

Discourse On Abu Sayyaf Group: A Secessionist Movement In Southern Philippines

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Abstract: *The Islamic insurgency movement in southern Philippines has been ongoing since the initial colonization efforts of the Spanish. It has continued through the American, and later Philippine Republic controlled government, and is controlled by a number of indigenous groups with Christian orientation, that share the cultural identity of the Moro or the Filipino Muslims. Abu Sayyaf group, which is one of the smallest, but most violent Muslim movements in the Philippines, has conducted a series of terrorist attacks with the hope of establishing an autonomous Islamic republic. The attempts to establish by the group an Islamic state in the Southern Philippines have failed. The aims of this paper is to interrogate why the Abu Sayyaf group has deviated from its original aims of establishing or pursuing Islamic state ideology in southern Philippines and they resorted into various activities like piracy, kidnappings extortions, beheadings, and killings of people through abduction when their ransom demand were not paid, and their activities was described as un-Islamic. And this paper recommended that the Philippines Government should monitor the activities of non-governmental organization operating in southern Philippines because some are supporting the activities of the group, and also The government of Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia should organized a joint military task force that will be patronizing the sea of southeast Asia, to stop the growing numbers of attacks on ships and Tankers passing through, the congested straits of Malacca, in other to disband the activities of the Abu sayyaf*

Keywords: Abu Sayyaf, Anatomy, Physiology, Southern Philippines, Islamic State, Ideology.

1 .Introduction

Abdurajak Janjalani founded the Abu Sayyaf Group in 1989 as al-Harakatul al-Islamiyyah (AHAI), also known as the Islamic Movement (Banlaoi, 2010). Muslim traders from Indonesia brought Islam to the Philippines in the 14th century. Muslim communities were established in the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao in the southern Philippines (Turbiville, 2002). Conflict in the region began with Ferdinand Magellan and the Spanish conquest, which led to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines in 1565. The Catholic Spanish converted large areas of the northern Philippines to Catholicism, but they were met with opposition in the Muslim south (Background Information Summaries, 2005).

Janjalani, on the other hand, was a charismatic and serious Muslim scholar, not just a Muslim fighter or mujahideen. Janjalani was born on the Philippine island of Basilan, which is now a stronghold for the Abu Sayyaf group. He attended high school at the Catholic-run Claret College in the Basilan capital, Isabela. Despite not finishing high school, he received a scholarship from the Saudi government to the Ummu I-Qura in Mecca, where he studied Islamic jurisprudence for three years (Glenda, 2000). Later, in Pakistan, he studied the Islamic revolution and became fascinated by the concept of jihad. Janjalani returned to Basilan in 1984 and began preaching to small groups at the Santa Barbara madrassa in Zamboanga City. He bemoaned the plight of Muslim Filipinos as victims of oppression, injustice, and a lack of development, urging them to fight and die for Allah's sake, thus earning paradise as martyrs (Samuel, 2000). Following his brief preaching stint in Zamboanga City, Janjalani founded the Juma'a Abu Sayyaf, also known as the Abu Sayyaf Group in English. The name was mistranslated as "bearer of the sword," but it actually means "Father of the Swordsman," a reference to and honoring Afghan resistance leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (Jose, 2001).

Following the defeat of the Spanish in the Spanish-American War, the United States took control of the Philippines under the Treaty of Paris in 1898. Despite uprisings in both the north and south, the Philippine Insurgency in the north ended in 1902. The resistance lasted until 1946, when the Philippines gained independence (Turbiville, 2002). Despite the fact that the Philippines were unified as one country following Japanese occupation and the end of World War II, the divide between north and south remained. The Muslim south felt unrepresented and unsupported by their government. Catholic Christians from the north were persuaded to relocate south and were given titles to their newly acquired land. This was interpreted as a threat to the Muslim south's land and communities. Furthermore, the Moros felt they did not have equal access to education, the legal system, or medical care. This, combined with religious differences, fueled renewed opposition to their government and support for a Moro independent state (Turbiville, 2002).

Janjalani gathered followers for his new movement in Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga City, and General Santos City. Most were disgruntled former Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front members (MILF). The Abu Sayyaf group lacked sufficient funds to advance its Program during its early stages. Abu Sayyaf sought foreign funding under the guise of Al Haratatull-Islamiya (Philippines Department of Defense, 2001).

