

## CHAPTER 18

# **Moro National Liberation Front and its Bangsamoro Armed Forces (MNLF-BAF)**

### Overview

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is the most significant rebel group to have entered into a final peace agreement with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). An Islamo-separatist movement, it led the armed resistance in Muslim Mindanao against the martial law regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos in the early 1970s and was recognized as ‘the sole legitimate representative of Muslims in Southern Philippines (“Bangsamoro people”)’ by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).<sup>1</sup> Several rounds of on-and-off peace negotiations over three decades were concluded in 1996 under the auspices of the OIC. But the implementation of the 1996 final peace agreement has been contentious. While a significant number of MNLF combatants has been integrated into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), there has been no disarmament or demobilization of the group. Since 2001, there have been occasional armed hostilities between the MNLF and the AFP in the MNLF heartland of Jolo island in the Sulu archipelagic province. Sulu hostilities in 2005 involved some apparent tactical cooperation between the MNLF and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) against the AFP, but in 2006 the MNLF shifted policy by actively cooperating with the AFP against the ASG in Sulu. Fierce fighting between the MNLF and the AFP again erupted in April 2007, and several MNLF camps in Sulu were taken. The MNLF therefore has one foot inside government but has not yet fully shed its rebel persona.

### Basic characteristics

#### Typology

The MNLF is a Moro rebel group with ambitions that are subnational geographically, but national in relation to a Moro nation.

## Current status

The MNLF is active and mainly concerned with the implementation of its final peace agreement with the GRP. There has been some division within the group in recent years around the issue of its paramount leader, Nur Misuari, but this is slowly being resolved in favour of the restoration of his pre-eminence in the MNLF.

## Origins

The MNLF originated in 1969 during military training in Malaysia of the 'Top 90' first batch of Moro youth and student activists. The Moro student activists and politicians were moved to attend the training by the 18 March 1968 Jabi-dah Massacre of Moro trainee soldiers who had refused to participate in a plan to invade Sabah, Malaysia. But the Moro politicians who arranged the training—led by Rashid Lucman—were primarily concerned with raising private armies to protect their own interests. When the young Moro trainees realized this, they decided to form their own group focused on Moro national liberation. Misuari was selected leader in recognition of his seniority, intellectual prowess, and links with influential politicians of all three major Moro tribes. The name 'Moro National Liberation Front' did not emerge until the second 'Batch 300' of young Moro trainees graduated in 1970.<sup>2</sup>

The 'National Liberation Front' of the group's name was inspired by the national liberation movements of the 1960s, notably the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Misuari had been exposed to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist radicalism and Filipino nationalist student activism while studying and teaching at the University of the Philippines. He had also been involved with the radical *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM, Patriotic Youth)<sup>3</sup> and its founder, Communist leader Jose Maria Sison, which reinforced his secular-nationalist orientation, though he eventually redirected his activism to Moro nationalism. MNLF's first Vice-Chairman Abul Khayr Alonto is credited with adding 'Moro' to the group's name, reclaiming a denomination that had previously been used pejoratively, and providing a common identity for the 13 Islamized but disparate ethno-linguistic tribes in their historical homeland of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan.

## Aims

The MNLF's original aim as articulated in its 1974 Manifesto was the liberation of the Moro nation 'from the terror, oppression and tyranny of Filipino colonialism . . . to secure a free and independent state for the Bangsa Moro people . . . and to see the democratization of the wealth in their homeland' (Misuari, 1974). The latter egalitarian plank has since been de-emphasized or forgotten. Since the 1996 Peace Agreement the MNLF has adopted the expressed aim of liberation through peace and development in the form of autonomy for the Muslims in the Southern Philippines. The group's leaders—Misuari in particular—often invoke their original aim of 'decolonization' and independence, however, which resonates strongly among the Moros. Some insiders say the MNLF has for some time now outlived its reason for being a 'liberation front', becoming instead an instrument for political and personal aggrandizement of its top leaders.<sup>4</sup>

