

## **Why Peace Talk Failed? Political Negotiations between the Philippine Government and the Moro Rebels**

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### **Abstract**

In spite of people's unity, armed communist movements in the Philippines continued to be resilient. According to Rivera (2005), this resiliency is a testimony to the persistency of the socio-economic conditions of the armed movements that have nurtured its struggles and failures. This paper is limited to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines – Moro National Liberation Front - Moro Islamic Liberation Front (GRP-MNLF-MILF) peace talks and agreements in the hopes of solving the territorial disputes in Mindanao. The main focus of this paper is the analysis on the dynamics of the peace talks that have traversed from former Presidents Corazon Aquino to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the years 1986 to 2004. To analyze this negotiation, Carrot and Stick Approach was used to see how the Philippine government responded to such crisis. Based on this approach, two episodic facets were formulated to understand further government actions in terms of its conciliation abilities. This paper ends with lessons learned and recommendations.

**Keywords:** Political Negotiations, Peace talks, Mindanao Conflict, Bangsamoro

### **Introduction**

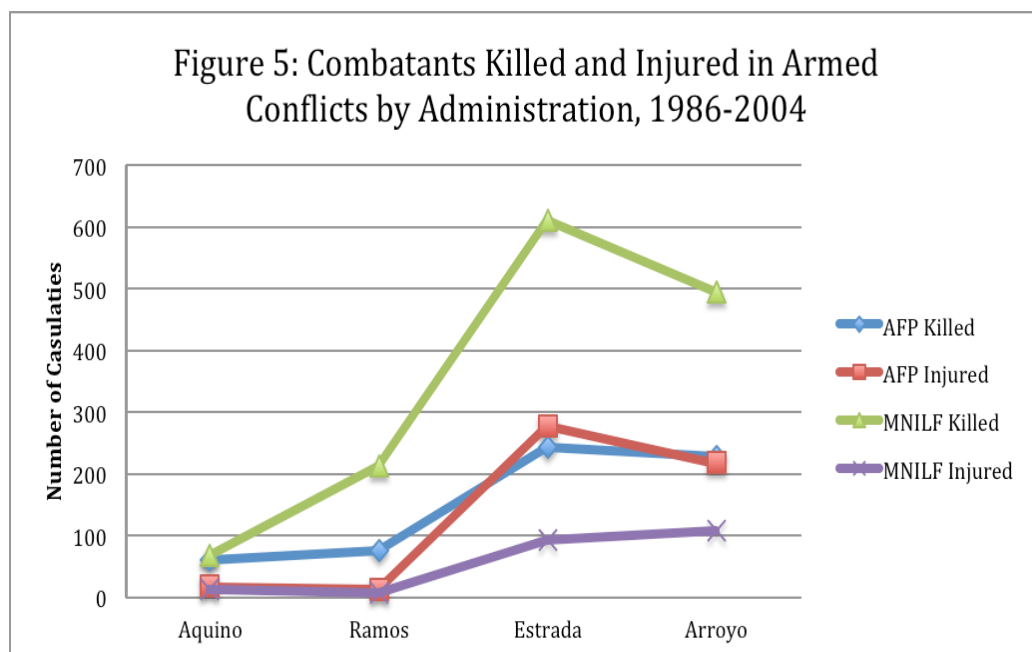
This paper is limited to the GRP-MNLF-MILF peace talks and agreements in the hope of solving the armed conflict in Mindanao. The process has lasted from the Marcos regime until the present administration of President Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, Jr. The main focus of this paper is the analysis on the failure of the peace talks that have traversed the period from former Presidents Corazon Aquino to Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

## Four Presidents Succeeded after Marcos: What have they done?

Since the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986, a new hope of a peaceful nation looms throughout the country. With the leadership of a housewife who ousted the dictator, Filipinos were seeing a new nation. In spite of people's unity, as seen in the historic People Power I, armed communist movements continued to be resilient. According to Rivera (2005), this resiliency is a testimony to the persistence of the socio-economic conditions of the armed movements that have nurtured its struggles and failures. Figure 5 shows the number of combatants killed and injured in armed encounters during the four administrations from 1986 to 2004.

### *The Housewife, Peace Talks and People Power*

The fall of the dictator started after the assassination of Senator Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, who at that time was a number one critic of the former President Marcos. Marcos was ousted from power through a peaceful process popularly known as the People Power revolution at EDSA in 1986. From then on, a simple housewife, through a snap election, was voted as the new President of the Republic. With the dictatorship's fall, the Aquino administration started to have significant political peace talks with the insurgents after the CPP/NPA agreed to a 60-day ceasefire.



Source: Bautista (2005: 4).

