

SECURITY IN THE PHILIPPINES AND INDONESIA: THE U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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USAWC CLASS OF 2011

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 15-05-2011		2. REPORT TYPE Program Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Security in the Philippines and Indonesia: The U.S. Military Role in Southeast Asia				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) COL Suzanne Vares-Lum				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) COL Maurice Ottinger Department of Distance Education				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The U.S. has increased its commitment to Southeast Asian nations as a result of their growing economic significance and the rise in China's influence in the region. China's threat to U.S. regional dominance lies in hindering access to South East Asian markets and unfettered access to sea lanes. However, the greatest security concerns originate from within Southeast Asian countries. The region faces a plethora of threats to security and stability including terrorism, communist and nationalist insurgencies, corrupt and authoritarian regimes, and escalating border conflicts. Of significant concern to U.S. security interests are the Philippines and Indonesia, where transnational terror activities thrive in the midst of fledgling democratic governments plagued by corruption at all levels. This paper examines the implications of the security concerns in these two nations to the U.S. military's role in Southeast Asia. The conclusion recommends that the U.S. military reassess its approach to partnerships, engagements and exchanges; the impact of the employment of ground forces; and the whole-of-government approach to security.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Southeast Asia, Philippines, Indonesia, U.S. Military Role, Interests and Security Concerns					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC PROGRAM RESEARCH PROJECT

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THE U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE: Security in the Philippines and Indonesia: The U.S. Military Role in Southeast Asia

FORMAT: Program Research Project

DATE: 13 May 2011 WORD COUNT: 5,264 PAGES:30

KEY TERMS: Southeast Asia, Philippines, Indonesia, U.S. Military Role, Interests and Security Concerns

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The U.S. has increased its commitment to Southeast Asian nations as a result of their growing economic significance and the rise in China's influence in the region. China's threat to U.S. regional dominance lies in hindering access to South East Asian markets and unfettered access to sea lanes. However, the greatest security concerns originate from within Southeast Asian countries. The region faces a plethora of threats to security and stability including terrorism, communist and nationalist insurgencies, corrupt and authoritarian regimes, and escalating border conflicts. Of significant concern to U.S. security interests are the Philippines and Indonesia, where transnational terror activities thrive in the midst of fledgling democratic governments plagued by corruption at all levels. This paper examines the implications of the security concerns in these two nations to the U.S. military's role in Southeast Asia. The conclusion recommends that the U.S. military reassess its approach to partnerships, engagements and exchanges; the impact of the employment of ground forces; and the whole-of-government approach to security.

SECURITY IN THE PHILIPPINES AND INDONESIA: THE U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The U.S. has increased its commitment to Southeast Asian nations as a result of their growing economic significance and the rise of China's influence in the region.¹ China's threat to U.S. regional dominance lies in hindering access to Southeast Asian markets and unfettered access to sea lanes.² In spite of this, the greatest security concerns originate from within Southeast Asian countries.³ The region faces a multitude of threats to security and stability including terrorism, communist and nationalist insurgencies, corrupt and non-democratic regimes, and border conflicts.⁴ Based on the level of U.S. counterterrorism monetary investment, some of the greatest concerns to U.S. security interests in Southeast Asia emerge from the Philippines and Indonesia,⁵ where destabilizing terrorist activities continue to thrive in the midst of fledgling democratic governments plagued by corruption at all levels.

In addressing security concerns in Southeast Asia, the U.S. has used its military to confront security threats emanating from the Philippines and Indonesia.⁶ By examining U.S. security interests in the Philippines and Indonesia and identifying the obstacles to security, as well as focusing on their root causes, U.S. military leaders can gain insight into the effectiveness of America's current role in Southeast Asia and explore implications for its future role.

This paper first examines the broader economic and political significance of Southeast Asia. The second section explores specific U.S. interests and security concerns in the Philippines. The third section studies the unique U.S. interests and concerns in Indonesia. The fourth section discusses the current U.S. military role in

these two countries, where significant monetary and personnel resources have been committed to confront terrorism. The conclusion asserts that the effective approaches used by the U.S. military in the Philippines and Indonesia can be applied to the greater Southeast Asian region and beyond. Further, it recommends that the U.S. military must reassess its approach to partnerships, engagements and exchanges; the impact of the employment of ground forces; and the whole-of-government approach to security.