## Ideology

Misuari has said that 'nationalism takes as much precedence as the inspired verses of the Holy Qur'an as the ideological root of the Bangsa Moro people's revolution' (Misuari, 1992, pp. 38–39). In the Tausug language, the three roots of the MNLF are described as *Bangsa* (nation), *Hulah* (homeland), and *Agama* (religion, which is Islam), in that order, reflecting a struggle that 'is principally a nationalist and territorial one, although religion has certainly served as a rallying call and focal point of resistance to the central government' (Tan, 2003, p. 112).

## Leadership

The MNLF's leadership has always centred on Misuari, the *Maas* (Tausug for 'wise old man') of the Moro struggle, even during the six years he was in detention until he was released on bail in April 2008. The first Central Committee of the MNLF was formed at its Libya base in 1974 and comprised 13 members, seven of whom—including Misuari—were secular. One of the religious members was MNLF head of foreign affairs Hashim Salamat, who led the MILF split in 1977.

Misuari's leadership has been criticized for being exclusive and at times even dictatorial, and was a key reason for the most significant splits in the MNLF, notably the MILF split and the so-called 'Executive Council of 15 (EC-15)' split in 2001. The latter split resulted in four factions: the Misuari group, the anti-Misuari EC-15, the pro-Misuari group of Alvarez Isnaji, and the anti-Misuari Islamic Command Council, with some overlaps and occasional merging. One insider observes that historically the MNLF 'is factionalized every time it talks peace with the GRP'.<sup>5</sup>

An MNLF unity process undertaken at the initiative of Libya, the group's old sponsor, highlighted the common cause of the four factions against the government's unilateral and flawed implementation of the peace agreement (see Chapter 3).<sup>6</sup> The main MNLF forces—including those in its Sulu/Tausug heartland—returned to Misuari, though for a long time the GRP officially recognized the EC-15 as the MNLF leadership it sponsored. Long-standing MNLF Vice-Chairman Hatimil Hassan, an ethnic Yakan from Basilan province, was the nominal leader of the EC-15, though its most significant member in terms of forces commanded was MNLF Secretary General Muslimin Sema, a Maguindanaon who has been mayor of Cotabato City for several terms.

Sema was elected Chairman of a reconvened Central Committee (CC) 'composed of veteran, longtime chartered senior members' of the MNLF at a meeting on 1–3 April 2008 in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The meeting involved 32 out of 49 members of the CC and determined to continue to support the 1996 Peace Agreement 'as the vehicle for peace and development', but, more significantly, to seek to restore the MNLF as 'the vanguard of the Bangsamoro



MNLF Chairman Professor Nur Misuari at his house arrest quarters in March 2008, a month before his release on bail. © Soliman M. Santos, Jr.

people'. This was to be done through 'the New MNLF Leadership' which has taken the place of the EC-15 as the main rival to Misuari. It includes former pro-Misuari faction leader Alvarez Isnaji, the incumbent mayor of Indanan, Sulu, whom the meeting endorsed as 'the MNLF common candidate' for regional governor in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) election of August 2008 (MNLF CC, 2008).<sup>7</sup> Isnaji was arrested and detained in June 2008, however, for his alleged involvement in a kidnap-for-ransom incident, and subsequently lost the election.

## Political base

The MNLF's political base is the Moro nation or the Bangsamoro people or the Muslims in southern Philippines. Among the 13 Islamized ethnic tribes, its political base is strongest among the Tausug, Sama, and Yakan in the Western (Island) Mindanao provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, and parts of the Zamboanga peninsula. It also has a significant following among the Maguindanao and Maranao tribes of Central (Mainland) Mindanao. In general terms the MNLF's Moro base is wider than the MILF's, with forces as far from the Moro heartland as the Davao provinces and far-off Palawan island province.