This, however, did not last very long as the two parties had a different agenda on their own. The government wanted to put an end the cessation of hostilities immediately, while the other wanted to have a comprehensive political settlement, which may have taken longer. These two differing views posted a challenge to the Aquino administration. Another challenge posted a threat when the administration's own military staged several coup attempts. This and many other challenges placed the Aquino administration at an indecisive stance with the secessionists. The peace negotiation, however, ended formally when dozens of peasants were killed near Malacanang Palace during a demonstration concerning issues related to land reform.

Further, after her assumption of office, President Aquino redirected the government's policy towards reconciliation, negotiation, peace and development (Diaz 2003). The Aquino administration emphasized these policies for issues concerning Mindanao a few months after her assumption in August 1986. Through negotiations, the MNLF had gone well, and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created through an organic act passed by Congress. The Organic Act for the ARMM, Republic 6734, was passed in 1989, but the elections for ARMM officials were boycotted by the MNLF until 1996. A limited measure of self-rule had been provided to ARMM; however, it lacked resources in tackling problems of the provinces under its rule. It became a ground of opportunities for politicians to commit graft and corruption.

The conflict continued, despite the administration's efforts. It meant that the economic impacts of war were not addressed because of the very limited or little investment infused in the affected areas (Concepcion 2003). As seen in Figure 5, the Aquino administration (1986-1992) was generally peaceful leaving only a few hundreds being injured or killed on both sides.

### *The General, Hague Joint Declaration and Human Rights*

A military man, Fidel Ramos assumed the presidency in 1992. With at least three armed movement challenges on his shoulders, Ramos was strongly pressured by the public to resume peace talks with the insurgency groups. Moreover, in order to recover from political instability and economic recovery, the administration was faced with a tremendous amount of pressure to work out a political resolution.

Responding to all the pressures, the Ramos administration resumed the exploratory talks by September 1, 1992 in the Netherlands. The Philippine government (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) signed the Hague Joint Declaration embodying their agreement to pursue a formal peace negotiation to resolve the armed conflict. Further, the Breukelen Joint Statement followed the declaration in 1994 to advance the peace negotiations. The talks allowed the actors

to clarify issues and concerns of both sides. They had also undertaken goodwill measures and confidence building as an improvement both voluntarily undertaken by either side.

Moreover, the GRP and NDF agreed on signing referendums in answering issues, which includes the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CAR-HR/IHL) of 1998, among others. This agreement was the direct response to the first agenda of the Hague Joint Declaration. However, this declaration never took effect since President Ramos did not sign it.

The Ramos administration faced tremendous number of challenges in dealing with NDF's demands as both parties had differing views on how to achieve peace. While dealing with the NDF, the administration faced another difficulty of resolving armed struggles of both the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and military rebels. Eventually, the challenge succeeded through political negotiations and talks but not for the NDF. A significant breakthrough took place when the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) together with Libya and Indonesia took the role of mediation between the GRP and MNLF. The Ramos administration was able to sign a final peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996. Though there were a lot of hitches in the creation of the ARMM, the offer of autonomy became very attractive for the MNLF as the renegade leader, Nur Misuari, ran for governor. Misuari was the first governor of ARMM. Nur Misuari's term was characterized by poor performance, corruption, and lack of management skills. This, however, led to the disbandment of the MNLF as ARMM was seen as a total failure of autonomy. According to Askandar et al. (TongbugaYöksaChaedan (Korea) & Kang 2009) the GRP-MNLF 1996 Final Peace Agreement was seen as a failure in the sense that it did not deliver what it was supposed to deliver, that is, peace and development to the Moros. Askandar et al (TongbugaYöksaChaedan (Korea) & Kang 2009: 95) further states that "The ARMM remains as an institution, but is riddled with poor governance, inadequate resources, ineffective regional framework, bureaucratic isolation from national governance, and shows a lack of democratization in its processes." The following year, however, there were signs of an armed struggle between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the military. This is a sign of the MILF's continuing cause of establishing an independent Bangsamoro state. This posts a new stage of the many skirmishes of the Moro struggle in Mindanao. Generally, the Ramos administration (Figure 5) was peaceful, like the Aquino administration, killing a few hundreds and a few more injured on both sides.

### *The Actor, All-out-War and Impeachment*

A veteran actor, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, became the next president to succeed the Ramos administration. He took over the challenges left by the Ramos administration, specifically the failed negotiations with the NDF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. President Estrada signed the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian law (CAR-HR/IHL) in August 1998 after a few months after being elected. However, the GRP and NDF still had issues on the equality of right to prosecute, to try and sanction violators of human rights. This was eventually sidetracked as the administration focused its efforts in capturing the members of the New People's Army including General Obillo.