2. The Organizational Structure of the Abu Sayyaf Group under Late Abdu Rajak Janjalani

Janjalani purposefully created a detailed organizational structure of the Abu Sayyaf group in order to achieve his vision of a truly organized Muslim resistant group in the Philippines (Rommel, 2008). He established the Islamic Executive Council, which consisted of fifteen Amirs. Janjalani presided over the Islamic executive council, which served as the Abu Sayaf group's main planning and execution body. Two special committees were established under the Islamic executive council. The Jamiatul Al-Islamia Revolutionary Tabligh Group was the first committee in charge of fund rising and Islamic education. The second committee was the Al-Misuaratt Khutbah Committee, which was in charge of agitation and propaganda (Headquarter of the Philippines Marine Corps 2002).

The Abu Sayyaf group also established a military wing called Mujahidden Al- Sharifullah, whose members were mostly disgruntled Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front members. This military arm had three main units to carry out all of the Abu Sayyaf group's terrorist activities: the Demolition Team, the Mobile Force Team, and the Campaign Propaganda Team. The Demolition Team, which was mostly made up of trained fighters, was capable of producing its own mines and explosives for use in the group's bombing operations. The Mobile Force Team, which was mostly made up of radio club affiliates, traders, businessmen, shippers, and professionals, was in charge of the Abu Sayyaf group's collaboration and coordination activities. The Campaign Propaganda Team, comprised of professionals, students, and businessmen, was in charge of gathering critical information required to carry out Mujahidden Al-mission. Sharifullah's (Phillippine Marine Corps 2002).

However, the original organizational structure of the Abu Sayyaf group was short-lived. When the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines killed Janjalani in a bloody encounter in Lamitan, Basilan, in December 1998, the Abu Sayyaf group suffered a severe leadership vacuum. As a result, some of its founding members were dissatisfied. Janjalani's organization crumbled quickly with him. The Islamic executive council, led by Janjalani, also died prematurely. With no overall Amir at the helm of the organization, it devolved into a mere network of various armed groups, each with their own Amir commanding their own loyal followers and operating primarily in Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi (Rommel, 2008).

2.1 The Organizational Structure of Abu Sayyaf under Late Abdul Rajak Janjalani

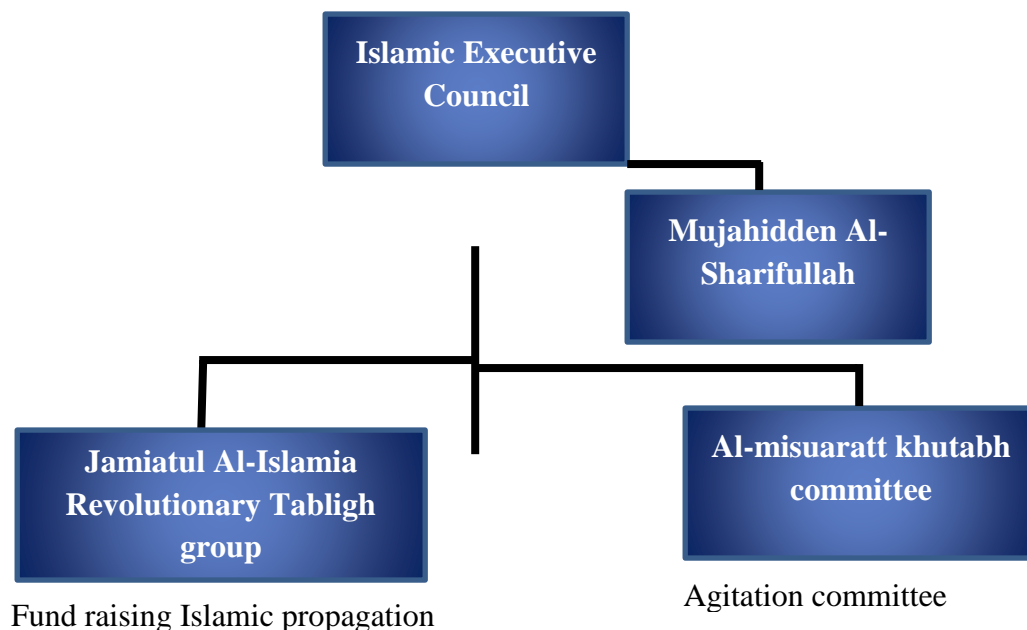


Figure 1: Source Rommel .C.B, 2008

2.2 Leadership Dynamics in the Abu Sayyaf Group

According to various Philippine Armed Forces reports, there were two major factions of the Abu Sayyaf group operating independently in two major areas of the Southern Philippines: Basilan and Sulu. The Basilan-based Abu Sayyaf group is still led by Khadafy Janjalani. Galib Andang, also known as Commander Robot, led the Abu Sayyaf group based in Sulu. However, with the capture of Commander Robot in December 2003, the Sulu group unexpectedly lost its leader. On March 15, 2005, Commander Robot was killed in a bloody jailbreak attempt (Rommel 2008).