As for political party association, the most that the MNLF has achieved is a formal alliance with the ruling Lakas (Strength) party of President Fidel V. Ramos (1992–98) as part of the political settlement surrounding the 1996 Peace Agreement. This political alliance enabled Misuari to run unopposed for regional governor of the ARMM. The success of other MNLF leaders who have run for regional and local government posts has tended to depend on government support—the administrations of presidents Joseph Estrada (1998–2001) and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–present) have not been supportive of the MNLF mainstream.

## Combatants and constituency

The MNLF's combatants span at least two generations and include people who look both younger than 18 years (i.e. child soldiers) and older than 60 (against a national retirement age for soldiers of 56). During the height of the 'Moro war of liberation' in the early 1970s, the various Moro armed resistance

groups tended to come from Moro youth led by traditional and secular elites, and most of the villagers in war-affected communities were involved in the struggle (Che Man, 1990, pp. 76, 80). This reflected the broad cross-class constituency of the MNLF in Moro/Muslim areas of Western (Island) and Central (Mainland) Mindanao.

## Sources of financing and other support

The MNLF has always relied heavily on external funding, which explains Misuari's fear of isolation from the OIC. Up until the 1996 Peace Agreement, the MNLF's financial and logistical support came mainly from external sources, chiefly Libya. Libya and the OIC contributed some USD 35 million to the MNLF in 1972–75, some in the form of weapons, military equipment, and other supplies, which were smuggled through the eastern Malaysian state of Sabah (Che Man, 1990, pp. 78–79, 83, 140). It is said that Malaysia became the administrator of the USD 1 million per year provided by the OIC up until the 1996 Peace Agreement.<sup>8</sup> Libya also hosted training, replacing Malaysia as the MNLF's principal training venue from the mid-1970s. MNLF training was supplemented in the 1980s by Syria, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) camps in the Middle East, and Pakistan (ICG, 2004, p. 4). Other major external sources of financial assistance included the Islamic Solidarity Fund, some Muslim government agencies, and foundations and companies, notably Saudi Arabia's Muslim World League and Darul Ifta (religious advisory council). Domestic financial support was mainly through *zakat* (alms), which were sometimes provided as rice and other foodstuffs (Che Man, 1990, pp. 83–84, 141). After 1996, the group benefited from government financial support arising from its control of the ARMM.

## Military activities

### Size and strength

In 1994, the AFP estimated the number of MNLF at 14,000; two years later the AFP estimate was 17,700 (Makinano and Lubang, 2001, p. 29). The implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement resulted in the integration of 6,905 (of a

projected 7,500) MNLF elements into the AFP and PNP as of 2006 (see Chapter 7). A significant number of these integrees were not MNLF fighters themselves, however, but rather their successors or beneficiaries (Ferrer, 2000). Some MNLF fighters have returned to civilian life, formed their own groups, or joined existing groups, including the rival MILF, kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and terrorist groups (Makinano and Lubang, 2000, p. 29).

The MNLF's own figures may not be very reliable. The MNLF's Muhtalla National Force Command under Chief Commander D/Gen. Hadji Andy Gappal, supposedly constituting the all-purpose forward command battalions, allegedly has 30,000 card-bearing members in Mindanao and Palawan, and Misuari claims that it is only one of more than 40 units of the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA). The group claimed that 7,000 and 3,000 MNLF fighters, respectively, were convened in 1999 to listen to Misuari at rallies in Camp Maharlika in Lantawan, Basilan, and at the MNLF's Jabal Nur Camp in Lanao del Sur (Ferrer, 2000).