Meanwhile, in the following year, the GRP ratified the Visiting Forces Agreement with United States of America. This was followed by the declaration of an all-out-war campaign against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It resulted in injuring a hundreds and killing a thousand more in both camps (see Figure 5). The escalation of hostilities was a complete violation of the 1997 ceasefire agreement. Wanting to have peace in his time, Estrada used the slow nature of negotiation and declared a war with the MILF in early 2000 (Diaz 2003). After a few months, in July 2, Estrada declared victory over Camp Abubakar, the main MILF camp. The then MILF chairman, Hashim Salamat, declared a jihad and the rebels waged guerrilla warfare. The MILF camp ignored the government's offer of amnesty and renegotiation. Thus, instead of achieving peace in his time, Estrada worsened the conflict bringing more hostilities to Mindanao.

A few months later, President Estrada faced corruption charges, which ended with an aborted impeachment trial by the Senate. This triggered massive public protest leading to his ouster on January 20, 2001. His Vice-President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, replaced Estrada as the next president of the republic.

### *The Presidential Daughter, Malaysia and War on Terrorism*

The daughter of the former president Diosdado Macapagal succeeded the presidency after the ousted Estrada stepped down from office. In her administration, she restarted the peace negotiations with the MILF signing an agreement on March 2001. The peace talks resulted to the formation of a joint MNLF-MILF panel for an official representation to the OIC meetings held in a foreign soil. The meetings with OIC and other international bodies were a ground for forging common posits to issues in resolving the conflict.

Further, Malaysia participated as a facilitator-mediator in the GRP-MNLF talks which made a strong impact on counseling the MILF to drop its secessionist cause and collaborate with the GRP. Later, the agreement was signed in Kuala Lumpur and subsequent talking points were taken up in Tripoli, Libya by June. Though the administration reverted its reconciliation and renegotiation to the Aquino-Ramos approach, apparently Macapagal-Arroyo was as impatient as Estrada according to Diaz (2003). Macapagal-Arroyo repeatedly changed the deadline set to sign an agreement, which was to be signed intentionally before the deadline.

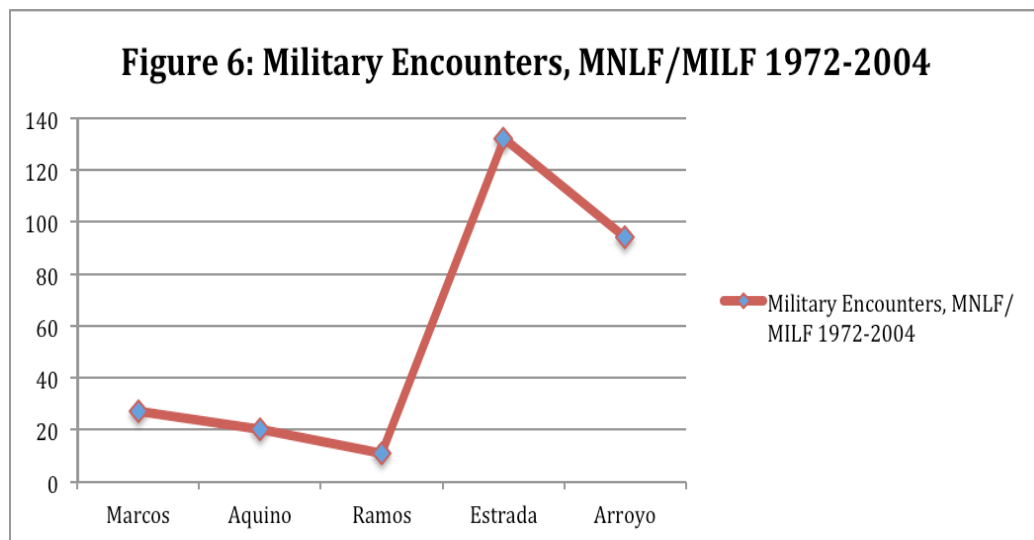
When terrorists attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, President Arroyo expressed her support for the “war on terror” by George W. Bush. She pledged to support this framework including the war against local terrorists embracing the Muslim armed guerillas. Moreover, it was apparent that the shifts of the negotiation policies of Macapagal-Arroyo concerning the Mindanao conflict have been influenced by the same military official that influenced the previous Estrada administration. The bombing of Buliok Complex at Pikit, North Cotabato was ordered by Macapagal-Arroyo or by the retired General Angelo Reyes. This was translated into a nonsensical GRP in attaining peace in Mindanao, although, it may not be proven. It is very significant that during the first term of Arroyo’s administration, the Mindanao conflict did not improve. Casualties on both side (killings and injuries) continued. See Figure 5.

Evidently, the Mindanao conflict persisted even after the fall of the Marcos regime. It may be countered that there was such a time when peace reigned in the republic. Peace is such an elusive reality; however that held for so long that not a single president after the fall reached a final solution to this almost four-decade conflict.