Southeast Asia's Growing Significance

Southeast Asian leaders have accused the U.S. of neglecting the affairs of the region for generations.⁷ Outside of the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) and historical studies of the Vietnam conflict, Southeast Asia is often absent in the current foreign policy discourse. This is an understandable state of affairs given the current global commitments of the U.S. military. For some Americans, however, the election of President Barack Obama has brought attention to Southeast Asia. This can be attributed to the President's historical connection with Indonesia⁸ and his recent commitment to broaden relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), assigning a resident ambassador to ASEAN,⁹ and committing to host the November 2011 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leader's conference in Honolulu, Hawaii.¹⁰

However, Southeast Asia experts agree that the region is emerging in significance on the global economic landscape over the last decade.¹¹ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consisting of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia are now important trading partners with the U.S, with the exception of Myanmar.¹² The economic

rise of Southeast Asia creates an increasing reliance on Southeast Asian sea lanes, which in turn amplifies the necessity for cooperation and collaboration between the U.S. and ASEAN.¹³

With the economic surge in Southeast Asian nations, China has also placed greater strategic importance on these countries.¹⁴ For this reason, some analysts argue that the U.S. must be concerned with Southeast Asia's growing significance as China continues to make overtures to governments within the region for potential basing purposes and economic opportunities.¹⁵ Others assert that while economic linkages continue to grow between ASEAN and China, the U.S. should not become overly reactive to the growing partnership. Instead, the U.S. should actively engage in the region to maintain its interests as competition for global resources increase.¹⁶

Furthermore, counterterrorism security concerns in Southeast Asia have also grown in significance. Since the 9/11 attacks on U.S. soil, the U.S. has shifted monetary and military resources to address transnational terrorism threats in Southeast Asia.¹⁷ The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has committed resources to deter the migration of terrorism that could impact U.S. interests in the region. These counterterrorism efforts have been most evident in the Philippines and Indonesia.¹⁸ The counterterrorism emphasis in these two countries are aligned with the goals and objectives outlined in the President's National Security Strategy,¹⁹ the National Defense Strategy,²⁰ the National Military Strategy,²¹ and the USPACOM Commander's Posture Statement,²² which all identify the defeat of global terrorism as a top priority.²³ Additionally, the threat and fear of an inhospitable environment to U.S. economic and political interests, as well safety and security of American citizens in the region, have

driven DOD and DOS to invest billions of dollars in stability and security activities in the Philippines and Indonesia.²⁴

U.S. Interests and Security Concerns in the Philippines

Many leaders and Southeast Asia analysts have identified the Philippines as important to U.S. interests due to its historical ties, geographic location, natural resources, and economic potential.²⁵ However, most analysts agree that in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Vietnam are economically stronger states than the Philippines; despite this assessment, the U.S. invests more security dollars in the Philippines than the two more economically strong states.²⁶ This is due to a number of factors including the reality that the Philippines experiences the most militant internal security challenges within Southeast Asia in the form of Islamic extremism, ethnic separatism and a communist insurgency.²⁷

From a historical perspective, the U.S. and the Philippines share a long history of connections. Unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines was a territory of the U.S.²⁸ The Philippines is one of the U.S.'s oldest and closest allies in the region, and the U.S. maintains a mutual security treaty with this country made up of 7,107 islands.²⁹ In terms of strategic location, the Philippines is near Malaysia and Brunei and is adjacent to critical sea lanes in the South China Sea, Philippine Sea, Sulu Sea, Celebes Sea and Luzon strait that are key for international commerce.³⁰ Further, the Philippines is rich in natural resources such as timber, petroleum, nickel, cobalt, silver, gold, salt, copper, and natural gas.³¹ Despite the wealth of natural resources, the economic potential of the Philippines has not been realized; some estimates claim that millions of Filipinos live abroad for employment, and this population of export workers is

considered one of their most productive of work forces.³² The Philippines has the potential to open its economy further to U.S. government and other foreign investments.³³ Nevertheless, the country must possess the conditions of stability and security to foster this growth.