A reliable recent estimate of MNLF size and strength in its main base, Sulu province, puts the number at around 5,800, about one-third of its former



MNLF fighters raise their banner and arms as they cry 'Allahu Akbar' ('God is great'). The image was taken in January 2008 at MNLF Camp Amilhamja in Langpas, Indanan, Sulu. © Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

strength.<sup>9</sup> This is still a formidable force in the group's heartland; the biggest AFP deployment to Sulu in recent years was in 2006, when it deployed nine battalions or about 4,500 troops against the much smaller forces of the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (Alipala, 2006). The AFP has grossly underestimated the size of the MNLF mainstream, which it calls the 'Misuari Breakaway Group' (MBG), at '700 concentrated mainly in Sulu and parts of Zamboanga del Norte' in 2006 (Esperon, 2006, p. 6).

## Command and control

A 2000 study showed the MNLF to be organized primarily as a military organization rather than a political one: two-thirds of the Central Committee members are military officials (i.e. with positions in the BMA) (Ferrer, 2000). The military chiefs of the following commands sit on the Central Committee: national intelligence service, military intelligence service, national field command, northern Mindanao command, national marines, air defence command, 'spider' division, and comptroller general's office (Ferrer, 2000).

The MNLF has its own army called the Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) or Bangsamoro Armed Forces, which came under the control of the Central Committee. The BMA is organized as a conventional rather than a guerrilla army. It has a General Staff, responsible for a National Mobile Force consisting of the 1st to 4th Armies occupying at least 13 permanent camps, as well as ten Provincial Armies, each with Zone Forces, Municipality Forces, and Barrio (Village) Defense Forces (Che Man, 1990, pp. 191–93). There are also parallel military and political departments represented by 57 national commanders and 28 state chairmen, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

Historically, the BMA was loosely knit and was unable to construct a clearly established chain of command. A wide communication gap seemed to exist between the Central Committee and the field commanders. The Central Committee appeared to focus on gathering external support and setting broad policy outlines, leaving field commanders to make their own operational decisions (Che Man, 1990, p. 83).

This seems still to be the case in Sulu, where MNLF force mobilization appears to be confined to five municipalities: Indanan, Maimbung, Patikul, Talipao, and Panamao.<sup>11</sup> The MNLF Lupag Sug (Sulu) State Revolutionary Committee

(SRC) under State Chairman Major General Khaid O. Ajibun is in charge only of military operations in the western sector of Sulu, while an MNLF Task Force Jabal Uhud under Commanding General Ustadz Khabir Malik is in charge of the eastern sector. Confusion arises from time to time over their areas of command. The recent factionalism in the MNLF has also led to confusion over chains of command, with faction leaders claiming certain commanders or commands.

## Areas of operation

The MNLF areas of operation are best gleaned from the provinces and cities covered by its 16 State Revolutionary Committees, grouped into two main sectors, Island Mindanao and Mainland Mindanao.

Table 18.1

### Locations of MNLF State Revolutionary Committees

SRC	States covered; number of municipalities in parentheses
<b>Island Mindanao</b>	
Lupah Sug	Sulu (18)
Tawi-Tawi	Tawi-Tawi (10)
Basilan	Basilan (6), Isabela City
Zamboanga City	Zamboanga City
<b>Mainland Mindanao</b>	
Western Kutawatu	Maguindanao (9), Cotabato City, Sultan Kudarat (3)
New Utara Kutawatu	Maguindanao (6), Lanao del Sur (1)
Central Kutawatu	Maguindanao (5), Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat (9)
Sebangan Kutawatu	Maguindanao (2), North Cotabato (17), Kidapawan City
Selatan Kutawato	Saranggani (7), General Santos City, Koronadal City, South Cotabato (10)
Ranao Sur	Lanao del Sur (19)
Central Ranao	Lanao del Sur (18), Marawi City
Ranao Norte	Lanao del Norte (20), Iligan City
Zamboanga Norte	Zamboanga del Norte (25), Dipolog City, Dapitan City
Zamboanga Sur	Zamboanga del Sur, Pagadian City
Zamboanga Zibugay	Zamboanga Sibugay (16)
Satar Davao	Davao del Sur (14), Digos City, Davao City

Source: General Secretariat, MNLF (2006, p. 11). This reference is from the MNLF EC-15 faction.