## **Two Episodic Facet: Peace and War**

During the Marcos regime, his government had only two principal choices on how to conciliate the complaints and demands of Muslims: either to give their leaders political power and development funds or to reprove them militarily if they wage an insurgency. This is the same with what the Americans call “carrot and stick approach” where the government offers both rewards and reprimands to persuade behavior. Under this policy, the government gives rewards first to the Muslim leaders for pacification. One of the rewards is giving political power to the leaders. The creation of an autonomous region has given the Muslim leaders freedom to exercise their rights. The question looms, however if the creation of an autonomous region is the final and appropriate answer to the cry of the Muslims.

To understand further the government's actions in trying to solve the Mindanao conflict, I have divided this analysis into two episodes. The first episode is the peace episodic facet where the government tries to appease the rebels, thus creating a temporal peace moment in Mindanao. This episode can be seen in the policies and actions made during the Aquino and Ramos administrations from the years 1986 until 1998. The second episode is the war episodic facet where the government tries to reprimand the rebels, thus escalating armed conflict. This episode can be seen during the regimes of Estrada and Macapagal-Arroyo from 1998 until 2004. These episodes emerged because of the analysis, which can be seen in Figure 6, where a decline of encounters between the government forces and the Moro rebels are apparent. This decline started after the Marcos regime and steadily diminished under the Aquino and Ramos administrations. This is the Peace Episodic facet. Escalations of encounters, however, were very fleeting under the Estrada administration and continued under the Arroyo administration. Although, there was a slight decline during Arroyo's administration, it was still higher as compared with the Aquino and Ramos regimes. This is the War Episodic facet.



Source: Patricio N. Abinales data file 'Sancho Panza in Buliok Complex: The Paradox of Muslim Separatism' Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2007, p. 295

### *Peace Episode: 1996 Peace Agreement and the ARMM*

The highlight of the peace episodic facet was on 2 September 1996; a historic signing of the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF. It was in the hopes of both parties that this agreement would bring a favorable balance between war and peace in Mindanao. The peace agreement was definitely a big factor in the development of peace as it was supposedly the final result in search for a just and peaceful political solution to the problem in the southern Philippines (Santos 2001). It provided for the creation of a new autonomous region embodied in the 1987 Constitution and the Republic Act (RA) 6734 with a territory to be settled by plebiscite. Further, it provided for representation and involvement by people of the new autonomous region in the national government.

According to Santos, Jr. (2001) the agreement was to be achieved in two phases. Phase 1 was the extendible transitional three-year period with the issuance of an Executive Order establishing the Special Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD) and the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD) creating an expansion of the autonomy of ARMM (May 2002). Phase 2 was the establishment of a new autonomous government where a Congressional action is needed incorporating the peace agreement on the core of autonomy for the improvement of the existing ARMM. Through a plebiscite, it will determine the final territory of the new region. As part of the whole package of the peace agreement, the government offered a political alliance with the MNLF leaders Nur Misuari and Muslimin Sema (Santos2001). This move promoted the integration of the MNLF to the political arena, giving them enough power to the realization of peace and development in Muslim Mindanao.

However, did this move help in a way in merging peace and development in the Muslim Mindanao? This was not the case, however as it turned out to be the biggest disappointment and a failure according to Askandar et al (2009) in the sense that it did not deliver what it was supposed to deliver, that is, peace and development in Mindanao. There were many expectations from the Moros upon the implementation of the agreement, but such hope turned into disillusionment because the level of expectations of peace and development has not been achieved (Santos 2001). Further, the plebiscite worries the leaders as this would lead to an unfavorable result to the expanded autonomy. The agreement, in a way, served only the aspirations of the MNLF who was not a representative of the entire Moro people. A breakaway group, in behalf of the Moro, continued to their struggle. While the government has been pursuing its way to build peace by means of the agreement with the MNLF, the former continued to negotiate with the MILF. According to Santos (2001: 10), the significance of holding peace talks with the MILF even after the conclusion of a final peace agreement is evident for various reasons. Firstly, the government showed its commitment in forging peace with the different rebel groups.



Secondly, it showed that the MILF had teeth that can affect the outcome of the peace process. In addition, their presence meant that the problem has not been resolved and that the final peace agreement with the MNLF was not the final solution. Moreover, as part of the agreement, projects shall be implemented in the SZOPAD under Executive Order (EO) 371. Poor project implementation resulted, however as twelve specific projects were not realized.

### *Poor Project Implementation*

The government had used the EO 371 as a gauge for the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement. EO 371 outlined among others, twelve specific projects to have been implemented in the SZOPAD as stated below:

1. *Human development projects, including but not limited to health and sanitation services, educational development, and welfare services, to promote the well-being of families in depressed communities and enhance their capabilities to participate in economic programs;*
2. *Socialized housing projects to address housing backlogs in priority areas;*
3. *Water supply development to provide potable water especially to depressed communities in the SZOPAD;*
4. *Roads and bridges to connect depressed communities to centers of economic activities and improve mobility of goods and services within the SZOPAD and between the SZOPAD and other growth areas;*
5. *Airports and seaports to address the needs of commuters and facilitate transport of products in the priority areas;*
6. *Telecommunications and power/electrification programs to support the increase in economic activities in the SZOPAD;*
7. *Development and promotion of tourism to harness the tourism potential and enhance appreciation and awareness of history and culture in the SZOPAD;*
8. *Environmental and marine resources improvement program to protect and conserve natural resources in the SZOPAD;*