Radulan Sahiron now commands the Abu Sayyaf group based in Sulo. Other Arm Force of the Philippines reports mentioned another faction of the Abu Sayyaf group operating in Zamboanga City, led by Hadji Radzpal. Other intelligence sources, however, identified Hadji Radzpl as one of the leaders of the Abu Sayyaf group's Sulu-based faction. Local leaders in Zamboanga City have denied the existence of the Abu Sayyaf group faction. As of 2002, the Abu Sayyaf group in Basilan had 73 members. These were hardliners from the Abu Sayyaf group, including 30 personal followers of Khadafy Janjalani, 30 personal followers of Isnillon Hapilon, and 13 followers of Abu Sabaya. The Hapilon group was the main security arm of the Abu Sayyaf group based in Basilan. The group of Abu Sabaya, on the other hand, joined the group of Khadafy Janjalani in running the group daily planning and administrative affairs (Rommel, 2008).

The Philippine military claimed that Sabaya and two others were killed in a naval encounter in June 2002. However, Sabaya's body was never found, sparking speculation that he is still alive, despite the Armed Forces of the Philippines' repeated declarations that Sabaya was among those who died and drowned in the waters of Sibuco Bay in Zamboanga Del Norte (Minda 2002). Under the command of late Commander Robot, the Sulu-based became a loose organization of Muslim bandits. On April 23, 2000, this faction of the Abu Sayyaf group was responsible for the kidnapping of 21 tourists staying at a resort on Malaysia's Sipadan Island. The Aabu Sayyaf group's Basilan and Sulu factions were also divided into separate groups, each with its own leader. As of 2002, the Basilan-based faction had ten armed groups, while the Sulu-based faction had sixteen armed groups. It is clear from these groups that the Abu Sayyaf group is not a homogeneous organization. Rather, the Abu Sayyaf group is a loose coalition of many groups of radical Muslim leaders and bandits commanding their own loyal followers in the Southern Philippines, according to (Rommel,2008). According to the various factions, the organizational structure of the Abu Sayaf group was far from what late Abdurajak Janjalani had envisioned.

2.3 Structure of Abu Sayyaf under late Khadafy Janjalani

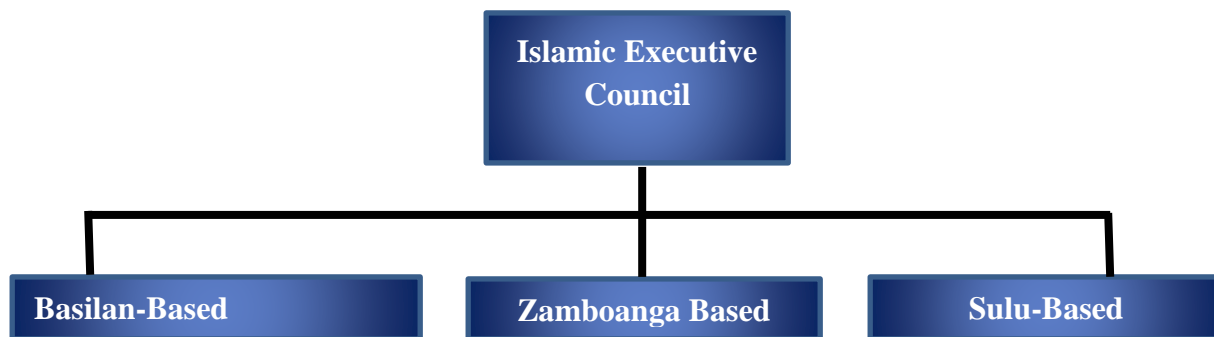


Figure 2: Source Rommel .C.B, 2008

3. The Reasons for the Emergence of Abu Sayyaf Group

Soliman (2005). (2005). Provides an excellent summary of the Bangsamoro issue in which the Abu Sayyaf Group is embroiled:

This issue is the historical and systematic marginalization and minoritization of Islamized ethno-linguistic groups known as Moros in their own homeland in the Mindanao islands, first by colonial powers Spain from the 16th to the 19th centuries, then by the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, and more recently by successor Philippine governments dominated by a Christian-Western elite since formal independence in 1946. This marked the full-fledged Filipino nation-statehood, but it also marked the end of Moro independence because Moro land was incorporated (Moro nationalists would say annexed) into Philippine territory.