## Strategy and tactics

The MNLF has employed a strategy combining armed struggle, Islamic diplomacy, and peace negotiations. Since the 1996 Peace Agreement its accent has been on the last two modes of struggle, along with engagement in electoral and parliamentary processes. Armed hostilities and threats are largely used for tactical—not strategic—purposes, to support MNLF political demands related to the peace process. MNLF forays into electoral politics, regional and local autonomous governance, and lobbying with both the legislative and the executive departments of national government have reaped mixed rewards for the MNLF, especially since the end of the friendly Ramos administration in 1998. The OIC's annual Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) remains the most important political and diplomatic arena for the MNLF, above even the Philippine Congress.

Ten days of fighting between the MNLF and GRP in February 2005 showed that the group is capable of conducting conventional warfare against the AFP (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, pp. 7–9). The MNLF launched frontal attacks against AFP fixed positions using .50 and .30 machine guns, 81 mm and 60 mm mortars, bazookas, and a B57. The AFP countered with artillery, aerial bombardment, and ground troop assaults against MNLF fixed positions in both the eastern and the western fronts in Sulu. Despite the dozens of casualties on both sides, independent observers found no evidence of any civilian casualties during the ten-day war. This was largely attributable to the pre-evacuation of as many as 70,000 civilians from the battle zones, notably the MNLF-led evacuation of its own civilian mass base in certain critical areas.

## Collaboration with other armed groups

The MNLF has cordial fraternal relations with its old main splinter and rival group, the MILF. Relations were better between the MILF and the government-recognized MNLF EC-15 faction (since replaced by the new Sema-led 'old guard' Central Committee of the MNLF) than with the mainstream MNLF Misuari group; the EC-15 even included the MILF in its delegations to the ICFM. But Misuari in particular is still bitter about the breakaway MILF, as he is about the EC-15. Residual sectarianism and tribalism in the MNLF and

MILF, as well as feelings of triumphalism and superiority over each other's efforts, militate against a united Moro front.

The MNLF shares the Western Mindanao main theatre of operations with the ASG, and the relationship between the two has been ambivalent. Unlike the MILF, the ASG is not considered a breakaway faction of the MNLF, though most ASG founders were originally young, disaffected MNLF cadres. The MNLF has for the most part officially repudiated the ASG for its depredations, and has occasionally participated in operations against it. At the same time, kinship and other local ties between MNLF and ASG field commanders in Sulu in particular have aided ground-level tactical alliances against the common enemy, the AFP. The MNLF has not contemplated links with the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) or the JI.

The MNLF has had ties with the Communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the past, though these have grown weak in recent years. Links between the two groups hinged on Misuari's student activist links to Filipino Communist leader Sison and on the groups' tactical alliance in the early 1970s against Marcos's martial law regime. A high point of MNLF–NDFP collaboration was a joint presentation of their respective cases against the Marcos regime in a session before the Permanent People's Tribunal in Brussels in 1980 (Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino, 1981). Misuari has distanced the MNLF from the NDFP in the past, especially in the eyes of the anti-Communist OIC. Sison, for his part, condemned Misuari for 'capitulation' when the MNLF entered into the 1996 Peace Agreement (Sison, 1996). Since then, Misuari and Sison have been estranged.

## Small arms and light weapons

### Stockpiles

Combatants often have personal or family firearms in addition to the organizational ones, which makes it difficult to estimate MNLF small arms holdings. Firearms are readily available in the Moro rebel milieu. While the 1996 Final Peace Agreement provided for the integration of a maximum of 7,500 MNLF elements into the AFP and PNP, it did not provide for disarmament.

MNLF integrees were invited to hand in their weapons voluntarily, but this has not substantially reduced the net number of firearms in MNLF hands.