Interests, which guide U.S. goals in the Philippines, include assisting the country to become a more stable, prosperous, and well-governed nation, and more importantly, one that does not provide safe-haven for terrorists.³⁴ Yet, the goal of defeating terrorists and fostering peace is a more daunting task in the Philippines due to several obstacles to U.S. interests, which include corruption, historical colonialism, poor governance, and poverty.³⁵ These obstacles fuel one of the greatest U.S. security concerns: the emergence and sustainment of terrorism and armed conflict in the Philippines. While these obstacles on one level are pervasive throughout Southeast Asia and in other regions of the world, there are peculiarities and unique circumstances in the Philippines that hinder change.³⁶

The first obstacle preventing stability and security in the Philippines is widespread corruption at all levels of the Philippine government.³⁷ According to the Corruption Perception Index 2010, which measures corruption of 178 countries on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean), the Philippines received a rating of 2.4 and ranked 134, only surpassing Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.³⁸ Many of the Philippine security concerns can be linked to the high level of corruption. This culture of corruption has been around so long that, “they don’t see it as corruption, but just another way of doing business.”³⁹ Certainly, this condition creates a major obstacle to internal reform.

According to former Ambassador to the Philippines, Ambassador (Ret) Charles B. Salmon, Jr., the problem of corruption resides in the Philippine's colonial history.⁴⁰ After almost 400 years of Spanish colonization and the presence of U.S. forces until the Philippines received its independence in 1946, the Filipinos have been living out their colonial experiences and have maintained a feudal structure in which politics are controlled by an elite oligarchy.⁴¹

Corruption and the country's colonial history have prevented effective governance. The members of the Philippine Congress and leaders who control the economy are for the most part related to one another.⁴² Those who have the most power and money pay the least taxes and the wealth of the country is founded on the backs of the poorest.⁴³ This directly impacts the economy, which is not performing at the level it should when you contrast the fact that Vietnam is now surpassing the Philippines in economic strength.⁴⁴ What keeps the country going economically is the fact that the Philippines sends 10 percent of its population overseas, generating a large percentage in remittances every year. The separation of military and civilian control is also often blurred as many Armed Forces of the Philippines officers have been placed into cabinet positions. The military and police are also reported to have significant corruption. Consequently, younger military personnel grow suspicious and lack confidence in their leaders and realize that to excel in the government, they must condone or subscribe to the corrupt atmosphere.⁴⁵

Poor governance and corruption have fueled the fruits of poverty: terrorism, separatist and communist insurgencies. Poverty, long-term colonialism and humiliation over being suppressed by the feudal and Catholic majority for centuries have given rise

to and sustained Islamic extremists groups like the Abu-Sayaaf Group (ASG), armed separatists groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the communist insurgents of the New People's Army (NPA).⁴⁶ Given the environment in the Philippines, it is not surprising these groups are able to recruit, train, thrive and conduct deadly attacks.⁴⁷

The ASG is one of the most extreme groups in the Philippines and has connections with al-Qaeda and affiliated groups such as Jemayaah Islamiya (JI).⁴⁸ Members of this group, now numbering about 350, have received training from foreign extremists and have provided safe-haven to transnational terrorists.⁴⁹ Most of the ASG trainers are from Indonesia and are difficult to identify as they blend in with the Philippine population.⁵⁰ Although small in number, the ASG has conducted some of the most violent attacks against civilian and Western targets including the 2004 firebombing of Philippine Super Ferry 14 with 116 deaths, a series of motorcycle assassinations in 2006 that left more than 70 dead, and planned simultaneous attacks on ASEAN summits in 2007.⁵¹ ASG has historical connections to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), the principal planner of the 9/11 attacks. KSM operated out of Manila in 1994 and planned attacks such as Operation Bojinka, which was the plot to simultaneously detonate multiple American commercial airplanes over the Pacific.⁵² The ASG maintains the most extreme views of all Islamic groups in the Philippines, and seeks to eradicate all Christian influence in the southern Philippines to create an Islamic state of Mindanao.⁵³ Consequently, the U.S. has focused most of its efforts in the Philippines on counterterrorism out of concern that the Philippines may become a safe-haven and training ground for international terror groups.⁵⁴ The outlook for ASG is still uncertain.

Some sources within the Philippines believe this group is still a threat and the U.S. forces should remain to keep the ASG and other extremist groups in check,⁵⁵ while others believe the ASG threat has diminished significantly in the past few years, suggesting that perhaps U.S. forces are no longer needed to address this threat.⁵⁶ Ambassador Salmon asserts that the ASG threat and links to foreign terrorism is exaggerated and that the U.S. should not use U.S. forces to support the Philippine counterterrorism struggle.⁵⁷

Still, ASG is just one of the Islamic-related groups that pose a threat to stability in the Philippines. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) founded in 1984 has contributed to the upwards of 120,000 people killed and hundreds of thousands displaced since the 1970s as a result of the separatist conflict in the southern Philippines.⁵⁸ The MILF's goal is to establish an independent state in Mindanao, but most recently engaged in peace talks with the Philippine government.⁵⁹ The Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the military arm of the MILF, is estimated to have between 11,000 and 15,000 fighters.⁶⁰ Despite its large size, arms and capabilities to launch more significant attacks against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the U.S. has been cautious about identifying this separatist group as a terror group.⁶¹

Despite the U.S. focus on ASG, the Philippine government leaders view the NPA as the most significant obstacle to security in the Philippines.⁶² The NPA is the armed branch of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and is a structured, hierarchical organization with approximately 5,000 fighters who seek to establish a socialist system through a protracted war.⁶³ According to the Philippine Army G-2, COL Paolo Miciano, the AFP spends most of their efforts on countering the NPA.⁶⁴ The NPA has repeatedly

carried out effective attacks against vital targets and infrastructure in the Philippines.⁶⁵

As with the MILF, the U.S. has been careful to not publicly label or target the NPA as a Foreign Terrorist Organization,⁶⁶ and the NPA is not part of the USPACOM overall security plan.⁶⁷

U.S. Interests and Security Concerns in Indonesia

Many Southeast Asia experts agree that Indonesia is the most strategically important country in Southeast Asia due to its population composition, natural resources, geographic location, rising economy, and emerging democracy.⁶⁸ Indonesia is home to the fourth largest population and the third largest democracy in the world.⁶⁹ The unique composition of the Indonesian population of 240 million, of which 86 percent are Muslims, and the fact that it has the largest Muslim population in the world, make Indonesia important to U.S. interests.⁷⁰ Indonesia is a moderate Muslim nation that allows the coexistence of six official religions. Indonesia demonstrates to the world that western democratic ideals and Islam can exist side-by-side, and this serves U.S. interests not only in Southeast Asia but also worldwide.⁷¹ According to Dr. Bill Weininger, Indonesia expert, Indonesia has an enormous set of natural resources from gold and copper to coal and bauxite and rare timber. It also sits astride some of the most critical sea lanes in the world, including the Malacca Strait, which is a key international commerce lane.⁷² Economically, it is the fastest growing G-20 Member, trailing only China and India.⁷³ Moreover, Indonesia's role as a regional stabilizer is becoming more critical as China exerts its interests in the region.⁷⁴

Indonesia's budding democracy, while promising, still poses some challenges to security. Indonesia only gained independence from the Netherlands in 1949 and is

slowly emerging as a representative democracy.⁷⁵ Consequently, corruption is not yet in check. According to the Corruption Index, Indonesia fares slightly better than the Philippines with a score of 2.8 and ranks 110 out of 128 nations.⁷⁶ Such corruption reduces the effectiveness of both the government and the military. Corruption feeds extremist ideology in Indonesia and around the globe.⁷⁷ Some Indonesian experts assert that a key to defeating corruption is defeating it at the highest levels. It could perhaps take generations to whittle away at corruption in Indonesia; there would have to be a succession of enlightened leaders to transform the country.⁷⁸ The consequence of a culture of corruption is ineffective governance which breeds poverty, human rights abuses and lack of equitable education.⁷⁹ In a Muslim nation, poverty and abuses can easily turn uneducated youth toward madrassas for education. Many of these madrassas indoctrinate its youth with extremist Islamic ideology modeled after cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, who has been arrested recently and is on trial for his promotion of Jihad.⁸⁰

Indonesia's demographics, fledgling democracy, and culture of corruption are potential obstacles to security as the combination of these elements facilitates the potential breeding of Islamic extremism and global Jihad.⁸¹ This point, however, is inconclusive as some experts do not see extremism in Indonesia as a concern for U.S. interests⁸² and others see this as a significant security concern⁸³ due to the fact that it is home to the largest Muslim population in the world. Radical ideology remains a concern for Indonesia to the extent that they have formed a deradicalization element in their counterterrorism organization.⁸⁴ Theoretically, even if only 1 percent of the population

espouses radical Islamic ideals, the number would still equal 240,000 Muslims with extreme ideology.