9. *Enhancement of agricultural production through irrigation and post-harvest and marketing facilities;*
10. *Establishment of food processing facilities to generate employment and create forward and backward economic linkages;*
11. *Establishment of Provincial Industrial Centers and People's Industrial Enterprises to serve as focal points of business activities and generate additional economic opportunities; and*
12. *People empowerment programs to ensure greater participation of women and other disadvantaged groups in governance and in the determination of their political, economic and social destinies.*

The first issue on the project implementation was the lack of concrete plans to realize the laid-out projects. The identified twelve projects are very ambitious and grandiose for the government to fulfill. Thus, it turned to be disenchantment. The identified Priority Investment Plan of SZOPAD for the three-year transition required an outlay of Php1.6 trillion, which was very unrealistic (Diaz 2003). Such ambitious plans put high hopes to the depressed communities in the ARMM; however, there were no concrete plans to realize all. The affected communities were asking for the provision of basic services that should have been delivered by different local governmental offices and agencies through their programs.

The projects were geared towards boosting the economic conditions of the areas covered by SZOPAD. Among the twelve, only a few were more sound and tangible in uplifting their economic conditions. Other projects were irrelevant in so far as the Muslim problems are concerned (Diaz 2003). Building seaports, airports, and irrigation projects were the least of their priorities. How could irrigation projects help the Muslim masses if they did not even have land to irrigate? According to the MILF, about 85 percent of the Muslim population are landless. Who will gain much from the projects? The other fifteen percent of the population who has land mostly are economically capable. Improving the economic situation in the area would mean alleviation of various indicators such as poverty, low income and unsanitary living conditions. This would mean nothing, however if the basic Muslim problem were not solved which revolved around landlessness.

The second issue on poor implementation of projects was the failure of coordination between bureaucracies. The lack of concrete definitions of work assignments and responsibilities rendered the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD), a transitory arm under the auspices of the Office of the President, a redundant agency. Their tasks were already embedded in other regional groups (Regional Development Council (RDC), Cabinet Office for Regional Development (CORD), etc.), local government units' mission. Even though the main tasks have been laid out, it was only a transitory government, which meant the Office of the President could only delegate their powers to SPCPD. Due to this, it was hard for SPCPD to render their role as the government's representative in the full implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. Further, the Office of the President had to approve the needed budget to realize such development in the Southern Philippines. They had the power to lessen the budget or stick to the budget as planned. This, however, was a major factor in the realization of peace and development projects. If approved, the SPCPD would have to coordinate with local officials and request their aid in the implementation of development projects in the area. The coordination, however, was an utter failure between SPCPD and governmental bodies. According to Mercado (1999), this failure was perhaps one of the causes for the non-delivery of the promised concentrated effort of peace and development initiatives in the SZOPAD since these initiatives happen in local communities. Without proper connection, all shall go to waste, as this is crucial in the implementation of the different phases of the peace agreement.

### *Foreign Aid: Does it do more harm than good?*

MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat's statement, as cited by Diaz (2003), talked about the different view of conflict and perception of peace between the government and the Muslim community. The view of the government towards achieving peace in Mindanao was to end the war while, for the MILF, it was about the socio-economic development as well as the grant of an independent Islamic state. Further, Diaz (2003) argued that socio-economic development to Muslim communities was one of the salient factors in having a lasting and genuine peace. In order to accomplish this, government had to commit to, and the Muslim constituents to be actively involved, in the process.

Since there was a lack of bridging programs by the government for the MNLF combatants and their families, the international donor organizations intervened. These organizations took over the mainstream using the SPCPD Secretariat and MNLF State Command Structure. According to Mercado (1999), this has led to a devastating result for the SPCPD as their focus has been shifted to managing and coordinating multi-country donor assistance. Because of this, they unknowingly forsook their main role in promoting peace initiatives in the SZOPAD. Similarly,

Diaz (2003) argued that the government should not have left to the non-governmental organizations or to other international and local groups the initiating of peace projects. Further, he mentioned that the government neither should have given the responsibility of socio-economic development for the Muslim constituencies to a foreign government nor to United Nation agencies. An article written by Mucha Arquiza entitled "Mass death also happens in the living" as cited by Diaz (2003) in an article dated February 21, 2002 entitled "Misunderstanding Socio-Economic Assistance" stated that the socio-economic assistance given to the Muslims was regarded as a tool to erase "Muslim identity". If this thinking is true, then the government and the international aid institutions shall be in a predicament on helping or not the Muslims.