Photographic evidence, some of it from MNLF sources, indicates that the BMA is heavily armed with a variety of largely US-designed small arms (Jane's Advisory Service, 2007). These include:

- 5.56 mm AR15 / M16 assault rifles (including M4 carbines);
- 7.62 mm M14 rifles;
- M1 Garand rifles and .30 M1 carbines;
- 7.62 mm AK47 and similar Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles.

Recent photographic and other evidence suggests that the most common small arms system used by the MNLF is the AR-15/M16 series. Most of the M-16 pattern rifles in service with the MNLF are thought to be of the M16-A1 configuration. The 7.62 AK-47 and Kalashnikov-like assault rifles were imported from Libya in the 1970s and are now rarely used due to obsolescence and lack of ammunition.

The MNLF also has the following support weapons and crew-served weapon systems, according to MNLF official photographs taken in 2001 (Jane's Advisory Service, 2007):

- 7.62 mm M60 general purpose machine guns;
- .50 Browning M2 machine gun;
- 57 mm M18 and 90 mm M67 recoilless rifles;
- 60 mm and 81 mm mortars;
- 90 mm M67 recoilless rifles;
- RPG-2 and RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

The MNLF says it has not used mines since 1976, fearing civilian casualties, though some research suggests that the group has used 'improvised' anti-vehicle landmines against AFP vehicles since the 1996 ceasefire (Jane's Advisory Services, 2007). In terms of ammunition, the BMA has access to 5.56 mm, 7.62 mm, .30, and .50 ammunition typically sourced on the black market.

## Sources

The MNLF built up its arsenal in the 1970s and 1980s from three sources: US-designed weaponry seized from the security forces on the battlefield; weaponry

purchased on the local black market—including ‘leaked’ security forces’ stocks, i.e. sales from corrupt officers; and weaponry imported from Libya via Sabah, Malaysia. Weaponry from Libya included several thousand FN-FAL 7.62 mm rifles—these have since disappeared from the BMA’s inventory—as well as 60 mm and 81 mm mortars and Soviet-manufactured RPG-2 rocket propelled grenade launchers. Libya also facilitated the supply of Kalashnikov AK47 assault rifles, but only a few hundred reached the MNLF because the rest of a much larger consignment was impounded by the Malaysian authorities. Continuing external funding support has allowed the MNLF to purchase arms from various sources, though not at the same levels.

The M16 has been manufactured in large numbers under licence in the Philippines. More modern variations held by the MNLF are likely to have been acquired from corrupt government and military sources. Some of these weapons are equipped with 40 mm M203 grenade launchers (Jane’s Advisory Services, 2007).

Local politicians who store their private armouries with the MNLF make good any shortage of arms and ammunition. The group procures relatively small numbers of small arms and light weapons from seizures during armed hostilities with government forces or through its own production of weapons.

## Recovered

A total of 4,874 firearms—mostly old M1 Garands and carbines, but also M16s—were voluntarily turned in by MNLF integreees to the ‘Balik-BARIL’ (Return Gun) buy-back programme for 1996–99 (Muggah, 2004, p. 40). This is considered a low turnover in terms of both quantity and quality.

## Human security issues

### Human rights abuses

Few human rights abuses have been reported since the 1996 Peace Agreement. A number of MNLF combatants used hostages as human shields to escape the encirclement by the AFP of the Cabatangan Complex in Zamboanga City in November 2001 (Castro, 2005, pp. 358–61). During the February 2005 hostilities in Sulu, the AFP complained about MNLF conduct, which involved

beheadings and other mutilations, and atrocities against innocent civilians (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 9).

### Children associated with fighting forces (CAFF)

MNLF Sulu Chairman Khaid O. Ajibun denies that his MNLF forces include child soldiers since, he argues, minors lack the necessary wisdom and experience to carry weapons. The other main MNLF Sulu commander, Ustadz Khabir Malik, however, has said that while children are not intended to be used as soldiers, they form members of families that have to move or be prepared for any eventuality (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 9).