Only 25% of the land in Basilan Province, which is controlled by the Abu Sayyaf group, is owned by Muslims, with the remainder owned by the Christian population. This creates a strong sense of hostility between Muslims and Christians in the area. Samira (2004) Regardless of political affiliation or theological beliefs, all Muslim radical groups in the Philippines support the Bangsamoro struggle. The term Bangsa is derived from the Malay word for nation. When Spanish colonizers confused the Muslim people of Mindanao with the moors of North Africa, they coined the term Moro (Peter, 1975). Though the term Bangsamoro is used to describe the national identity of Muslims in the Philippines, Muslim leaders regard the Bangsamoro struggle as the country's longest national liberation movement, spanning nearly 400 years of violent resistance against Spanish, American, Japanese, and even Filipino rule (Samuel, 2003). This 400-year history of Moro resistance informs the current struggle of the Abu Sayyaf group for a separate Islamic state (Rommel, 2006). This historical context of conflict and inequality is deeply ingrained in Abu Sayyaf's current advocacy (Charles, 2004).

4. Aims and Objectives of Abu Sayyaf Group

A study of a Philippine military official who was once assigned to fight the Abu Sayyaf group reveals:

In the early 1990s, Abdurajak Janjalani founded the Abu Sayyaf Group with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the Southern Philippines, breaking away from the Moro National Liberation Front led by Nur Misuari. The inadequacy of Misuari's Muslim socioeconomic reforms exacerbated Muslims' social grievances, which became a source of violence and strife (Benhur, 2003).

When Janjalani returned to the Philippines in mid-1989, he left the Moro national liberation front and founded Al-Harakatul Islamiyya as a vehicle to be used once more for an independent country, national identity, and, most importantly, Islam, meaning an Islamic state for the Bangsamoro. He outlined the Abu Sayyaf Group's ultimate goal in a public proclamation: establishing a pure Islamic government through a necessary war to seek kaadilan (justice) for Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu (Tan, 1995: 96).

The Abu Sayyaf group seeks to establish an Islamic state in Mindanao, independent of the rest of the Philippines, for the Filipino minority known as the bangsamoro struggle, in which Filipino Muslims are concentrated in the southern Philippines, where Muslim merchants who arrived in the 1300s or earlier have long clashed with the Spanish, American, and Filipino governments who have sought to oppress them. The Abu Sayyaf group also wants to drive out Christian settlers from Luzon and the Visayas, two other Philippine regions. With government encouragement, these Christian settlers began migrating to the southern Philippines in 1910, and they now make up 75% of the region (Mapping militant organizations, 2015). The Abu Sayyaf Group declared in a public statement issued in November 1994 that its struggle was for kaadilan, or justice, for the Bangsamoro people. Abdurajak Janjalani emphasized in one of his ideological discourses or Khutbahs that "the initial objectives for redress of grievances or attainment of justice ultimately ends in the demand for a purely Islamic state as the surest guarantee of justice and prosperity for Muslims." (Tan, 1995).

5. Abu Sayyaf Group from Islamic State Ideology: to Banditry in Southern Philippines

According to Abdurajak Janjalani, the Abu Sayyaf group's ultimate goal is to establish a purely Islamic government in the southern Philippines, whose nature, meaning, emblem, and goal are fundamental to peace (Abdurajak 1993). Abuza was also correct when he stated that the Abu Sayyaf Group devolved into a bandit group between 1995 and 2001. Following the death of Abdurajak Janjalani in 1998, the Abu Sayyaf Group began kidnapping for ransom. The Abu Sayyaf Group was involved in 140 kidnapping for ransom incidents in 2000-2001 alone, resulting in the deaths of 16 victims (Abuza, 2005).

Following the death of Abdurajak Janjalani, the remaining leaders reluctantly chose Khadafy Janjalani, his younger brother, as his successor in July 1999. However, the Abu Sayyaf group, led by Khadafy Janjalani, had lost its original organizational structure as well as its Islamic theological zeal. Unlike his elder brother, the younger Janjalani lacked his brother's theological zeal. Due to a lack of a strong ideological guide, the majority of its members turned to banditry, piracy, kidnapping for ransom, and other terrorist activities. The Abu Sayyaf group was heavily factionalized as well. However, it was reported that Khadafy Janjalani attempted to revive the Abu Sayaf group's Islamist agenda. His plan was thwarted when he died in January 2007. (Rommel, 2008).

Piracy and maritime terrorism are inherent in the Abu Sayyaf group's capabilities. The majority of Abu Sayyaf group members and followers come from Muslim families and fishing communities with a century-long seafaring tradition. Members of the Abu Sayyaf group are very familiar with the maritime environment because they live near the waters of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. In fact, the majority of Muslim Filipinos who live in coastal communities are seasoned divers. Members of the Abu Sayyaf group have

extensive knowledge of the maritime domain, which allows them to conduct piracy and carry out maritime terrorist attacks (Rommel 2008).