Should we stop receiving aid from donor countries then? I guess not. It may seem that foreign aid is a bad thing in the formation of peace and development efforts to Mindanao; however, that is totally not the case. Foreign aid agencies in their truest intentions were for the good of the donor countries. In the Phase III process of the peace agreement, in order to provide the basic service and livelihood, the establishment of trust and confidence between and among the government, former combatants, institutions and civil societies are important. The Muslims are very receptive to reforms that will change their socio-economic status without compromising their faith. Thus, projects with enough funding, planning and proper implementation are the right approach to achieve this. The aid from the donor countries helps in facilitating the realization of peace and development in the area. With proper channeling, clear-cut projects and proper implementation, socio-economic development is within the Muslim Mindanao's reach. Diaz (2003) opined that the government alone has the power to win the goodwill of the MNLF, MILF and other rebel group. By working together in finding the missing piece of the puzzle and strengthening the weak links in the peace chains, surely this can be achieved.

In sum, have giving rewards to the leaders helped in the creation of a peaceful Mindanao? It turned out it did not. Giving a carrot as a way of appeasement did nothing significant in the realization of a peaceful Mindanao. After the signing of the peace agreement, it created more difficulties in Muslim Mindanao. Giving political power, by establishing ARMM, was one of the greatest disappointments and failures. Further, giving development aid in a way created an impact in socio-economic aspect; however, because of poor implementation it turned to be another disappointment. It may be pointed out, though, that there was a lesser-armed conflict that happened during the first episode with a total of thirty-one encounters. The peace episodic facet has fewer fatalities, wounded and number of conflicts. Due to this fact, however, another question lingers in my mind. What should the government do then since appeasement did not work? Will the "stick" approach solve the four-decade-old conflict?

## *All Out War: A bad move?*

The second episodic facet used the stick approach where the government offered reprimands to change behavior. In this policy, after the government had given rewards but failed to pacify the conflict, the use of psychological violence or threats needed to be done. Would this work, then, as an alternative in the fulfillment of peace and development in Muslim Mindanao?

In 2000, President Estrada launched an all-out-war attack to MILF camps. What compelled the government in launching such a huge endeavor? Before Estrada was elected as president, the Ramos government agreed to recognize the MILF camps as a continued commitment for a peaceful solution to end the Mindanao conflict. As the then elected president, Estrada followed the peace initiative of his predecessor and recognized seven camps within a year's time. According to Diaz (2003), the main reason for the recognition of the MILF camps was to avoid military-MILF encounters during the peace negotiation. President Estrada, however, became impatient and decided to reverse the agreement. In defense, he and his advisers saw the existence of MILF camps as a violation of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity. For the MILF side, they agreed and acknowledged that the camp areas were Philippine territory, although under their control, and were not a violation of the territorial integrity of the nation (Diaz, 2003). Whose side is right and whose is not? Both sides were right and at the same time wrong. Recognition of the camps was part of the peace process. Even before Marcos' regime they recognized the demand and agreed to negotiate and settle the demands. It went wrong because of misunderstanding between the government and the Moro rebels, not seeing the clear picture and launching of an all-out-war to reverse it. This mistake continued with the Arroyo government. Diaz further argued that this behavior made the government weak in making peace policy for Mindanao to guide leaders in succession. On the other hand, sovereignty and territorial integrity are rights that originate from the citizenry and should be shared and enjoyed. The MILF has the same right and should enjoy these rights. It is within their rights to form communities and till farm areas. According to Diaz (2003), the only thing that seemed to be a gaffe was their defiance of the government laws and authority by venturing their claim over the camps.

This miscalculation of the Estrada government led to considerable displacement issues that further thwarted the peace process. The effects of displacement on several vulnerable groups were documented by the researchers of Community and Family Services International (CFSI) through interviews, case studies, and analysis of survey data. For example, it was found that children and youth suffered from such consequences of displacement as interrupted studies, trauma, poor health, and the need for child labor. Many have also been polarized, and were likely to harbor strong feelings against "opposing" communities, by the experience of conflict and loss. Some of the community members interviewed discussed the "crisis

of the children” as one of the most significant consequences of war and displacement, with very troubling implications for the future.

Moreover, as in most cases of displacement, women were among those who have had the heaviest burden to bear. They have had the responsibility of trying to hold their families together even as social structures have eroded, family resources and livelihoods were lost, and family members were forced to disperse in order to find work. Above all, the loss of family members due to war has had a tremendous psychosocial impact, affecting the women physically, psychologically, and emotionally (Daguino et al. 2003).

It may be right for the Arroyo government to reopen the peace talks with the MILF shortly after her assumption. This move made the peace process be on track and promising with Malaysia as mediator. Enthusiasm from both parties was seen as they agreed to pursue rehabilitation and development to affected displaced communities. Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA) was created for the purpose of coordination with other agencies in the continuation of seeing the program succeed.

Peace in Mindanao seemed to be within grasp up until the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) attacked and assaulted Ustadz Hashim Salamat’s Headquarters, MILF Chairman, during the Id’l Adha. Due to this development, formal peace talks could not move forward. Peace talks may seem to have resumed with both parties having reaffirmed their commitment to pursue the peace process. However, MILF’s trust and confidence to the government had already been damaged. The new war unfolded new grounds for both parties to distrust each other. According to Mercado (1999), once the peace process loses its integrity and citizenry, extremism take over.

In sum, the ‘stick’ approach does not seem to work either by taking an all-out-war in hopes to end the conflict in Mindanao. It resulted in a much bigger conflict, losing thousands of lives, displacing hundreds of thousand individuals and losing trust and confidence to the capability of the government to handle the situation. What is the right approach then, as both giving a reward and reprimand did not work? It may be difficult to achieve peace at this time for we cannot revert what has been done; however, it seems there is no alternative to achieve a peaceful Mindanao but to begin another dialogue in a more trustworthy and wholehearted way. As the new government signed a new peace agreement with the Moro rebels, all we can do now is to wait for a positive outcome.

## Concluding thoughts

The factors that affect the success and failure of peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the Moro rebels can be expressed into two factors: Internal and External. Internal factors are articulated using the 5P's aspects: political will, policies of the state, peace talks, project implementation and peace agreement. Further, external factors are grouped using 2F's aspects, namely: foreign aid and foreign mediation. These aspects are analyzed using a three-leveled scale impact to the two episodic facets of peace talks: strong, neutral and weak. What makes peace negotiation relatively a success or a failure? Using the two episodic facets, we can practically see how these aspects form the shape of successful peace negotiations with the rebel groups. During the peace episodic facet, what makes this episode relatively successful in bringing *Hudna* in Mindanao was the strong political will of Aquino and Ramos. They wanted change to happen in Mindanao and they wanted it done in a peaceable manner. They initiated the peace talks between the insurgents and partially acceded to the demands of the Moro rebels, in the sense that the central government had given them partial autonomy, freedom and political power by creating the ARMM. However, political and financial aspects and policies are still controlled by the central government. During their presidency, it was their utmost priority to end the insurgencies and pledged to realize the expectation of the Muslims on the idea of justice and development (Diaz 2003).

**Table 3: Summary on the analysis of the Philippine government's peace negotiations with the Moro rebels**

Factors	Peace Episode	War Episode
<b>Internal Factors</b>		
- Political Will	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>
- Policies of the State	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Weak</b>
- Peace Talks	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Weak</b>
- Project Implementation	<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b>
- Peace Agreement	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Weak</b>
<b>External Factors</b>		
- Foreign Aid	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>
- Foreign Mediation	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Neutral</b>

The second aspect which makes a successful peace negotiation was strong peace talk activities that occurred within the peace episode. Both presidents were very active towards reconciliation, negotiation and peace and development initiatives with the rebels. This was the emphasis of the Aquino government, and subsequently continued by the Ramos administration, on her policies in Mindanao, which were issued on August 20, 1986, a few months after her assumption of office (Diaz 2003).

One of the external factors, foreign aid, played a big role in giving temporal peace during the peace episode. The Aquino regime encouraged the participation of the non-governmental organizations (NGO) in the realization of the policies on fostering peace and development. There was a strong intervention by foreign donors by giving socio-economic assistance in the rehabilitation of communities in Mindanao. But could giving socio-economic assistance to the affected communities would create a lasting peace in Mindanao? I guess not. Donor countries are not always there to help; it is still in hands of the government to build a lasting peace in Mindanao. Foreign aids from donor countries are only but a vessel to help communities to start anew.

During the war episode, Presidents Estrada and Arroyo had a very strong political will in dealing with matters of the government. However, during this episode having a strong political will would create a negative effect in the realization of peace in Mindanao. The Estrada government wanted to resolve the issue by setting a deadline between the government and the MILF panels to sign a peace agreement or else it would settle it by military action. An almost similar situation took place under the Arroyo administration. Foreign benefactors had also a big role in giving a positive outlook to the affected communities despite the escalation of war in Mindanao.

The two episodic facets sum up how the government assesses the conflict in Mindanao. The relative success and failure of the negotiation relies on the understanding of the leaders of the entire situation. The war episode happened because of impatient leaders wanting that peace in Mindanao happen in their time (Diaz 2003). Peace is such an elusive word that it cannot be achieved overnight or by aggressively pursuing it. The failure of a peace negotiation was due to a number of reasons: weak state policies, peace talks, project implementation and peace agreements. The utterly weak state policies were a result of slow actions of policy makers to deliberate creating a slow peace momentum to take place for Mindanao. Further, according to Diaz (2003), there was a lack of peace policy for Mindanao to guide governments in succession. Secondly, weak peace talks between the representatives of both actors, resulting in either one side breaking the cease-fire agreements or both making the negotiations really hard to pursue, or the government suspending peace talks and changing its core of negotiation. Thirdly,