### Gender

The MNLF is the only Moro or Muslim armed group with women in its leadership. Among the more prominent female leaders in the MNLF Central Committee are Bainon Karon, Chairperson of the National Women's Committee, and Eleonora 'Roida' Tan-Misuari, Nur's wife. No female leaders sit on the MNLF peace panel, however. There is a women's auxiliary component of the BMA. There are no reports of MNLF abuse of women.

### Displacement

The February 2005 major armed hostilities involving the AFP, the ASG, and the MNLF in Sulu resulted in the displacement of 70,000 Sulu civilians, or 15 per cent of the population. There were no civilian casualties, largely thanks to their pre-evacuation from the battle zones, notably by the MNLF (Mindanao Peaceweavers, 2005, p. 8).

## Outlook

### Capacity for negotiations

The MNLF has proved its capacity for peace negotiations, having engaged three Philippine administrations in three phases of talks. The MNLF's chief peace negotiator, Misuari, is described by GRP peace negotiators as a tough negotiator adept at brinkmanship (Kalinaw Mindanaw, 2000, pp. 123–24;

Ramos, 1996). During the 1992–96 peace negotiations, the MNLF matched the GRP in terms of staffing the five support committees for technical discussions on substantive agenda items. The MNLF was able to draw on a pool of sympathetic Moro professionals, including experienced Moro lawyers, for this and similar purposes. But Misuari deferred to the GRP on crucial constitutional limits for a negotiated political settlement. Other factors—especially the influence of the OIC—also had a bearing on Misuari’s acceptance of what the GRP said was ‘the most that it could offer’ (Iribani, 2006).

## Prospects for the future

The MNLF no longer represents the key to a just, lasting, and comprehensive future solution to the Moro problem. It has unravelled and shown a lack of requisite leadership capabilities. It tends to revel in its ‘glorious past’ as the Moro vanguard. Indeed, it must be credited with placing the Moro cause on the national and international agenda, as also with the gains for this cause achieved in its 1996 Peace Agreement. But more than a decade later these gains have not fully resolved the Moro problem. A truly final solution to the Moro problem, including the more recent terrorist problem in Mindanao, will require the positive cooperation of the MNLF. In this respect, much depends on whether the MNLF leadership continues to hang on to an inadequate peace agreement that gives it some political status and hegemony, or gives way to an arrangement that is better for the Moro people. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 ‘Report and Resolutions on Political, Muslim Minorities and Communities, Legal and Information Affairs’ adopted by the 27th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (Session of Islam and Globalization), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27–30 June 2000. Resolution No. 56/27-P ‘On the Question of Muslims in Southern Philippines’.  
<[http://mnlf.net/OIC/27\\_ICFM\\_Resolution.htm](http://mnlf.net/OIC/27_ICFM_Resolution.htm)>
- 2 Notes written by Octavio A. Dinampo, Professor Mindanao State University (MSU)-Sulu for Soliman M. Santos, Jr., October 2006 (hereafter ‘Dinampo notes of October 2006’). See also Che Man (1990, pp. 77–81).
- 3 Though he has been usually linked to the KM, Misuari said in an interview with Soliman M. Santos, Jr. that he eventually became attracted to the intellectuals in KM’s fraternal rival activist youth organization Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK, Democratic Association

of Youth), which split from KM in early 1968 (before the Jabidah Massacre). The interview took place on 23 March 2008 at Misuari's house-arrest quarters in Quezon City.

- 4 Dinampo notes of October 2006.
- 5 Khalid Al-Walid, pseudonym of an MNLF mid-level cadre, written notes for Soliman M. Santos, Jr., March 2007 (hereinafter 'Al-Walid notes of March 2007').
- 6 Atty. Randolph C. Parcasio, Legal Counsel, MNLF, interview by Soliman M. Santos, Jr. on 30 May 2003 in Makati City.
- 7 Also Soliman M. Santos, Jr., conversation with some of the 'New MNLF Leadership' including Chairman Muslimin G. Sema, on 3 April 2008 in Cotabato City.
- 8 Dinampo notes of October 2006.
- 9 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.
- 10 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.
- 11 Al-Walid notes of March 2007.