Bashir's name is closely associated with Jemaah Islamiya (JI), which is the most active terror group within Indonesia with links to al-Qaeda.⁸⁵ JI is also termed by some as the Southeast Asian al-Qaeda.⁸⁶ JI is most known for its deadly attacks in the Bali Bombings I and II in 2002 and 2005, Bombing of JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003, the Australian Embassy bombing in 2004, the Bombing of the Philippine SuperFerry 14 in 2004, and the Ritz-Carlson and the JW Marriott in 2009.⁸⁷ JI seeks to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia, and such a state would be the catalyst for Islamic governance across Southeast Asia. This regional Islamic vision, their successful violent attacks, and international affiliations make this group the most radical of the many Islamic groups in Indonesia.⁸⁸

The aggressive counterterrorism efforts by the Indonesian police, particularly Detachment 88, has upset and slowed operational progress of JI and its affiliated groups.⁸⁹ However, the radical Islamic ideology continues to spread throughout the country and given the effective use of social networks and the web, resurgence could occur.⁹⁰

Current Role of the U.S. Military

USPACOM holds the primary responsibility for U.S. military operations in the Asia-Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR), in which Indonesia and the Philippines rest. USPACOM Commander Admiral Robert F. Willard has included strengthening partnerships to “build capacity over the full spectrum of military activities” and to “promote military professionalism . . . to build trust and increase multilateral

effectiveness” as part of his commander’s guidance.⁹¹ USPACOM’s focus areas also include countering transnational threats through partnerships, while building capacity to disrupt violent extremist organization networks.⁹²

Admiral Willard and the USPACOM Strategic Policy and Planning J5 staff responsible for the Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP) in Southeast Asia are well aware of the obstacles to securing security interests in the Philippines and Indonesia.⁹³ To address these challenges, USPACOM has elected to use a whole of government and multinational approach in the region. To facilitate this approach Admiral Willard has become the first commander in USPACOM to establish a separate Interagency Directorate, the J9, to collaborate with other U.S. government agencies. Through this venue, other government agencies work together with PACOM to effectively engage nations in the Asia-Pacific AOR.⁹⁴

In addition, USPACOM has established a detailed TSCP to facilitate cooperation and collaboration in the Philippines, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries.⁹⁵ In the Philippines, the annual Balikatan Exercise and in Indonesia, the annual Garuda Shield Exercises both serve as venues to enhance multinational partnerships and establish trust.⁹⁶ There are multiple military to military and civilian to military exchanges and partnerships to enhance military and civilian capacity including tactical training, information sharing and joint civil military exercises to address a multitude of security issues.⁹⁷ Since 2002, partnerships and cooperation with the U.S. has increased, even more so after the Bali JI attacks as well as other significant terror attacks in the Philippines and Indonesia.⁹⁸ For this reason, USPACOM places emphasis on engagement and relationship building to gain trust and dialogue that enables

multinational militaries to engage more effectively during a crisis mode. By sustaining multinational relationships, countries will already have familiarity and trust established. There is a built-in trust that should exist prior to an event rather than just meeting at the crisis point.⁹⁹ Further, in 2005, the Secretary of State reestablished normal military relations with Indonesia and allowed greater opportunities to support military reform and increase its capacity to respond to natural disasters and regional stability.¹⁰⁰

The use of the Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) has been one of the most successful counterterrorism operations in the region. The model of using JSOTF-P in the Philippines, not as a kinetic force, but one of an advisor, and in a support role has proven to be very effective.¹⁰¹ The JSOTF-P has been conducting operations since 2002 and conducts counterterrorism support operations in the Sulu, Tawi Tawi, Basilan and Maguindanao provinces that make up the Autonomous Region of Muslims (AARM).¹⁰² After the first three years of U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Southern PI, there was a drastic reduction in kidnappings and beheadings along with the elimination of many ASG fighters.¹⁰³ The low profile, non-kinetic employment of the JSOTF-P dispelled the notion that the U.S. was an occupying force, and demonstrated sensitivity to the Philippines' colonial history and resentments. The model used was a success in Basilan and was exported to Jolo.¹⁰⁴ According to a high-level Philippine government official, "If the U.S. forces leave the Philippines, it will be chaos in the Philippines. Without the help of the U.S. Government, the extremists would flourish. They are checked with the presence of the U.S. military. If the U.S. stays in the Philippines, JI and ASG will be in check."¹⁰⁵

Implications for the future role of U.S. Military in Southeast Asia

U.S. strategic leaders should invest in measuring U.S. military effectiveness in the Philippines and Indonesia as the U.S. continues to commit monetary and personnel resources to the region on a tightening budget. Taking the time to assess current U.S. military activities in these countries can facilitate refining the military's role without draining limited resources. Southeast Asia experts in the field agree that sustaining effective partnerships and engagements assist the U.S. in securing U.S. interests in the region. Additionally, maintaining low-profile counterterrorism support in the Philippines is one of the most effective counterterrorism strategies that should be modeled for future operations. Moreover, the U.S. military would be hard-pressed to sustain the security challenges in Southeast Asia alone, and therefore must be an integral partner in the whole-of-government approach, not just in word, but also in deed.

