the regional distribution of poverty, with parts of Mindanao recording HDIs on par with the poorest countries of Asia or Africa, highlighting the need to redress regional inequity. While key development indicators have improved over the past 10 years, there is scope for further advancement in life expectancy and health indicators such as infant birthweight, crude death rate, infant and maternal mortality, and access to sanitary facilities. Moreover, in the face of limited budgetary resources, rapid population growth has limited the expansion of basic services resulting in declining student/teacher ratios, increased dropouts in basic education and low achievement scores, trends that have been exacerbated by the crisis. An ADB study on the social impact of the crisis found lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates in education. A study of the 1998 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey indicates that poor households adjusted to the shock of the Asian financial crisis and El Niño by changing eating patterns, working longer hours, and taking children out of school. Budgetary provisions for education and health after the crisis have been inadequate. This will slow improvement in the quality of basic education and reduce expansion of much needed primary health care services as well as reduce support for family planning, immunization, and feeding programs."

¹⁰⁵ Bello, Walden, “Perspective,” BusinessWorld (Philippines), March 7, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ In 2003, the United States offered MILF \$50 million in such development funds to sign a peace deal; the offer was rebuffed.