The February 2004 bombing of Super Ferry 14 demonstrated the Abu Sayyaf Group's maritime terrorist capability. According to Philippine intelligence reports from July 2005, Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyya fighters received underwater training in Sandakan, Malaysia, in preparation for attacks on maritime targets such as ports and commercial vessels (Michael, 2005). Officials from the Philippine Coast Guard even admitted that the Abu Sayyaf group was posing an increasing threat to the Philippines in terms of piracy and maritime terrorism. Manila has even been named as one of 26 city ports and anchorages that are vulnerable to such maritime attacks (Agence, 2003).

(Frake, 1998) The Abu Sayyaf groups could be classified as "quasi-bandit" and "quasi-rebel." The Tausugs, another important ethnic component of the Abu sayya, have a history of seafaring slave-raiding in the Sulu Sultanate in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including some ransom seizures of Catholic missionaries. Today's Abu Sayyaf raiders appear to be animated by the same centuries-old meme (described by Richard Dawkins as the cultural equivalent of the biological gene) that once animated their slave-raiding forefathers (David, 2000.; Vitug, 2001; 22). Contemporary manifestations of this'meme' could include not only the Abu'sayyaf group's earlier kidnapping for ransom activities, but also its more recent maritime piracy and terrorism Banlaoi (2005; 2006).

When Moros refer to the Manila government as a government of foreign people' (referring to mainstream Filipinos), the Abu Sayyaf group has been able to capitalize on the long-standing Moro rejection of state authority, whether Spanish, American, or Filipino. In light of this, the Abu Sayyaf group is not necessarily regarded as "extremist bandits" in the communities in which it operates, but has gained some popular support in some parts of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi as a result of kidnapping operations (Turner, 2003, 392; Gutoc, 2003). From 1992 to 1998, a former Abu Sayyaf group urban hit squad leader in Basilan recalled:

People supported us because when we received ransom money from the kidnappings, we gave it to them. When they asked for pump boats (motorized outriggers), which we provided for their livelihood, they would hide our firearms, making it impossible for the military to catch or follow us (Longid,1994).

The image of harmless Robin Hood-style banditry clashes with later, more lucrative kidnappings, including of foreigners. Even when pursuing predatory or criminal banditry, the Abu Sayyaf group has been able to differentiate itself from other kidnap-for-ransom gangs, such as the Pentagon Gang in Central Mindanao. Randy David, a Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist and sociology professor, dubbed them "postmodern bandits," with all the literal and figurative connotations that term implies:

Nothing stands out more than the image of an Abu Sayyaf bandit wearing a ski mask under Ralph Lauren sunglasses, brandishing an automatic weapon and communicating ransom demands via satellite mobile phone. He speaks a mix of Islam, ethno-nationalism, and anti-modernism. He talks to the media like a politician, negotiates with diplomats and public officials, but abducts a third wife. He accepts foreign currency ransom payments in cash or by digital transfer to a numbered bank account. He talks about settling in an orange plantation in his backyard, while his comrades plot future raids on foreigners on vacation in island luxury resorts (David, 2000).

Other scholars, particularly Eduardo F. Ugarte, call David's catchy characterization of the Abu Sayyaf group as "postmodern" into question, pointing to evidence of continuity with past traditions. Because of their prominent roles in the most sensational kidnappings, Sabaya and Ghalib Adang (known as Commander Robot) have been largely responsible for the Abu Sayyaf Group's bandit imprint. By 2001, they appeared to have tipped the scales in favor of the Abu Sayyaf group being viewed as "bandits and entrepreneurs of violence," using their reputation and capacity for violence as capital to gain relative security, power, and control in a highly volatile area, as well as the money, resources, and respect required for self-perpetuation (Gutierrez, 2000).

Accounts of victims of the three major hostage crises of 2000-02, all of whom have published at least one book about their experience, support the view of the Abu Sayyaf group as bandits rather than rebels (Torres, 2001; Aventajado, 2004; Burnham, 2003). In the cases of the hostage takings on Sipadan and Dos Palmas, for example, it quickly became clear that money was the goal, gained not only through the main ransom demands but also through brazen financial charges to foreign journalists for access to guides and interviews with Abu Sayyaf group leaders and hostages (Ressa, 2003). Political demands and Islamic rhetoric rang hollow in the midst of such profiteering. A Catholic priest kidnapped in the earlier Basilan incident attempted to comprehend his Abu Sayyaf Group captors:

He considered them to be fundamentalists. They were devout Muslims who constantly prayed and talked about defending Islam. Later, he realized they were only out to make money. They were only using Islam as a cover. It was simple for them to gain followers because they offered large sums of money to entice people to join them (Torres 2001).

During the Dos Palmas hostage crisis, Khadaffy Janjalani, Abu Sabaya, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon (alias Abu Musab), and two Abu Sayyaf group sub-leaders took five of the hostages as wives (Burnham and Merrill, 2003). Sabaya had done the same with a teacher held hostage in the previous Basilan incident, with Khadaffy's knowledge and approval (Torres, 2001). The Abu Sayyaf has justified kidnapping on several occasions, despite the fact that it is a criminal act and is condemned as un-Islamic by the Moro national liberation front and the Moro Islamic liberation front. A spokesman for the Abu Sayyaf group in Basilan described kidnapping as "part of the revolution," a type of jihadi struggle (Quimpo, 1999).

According to Khadaffy Janjalani, "philosophically, if it is permissible to kill the enemy, why not simply kidnap him?" Religiously, who else but the Prophet of Islam gave the order to kidnap or seize Abu Suffian's caravan? So, what's the difference between kidnapping and seizure back then and now? 'An Abu Sayyaf group manifesto distributed during the Sipadan hostage crisis justified it in historical terms: for about 100 years, the Bangsamoro people have been made hostages under the rule of democracy, the colonial government in Manila kidnapped the Bangsamoro people's sovereignty. This is the truth, and it is a barbaric act against humanity' (Agence France Presse, 2000; emphasis added). Another justification for the kidnappings, according to an Abu Sayyaf group sympathizer in Basilan, is the impact on the media: if there is no other way, if that is their last chance to be heard. It is difficult to gain attention, especially for people like us who live in underserved areas of our country (Labog-Javellana, 2000).

When a British-Canadian mining consultant was beheaded by an Islamic kidnapping gang in the southern Philippines, the country's leaders vowed to use all military force to defeat the Abu Sayaf militia. But there has been no sign of progress in the week since in the relentless manhunt for the outnumbered gunmen who murdered John Risdell and are still holding three other hostages abducted with him. The captives are the most recent victims of the burgeoning kidnap-for-ransom operations carried out by small bands of Abu Sayyaf fighters who combine ruthless banditry with religious zealotry (Philip, 2016).

The militants, whose leaders have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State faction, have released a final message video of the remaining hostages, which features two western men wearing orange shirts and Filipina women wearing black head-clothes. There have been reports of new military buildups in the region, where four Malaysian captives are also held, fueling speculation that outgoing President Benigno Aquino may order a new offensive in his final month in office. However, in the past, such action has usually resulted in ambushes and high military casualties. In the new video, Robert Hall, a Canadian sailor who is now gaunt and emaciated after eight months in captivity, appeals for help to President Rodrigo Duterte, the first time the country's next leader is directly involved in the crisis. In the video, Mr. Hall says, 'I came into your beautiful country in good faith and in peace, and here I am. We hope that you can work on our behalf as soon as possible to get us out of here, and the sooner the better.' 2016 (Philip).

Mr. Hall will be kidnapped if a \$6.5 million ransom is not paid, according to Abu Sayyaf. By 3 p.m. on June 13, a Norwegian and a Filipina will suffer the same gruesome fate as Mr. Risdell. In recent months, the band of hostage takers has grown more brazen in their speed boat seeking kidnap borne raids, seeking kidnap targets far from their stronghold, and instilling fear of raids on tourist areas. The terrain and local support certainly favor the militant in their lair, the lawless strife-torn Sulu Archipelago. They hide out on jungle-covered islands, dividing their time between piracy and farming jack fruit and durian (Philip, 2016).

However, regional security experts have now described to telegraph how the profit is shared between corrupt official and military commanders, religious leaders and tribes leaders, and distributed down to the local villagers who provide food and cover, not to mention the foot soldiers of Abu Sayyaf and arm procurers. The simple fact is that it is in no one's local interest for this kidnapping to end when there are so many people who benefit from the system. According to the security analyst, this business has pumped millions into the local economy in an island chain described by regional security expert Michael Vatikiotis as a hotbed of piracy, clan loyalties, and warriors. Mr. Risdell and his fellow hostages were kidnapped from a high-end marina on the holiday island of Samal and transported 500 miles to Sulu. Mr. Risdell, on the other hand, is 68 years old and was born in London and raised in Canada. Was beheaded not because of some twisted religious interpretation, but because a \$6.5 million ransom payment deadline had passed. According to Matt Williams, a country director for pacific strategies and assessment for a risk management security company, Abu Sayyaf is a bandit and pirate organization motivated solely by greed, not Jihad (Philip, 2016).

There is an unofficial bounty for captives of \$10,000 for locals, \$100,000 for other South East Asians, and whatever can be bargained for by westerners. The stakes were raised dramatically following the release of the German couple kidnapped from their yacht in 2014. The prisoners are believed to have been released in exchange for a \$500,000 ransom payment, though the source of the funds

is unknown, and both the German and Philippine governments have denied paying the ransom (Philip, 2016). According to the telegraph, details of negotiations conducted through intermediaries were lunched with the captors, but it was made clear that the sum demanded was impossible. After several months, the kidnapper reluctantly lowers their demand to \$6.5 million, which was still a high figure. They released a chilling video of the emaciated captives pleading with their government to meet the militant's demand that one date line pass, as they had with other hostages in the pass during negotiations. However, the set a final deadline for ransom payment of 3pm on April 15, 2015, and barely an hour later, masked men on a motorbike dumped Mr. Risdell's head in a plastic bag at a street corner in Jolo's main town (Philip,2016).

Just seven days before Mr. Risdell murdered a retired Italian priest and businessman seized last year from the city of Dipolog, Justine Trudeau, Canada's prime minister, denounced the killing as an act of cold blooded murderer. His family is believed to have excluded the Philippine military from the negotiations and instead made direct contact with the kidnappers, eventually securing his release in exchange for a \$600,000 warrant. Rodwell, an Australian ex-soldier and teacher, was kidnapped in late 2011 from his home in the southern Philippines and released 14 months later after his family reportedly agreed to pay \$100,000 in board and lodging expenses. However, the Abu Sayyaf group entered the kidnapping business after late Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi paid millions of dollars to secure the release of western tourists kidnapped from a Malaysian resort in 2000. In 2001, Abu Sayyaf kidnapped another large group in Palawan, eventually beheading one American tourist while a US missionary was shot dead in a rescue mission. However, Philippine brigadier general Alan Arrojado, who led the military taskforce for the Sulu region, was blunt about the hostages' prospects if the financial demand is not met. He stated that if the ransom is not paid, they will behead their victim. That is their standard procedure (Philip,2016).

Octavio A. Dinampo was abducted by the Abu Sayyaf Group in June 2008, along with television anchorwoman Ces Orea-Drilon, whom he was escorting to an interview with Abu Sayyaf Group amir Radullan Sahiron. For ten days in the Sulu hinterlands, Abu Sayyaf Group elements led by Sahiron held them hostage. They were freed after a ransom of PHP 20 million (USD 440,000) was paid for Drilon. This was the most sensational story of the year as of November 2008. Many other Abu Sayyaf Group observers revised their assessments of the group in the aftermath of the kidnapping. An editorial in the Philippines' leading daily newspaper provides a succinct description of the complexities involved in evaluating the group:

The fundamental truth is that the kidnapping of Drilon and company, which included professor and peace advocate Octavio Dinampo, is part of Mindanao's and thus the Philippines' complicated history. That a barbaric bandit group like the Abu Sayyaf Group emerged from the near-medieval poverty of Basilan and Sulu, waving the colors of Islamic fundamentalism, wrapped in the mantle of Moro nationalism, and shielded, in its early years, by the veil of collusion with military elements)is a'story' that goes beyond the mere storytellers (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2008).

It is worth noting that Sahiron and other ABU Sayyaf Group members are labeled as murderers and terrorists in the Anti-Terrorism Task Force wanted posters and leaflets in English, but Mamumunuh (murderer) and Munduh (bandit, not terrorist) in Tausug. Indeed, because kidnapping connotes banditry, the Abu Sayya Group's bandit aspect currently overshadows its other aspects in the public mind (Santos et al, 2016).

Cocoy Tulawie, a politician and member of an influential family in Sulu, told Al Jazeera in 2016 that this has long been the norm, and that local government officials have been in collusion with Abu Sayyaf for decades. He claims that younger members are ignorant of Islam but are zealous in their representation of it. Their interpretation of Islam is flawed simply because dawas - or Islamic schools - are usually located in major cities and they do not have the opportunity to study the Quran "properly." Ignorance, he claims, is what makes them dangerous. Mr.Tulawie also chastised religious leaders in Sulu for failing to condemn Abu Sayyaf's actions, claiming that no one had condemned the violence as anti-Islam (2016).