weak project implementation by the state created a lot of grievances from the affected communities, thus creating more tensions. Further, projects planned by the state were not even feasible to begin with, as they needed more funding. With no funding from the state, how could they realize all twelve projects? It is good to have simple and achievable projects than to have a grandiose one that is impossible to realize. Lastly, failed peace talks were due to the poorly laid-out peace agreement between actors. Better understanding of the issue can make an excellent proposal for an agreement to be supported. MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat's statement as reported by Diaz (2003: 91), "*the government wants to end the war; we want to solve the Muslim problems*" clearly signifies the different views of the both actors in achieving peace in Mindanao. In the end, is there an alternative in achieving peace in Mindanao given the unsatisfactory outcome of the peace negotiations? Although a Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) draft has already been submitted to the Philippine Congress for review and scrutiny, its effectiveness in achieving peace in Mindanao is yet to be seen. What would be a better alternative in achieving peace if not for a successful peace talk? One suggestion would be to have representatives from various sectors, including but not limited to Indigenous People, Christian settlers, the Private Sector, Academe, Moro leaders, the Philippine government and an unbiased third party from an independent country in the peace consultations. In the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)-Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) Tripoli Agreement on Peace on 2001, the first paragraph stipulates, "*it is the birthright of all Moros and all indigenous peoples of Mindanao to identify them and be accepted as 'Bangsamoros'. The Bangsamoro people refer to those who are natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and its adjacent islands including Palawan and the Sulu Archipelago at the time of conquest or colonization and their descendants whether mixed or of full native blood. The freedom of choice of the indigenous people shall be respected.*" Here, we can see that the memorandum of agreement was for the union of the Muslim Filipinos and the Lumads as the original inhabitants of the island. However, the Lumads (Indigenous Peoples) do not have any participation in this agreement. When the Memorandum of Agreement was formulated the Indigenous Peoples were not consulted. In one of the workshops on ancestral lands at the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference of UGAT, Inc. in 1987, there was a striking remark by the secretary-general of the Lumad-Mindanao to the position made by the Bangsa Moro advocate. He said "*We, the Lumads of Mindanao do not consider ourselves as Bangsa Moro. Neither do we claim as our ancestral territory such provinces as Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and the greater part of Mindanao. The rest of mainland Mindanao, however, is ours by ancestral right* (Turner, May & Turner 1992: 235-236)." Local political leaders, especially in North Cotabato, have been quite adamant to know the content of the Memorandum of Agreement and already raised their protest on being made part of the Bangsamoro homeland without prior consultation. That is why the reactions of local politicians, foremost of whom is

Vice Governor Manuel Piñol of North Cotabato, Celso Lobregat of Zamboanga City, and Lawrence Cruz of Iligan City, went public in assailing the non-disclosure of the contents of the Memorandum of Agreement especially on the issue of territory wherein North Cotabato, Zamboanga City and Iligan City were included in the expansion areas. The political group challenged the government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front for transparency until it reached the Supreme Court. The highest court responded in their favor on August 4, 2008, a day before the formal signing of the Memorandum of Agreement in Kuala Lumpur and issued a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO), effectively stalling the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (Antoine, 2008). As a result, more conflict heightened between the two groups. Christian settlers mostly dominated the expansion areas included in the agreement.

A further suggestion would be the participation of the local government in achieving peace or *hudna* in Mindanao. Providing the basic needs of the local constituencies is a greater leap on not airing their grievances. By allocating its budget in promoting peace, development and security aspects in the area can vastly contribute in realizing *hudna*, supposing that the budget will not be pocketed by corrupt politicians as there are still some issues on the graft and corruption, especially in the ARMM.

Utilizing the private sectors in breaking the connection between socio-economic and conflict in Mindanao implies their strong positive roles. More conflict implies a losing opportunity for the businesspeople to invest. Having no or little-investments in the area would mean less opportunity for people to be employed, no income to provide for the family and in turn will lead to more grievances to the government. Encouraging them to invest and develop some economic activities, especially the use of natural resources should be in accordance with respect for the rights of the Moros and Indigenous peoples, the rights of investors and international environmental law.

It is also important to encourage academe, whether public or private entities, to incorporate *hudna* and peace related activities in its curricula. This program will help in the awareness of the students to its benefits and consequences. A similar program is also encouraged to all religious sectors since their teachings are centered in the propagation of peace and love.

Finally, the smallest political unit has a greater role in the accomplishment of peace in Mindanao. The understanding of peace and love starts with the family. It is with the family that reflects how a person sees life and how they value life in the process.

## Note:

Taken from the third chapter of the author's research paper entitled '*Hudna: Analyzing Causes of Armed Conflict in Mindanao*' dated May 9, 2013 at International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan.

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