In order to determine implications for the U.S. military role in securing interests in Southeast Asia, strategic leaders should measure the current effectiveness based on realistic expectations, goals and outcomes.¹⁰⁶ The current mechanism USPACOM has in place to measure the effectiveness of the Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP) is the Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System (TSCMIS). Its purpose is to collect feedback from engagements.¹⁰⁷ The reality is that USPACOM has difficulty making the tool effective as it does not account for the DOS and Embassy engagements, but looks at military engagements alone.¹⁰⁸ If the assessment does not take into account the whole-of-government perspectives, then TSCMIS will only reflect a singular aspect of the complete picture.¹⁰⁹ A qualitative but reliable mechanism to measure effectiveness is the Foreign Area Officers serving in these countries. They

along with intelligence feedback and reports from defense attaches provide real-time feedback from the host nations.¹¹⁰ Another subjective tool to measure effectiveness is the open source media, which often reflects atmospherics and local attitudes.¹¹¹

In addition to accurate measures of effectiveness, the U.S. military should sustain partnerships, engagements, and exchanges in the Philippines and Indonesia to secure interests in these countries. The U.S. military would be more effective by examining its approach in these countries and ensuring that those who engage take into consideration each country's unique culture, history and demographics. Furthermore, partnerships should be approached more equitably. According to Ambassador Salmon, "The American military is not particularly good at partnerships despite our protestations. Generally, we are overbearing, and we want to do it our way. We get impatient with people who don't do it the way we want . . . This is especially hard in the Philippines that has had the colonial experience . . . Business as usual is not good."¹¹² A well-placed Philippine official stated in a closed interview, "Sometimes Americans look at themselves like they are god. The way they are perceived. When we (leaders) do not maintain the highest standards, it provides fuel for (insurgent) groups."¹¹³ One way to bridge this gap is to promote and sustain Asia-Pacific partnerships between Guam and Hawaii National Guard units and the Philippines and Indonesia respectively. The established National Guard State Partnership Program with the Philippines and Indonesia allows relationships to maintain long-term continuity.¹¹⁴

As the U.S. military engages with these countries, its leaders should examine realistic expectations and examine the programs that have had success and eliminate those that bear no fruit.¹¹⁵ When the U.S. engages these countries, its leaders should

also think in broader terms and involve other countries as well. For instance, the Indonesian military, Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI) is becoming more involved with Singapore and Malaysia. The U.S. should promote these types of partnerships within the region and within its internal agencies. As the U.S. military engages, its personnel should have an understanding of varying aspects of governance in the host nations.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, young, rising mid- to high-level Filipino and Indonesian military leaders should be the focus of country exchanges. The Philippines and Indonesia would benefit greatly by sending its rising leaders to U.S. military schools. Such leader development fosters transparent leadership development as well as democratic ideals, which could impact the Philippine and Indonesian militaries and government institutions.¹¹⁷ Military and political leaders who have been trained or educated in the U.S. have often returned to the Philippines to become successful leaders who promote effective governance.¹¹⁸ For this reason, the U.S. should facilitate military educational exchanges. However, Ambassador Salmon is skeptical that such exchanges at U.S. expense are actually as effective as assumed. He stated that the U.S. has been doing exchanges for 65 years, and the corruption level in the military and government has not changed significantly. He asserts that real reform comes from within the country, not from external forces.¹¹⁹

Despite this position, USPACOM is committed to leadership and training exchanges as it has realized positive results. The U.S. military should sustain its low-profile role in the counterterrorism efforts in the Philippines and Indonesia. The JSOTF-P operation in Southern Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago Region is an example of the U.S. military supporting the AFP without being directly involved in kinetic

operations. At the same time, the U.S. military should not attempt to impose this model on Indonesia because it worked in the Philippines, as each country's needs should be assessed based on their unique environment. In Indonesia, Detachment 88 has been successful in disrupting JI and its affiliates. The model of using the Indonesian police rather than the TNI for counterterrorism has added legitimacy to the government of Indonesia.¹²⁰ This model should be further studied and exported as it does not place internal counterterrorism in the hands of the military, but follows judicial procedures and constructs legal cases against terrorists and convicts them through the courts.¹²¹ According to Indonesia analyst, Rob Sargent from the APCSS, "The U.S. would do well not to disrupt this structure that has been effective in upsetting JI planning, procurement, training and execution."¹²²

Additionally, the U.S. military should enhance its interagency coordination to build the capacity of Indonesia and the Philippines as well as promote multinational collaboration with regional partners. The U.S. military should continue to work with agencies such as USAID to strengthen Mindanao by focusing on infrastructure, environment, education, health, local governance and economic growth.¹²³ "There is anger at the U.S. for perceived condoning of the Philippine government corruption and injustices."¹²⁴ For this reason, the U.S. military should work with regional partners to address the root causes of the rise and sustainment of extremism and armed conflict in the region.

In conclusion, U.S. security interests in the Philippines and Indonesia will continue to draw increasing attention as China hedges its way through Southeast Asia and as ASEAN increases its economic trade agreements with the U.S. The obstacles

to achieving stability and security in Southeast Asia are not limited to transnational terror threats; despite this reality, U.S. monetary, intelligence and personnel resources have focused on the counterterrorism concerns in the Philippines and Indonesia. This focus is driven by the potential transnational terrorism threats to U.S. interests abroad and in the U.S. Homeland. However, the concern that if these countries are left unsupported by the U.S., they will then become breeding grounds for transnational terror and potentially become isolated extremist training camps for terrorism export is a contested point. Ambassador Salmon believes that this concern is exaggerated and that it would be very unlikely that the Philippines would become a site for the exportation of terror, and feels the U.S. response to the uncovering of the Operation Bojinka plot was an overblown reaction.¹²⁵ Indonesia expert, Dr. Jim Wieninger from the APCSS, believes that Indonesia does not need the TNI or U.S. military to be involved in the counterterrorism struggle in Indonesia, nor should the U.S. pressure the TNI to become involved in an already effective Indonesian counterterrorism strategy.¹²⁶ Despite these counter views from some in academia, the U.S. security goals and strategies focus on deterring the threat of transnational terror, and that is reflected in the USPACOM strategy to support counterterrorism threats in Indonesia and the Philippines through a variety of methods. Most of these methods reflect that of a soft-power approach using partnerships, exchanges, bilateral exercises and the employment of low-profile JSOTF-P forces. The obstacles to securing interests in Southeast Asia should not be addressed by the military alone, but all elements of national power are essential in bringing peace and stability to the region. Strategic leaders should coordinate efforts to

address the root causes of the security obstacles in the Philippines and Indonesia, which include corruption, weak government capacity, poverty, and poor education.

Moreover, U.S. military strategic leaders should continually reassess their methods and approaches to accurately measure effectiveness. Leaders should make appropriate adjustments to training programs as U.S. forces engage and partner with Southeast Asian countries. In constructing these assessments, the U.S. military should work in concert with its interagency and multinational partners. Questions addressing whether USPACOM should remove JSOTF-P from the Philippines should be closely examined. Ambassador Salmon argues that it is time to “remove the training wheels from the bike,” and the U.S. JSTOF-P has been in the Philippines long enough.¹²⁷ This is a decision that must also consider the possibility of China filling the gap if the U.S. should leave, given the Philippines government’s recent appeasement of China regarding human rights violations.¹²⁸ U.S. leaders should also question the way in which it educates those who engage, partner and conduct exercises with Southeast Asian nations for U.S. efforts can be nullified by arrogance and imbalanced relationship building. Also, U.S. military leaders assert that the whole-of-government approach is necessary for securing U.S. interests in these countries, but how well is the U.S. military actually ensuring that it is a true partner with other agencies?

According to Lt. Gen. (R) E.P. Smith, the Director of the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, “The challenge we have most is how do we collaborate and cooperate in rising roles and interests . . . not just the military, but as a nation we are prioritizing our interfaces throughout the globe.” He also stated during a personal interview, that

the U.S. is now trying to engage in more comprehensive ways to be more constructive for partnering in the future, and “everyone is trying to figure out how we do that.”¹²⁹

Endnotes

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