6. Response from the Philippines Government

Since August 2000, the Philippine government's basic policy has been to apply constant military pressure on Abu Sayyaf. President Estrada directed the deployment of over 1,500 troops to Jolo in September 2000 to conduct operations against Abu Sayyaf units that had kidnapped foreign hostages in Malaysia. Following the hostage-taking on Palawan, President Arroyo dispatched the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to Basilan. In 2001, up to 4,500 troops were deployed to Basilan. (AFP) operations appear to have reduced Abu Sayyaf strength from over 1000 in early 2000 to under 1000 now. In December 2001, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) estimated that the Abu Sayyaf strength on Basilan was less than 100, while it was around 500 on Jolo (Larry, 2002).

Beginning in October 2001, the United States sent groups of military observers to Mindanao to assess Arm Forces of the Philippines (AFP) operations against Abu Sayyaf, provide advice, and assess AFP equipment needs. When President Arroyo visited Washington in 2001, President Bush extended \$93 million in military aid to the Philippines and offered a direct U.S. military role in combating Abu Sayyaf. President Arroyo insisted that the US military role be advisory, with the AFP maintaining full operational responsibility (Larry, 2002).

7. Challenges Face by the Philippines Government to Eliminate Abu Sayyaf Threat

The Abu Sayyaf group has never participated in peace talks or other nonviolent political activities. It specifically promotes armed struggle as a means of achieving Moro independence. The Abu Sayyaf group has carried out attacks to destabilize ceasefire agreements and discourage peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. In July 2014, the Abu Sayyaf group killed at least 21 Muslims on the island of Jolo for celebrating the end of Ramadan, claiming it was in retaliation for their support for the peace process (Mapping militant organizations, 2015).

Military officials in the Philippines, on the other hand, admit that the country has a very weak intelligence network. Despite the government's administrative order 68, issued on April 8, 2003, to strengthen the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), state intelligence capability remains weak. General Narciso Abaya, a former chief of staff of the armed forces, has openly admitted that the government's anti-terrorism campaign is hampered by the non-sharing of intelligence information ([https://www. the free library. Com/maritime + Terrorisms + in...](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/maritime+Terrorisms+in...) Accessed on October 2, 2017). Abaya believes that there is a culture in the Philippines among intelligence units to withhold vital intelligence information: 'I think we need to improve our intelligence.' The trend nowadays is to share rather than to know. This is a growing trend among intelligence agencies around the world. In fact, he lamented, 'sometimes our units zealously keep intelligence information to themselves that, if combined with information from other units, would provide a more comprehensive picture of the enemy.' The international peacekeeping mission that visited Basilan on March 23-27, 2002, reported that there is consistent credible evidence that the military and provincial government are coddling the Abu Sayyaf.' In such cases, a military solution "will not solve the problem." ([https://www.thefreelibrary.com/maritime + Terrorism + in...](https://www.thefreelibrary.com/maritime+Terrorism+in...) (Accessed on October 2, 2017)

General Ricardo Visaya, Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), stated that one of the most difficult challenges in combating the Abu Sayyaf is the complicated terrain in the jungles of Sulu, which is unfamiliar to soldiers from other parts of the country. But with time, we will be able to overcome." Visaya stated. Another setback, he says, is the lack of community support in conflict zones. The Abu Sayyaf are known to have good relationships with the locals because they give them money from the ransoms they receive (Eimor, 2016).

8. Recommendations

- The governments of the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia should organize a joint military task force to patrol Southeast Asia's seas in order to halt the growing number of attacks on ships and tankers passing through the congested straits of Malacca and disband the Abu Sayyaf's activities.
- The Philippine government should investigate the activities of the Philippine Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police operating in the country's south. Anyone found guilty of conspiring with the Abu Sayyaf should be severely punished and demoted as a deterrent to other military personnel.
- The Philippine government should allocate more funds to the southern Philippines in order to locate more capital projects to develop the region.
- The Philippines government should monitor and scrutinize the activities of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other foreign donors operating in the southern Philippines, as some of them fund the Abu Sayyaf.
- Instead of a military solution, the Philippines government should negotiate with Abu Sayyaf on the issue of regional autonomy.

9. Conclusion

Abu Sayyaf, which translates as "Father of the Swordsmen," was founded in 1991 by a radical young Muslim insurgent named Abdurajak Janjalani with funding from Late Osama bin Laden and his brother-in-law Mohammed khalifa, who married a Filipino

woman. Abu Sayyaf has its roots in the long-running Muslim insurgency in the southern Philippines. Who broke away from the Moro National Liberation Front, an existing rebel group, to pursue their dream of an Islamic caliphate rather than regional autonomy? However, the Abu Sayyaf group later strayed from the Islamic state agenda and engaged in kidnapping for ransom, piracy, extortion, and beheading of their victims whose ransom demands were not met. And their activities are regarded as un-Islamic.

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