## Bibliography

- Alipala, Julie. 2006. '9 Battalions Pursuing 50 Sayyaf Men.' *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila). 8 August.
- Castro, Delfin. 2005. *A Mindanao Story: Troubled Decades in the Eye of the Storm*. Manila: Delfin Castro.
- Che Man, W. K. 1990. *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Esperon, Jr., Hermogenes C. 2006. 'Perspective from the Military.' *Digest*. 4th Quarter. Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines.
- Ferrer, Miriam Coronel. 2000. 'Integration of MNLF Forces into the PNP and AFP: Integration without Demobilization and Disarmament.' Unpublished paper prepared for an assessment of the implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, by the Program for Peace, Democratization and Human Rights, Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines.
- General Secretariat, MNLF. 2006. 'The MNLF Comprehensive Technical Report to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) ICFM Meeting, Baku, Azerbaijan.' 19–21 June.
- ICG (International Crisis Group). 2004. *Southern Philippines Backgrounder: Terrorism and the Peace Process*. Asia Report No 80. Singapore/Brussels: ICG. 13 July.  
<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/412b41cc4.html>>
- Iribani, Abraham S. 2006. *Give Peace A Chance: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Talks*. Mandaluyong City: Magbassa Kita Foundation/Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy.
- Jane's Strategic Advisory Service. 2007. 'Non-state Armed Groups Study: Study of Non-state Armed Groups in the Philippines.' A background report commissioned by the Small Arms Survey, July.
- Kalinaw Mindanaw, B. R. Rodil. 2000. *The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Process, 1975–1996*. Davao City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao.
- Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino. 1981. *Philippines: Repression & Resistance: Permanent People's Tribunal Session on the Philippines*. Utrecht: Komite ng Sambayanang Pilipino.
- Makinano, Merliza M. and Alfredo Lubang. 2001. *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: The Mindanao Experience*. Ottawa: International Security Research and Outreach Programme

- International Security Bureau, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. <[http://www.international.gc.ca/arms-armes/assets/pdfs/makinano\\_lubang2001.pdf](http://www.international.gc.ca/arms-armes/assets/pdfs/makinano_lubang2001.pdf)>
- Mindanao Peaceweavers. 2005. *Sulu: State of War, Calls for Peace. Report of the Sulu Peace and Solidarity Mission of 27–31 March*. Davao City.
- Misuari, Hajji Nur. 1974. *The Manifesto of the Moro National Liberation Front: Establishment of the Bangsa Moro Republik*. 28 April.
- . 1992. 'The Rise and Fall of Moro Statehood.' *Philippine Development Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 1–41.
- MNLF CC (Office of the Secretary General (M/Gen. Abdul Sahrin), MNLF Central Committee). 2008. Press Release, 3 April 2008, and attached Resolution No. 003, s. of 2008, MNLF Central Committee 'Policy Declaration and Direction' and Minutes of the Central Committee Meeting, Bay Plaza Hotel, Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur, 1 April.
- Muggah, Robert. 2004. *The Prospects for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front*. A Desk Review commissioned by the UNDP.
- Ramos, Fidel V. 1996. *Break Not the Peace: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Negotiations, 1992–1996*. Philippines: Friends of Steady Eddie.
- Sison, Jose Maria. 1996. 'Misuari Capitulation is a Bad Example.' Posted 17 July. MIM Notes 121. 1 September. <<http://www.philippinerevolution.net>>
- Tan, Andrew. 2003. 'The Indigenous Roots of Conflict in Southeast Asia: The Case of Mindanao.' In Ramakrishna, Kumar and See Seng Tan, eds. *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies.