

Mindanao: Land Raped and Plundered

Mindanao is the 19th biggest island in the world. Its land area is about 101,998 square kilometers or 34 percent of the total land area of the Philippines.

Mindanao is blessed with an abundance of minerals. Metallic mineral reserves are placed at some 3.6 million tons and non-metallic mineral at 8.6 billion tons. Potential coal reserves is estimated at 37.5 million metric tons and or 18.2 percent of the national reserves.

The island produces 50 percent of all the corn and coconut, 20 percent of all the rice, 50 percent of all the fish, 40 percent of all the cattle, almost 100 percent of all the banana and pineapple exports, 89 percent of the nickel and cobalt, 90 percent of the iron ore, 62 percent of the limestone, and almost 100 percent of the aluminum ore in the Philippines.

Bonanza of profits have been made over a half of century from lumber and timber, which also cleared the lands eventually occupied by the agribusiness corporations. The "paradise of tobacco, hemp and coffee plantations" visualized by Harper in 1900 has taken the shape of rubber, sugar, pineapple, banana, palm oil and lately, asparagus and the Lumads. All of them have been pushed off from the land.

By the early 1980s, the multinationals together with local grown landlords were making plans of raising livestock on thousands of hectares of pasture lands. Ancestral lands belonging to the Manobo tribal people have been grabbed by cattle ranchers. Later on, the contested lands were sold to the Bukidnon Sugar Corporation.

A number of dams were constructed to generate hydroelectric power for the new industries. These projects have inundated hundreds of thousands of hectares farmed by the Moros and Lumads. They were also intended to create new canals that were to carry water to the sites of corporate farming and agribusiness corporations.

Scores of Lumads and Christian settler communities have also been dislocated by the logging operations in northern and southern Mindanao.

As in the past, war is still pursued in the name of profit. The 10,000 hectares in Matanog which used to be Camp Abubakar is being eyed to be converted to a special economic zone. The war in Maguindanao was to clear the area surrounding the six towns to pave way for the \$262 M sugar plantation (Moroland Sugar Corporation). It is where the former Camp Omar was located.

The war in Pikit was pursued to facilitate the NAPOCOR and multinational corporations to start the exploration and eventually the exploitation of the natural gas within the Liguasan marsh.

Thus, the US and the Philippine government's disposition and use of military power through war has been and is always connected to the control and exploitation of the remaining vital resources in the island. The US in collaboration with the government of the Philippines also create or exploit the context of conflict to sustain and ensure the benefits from the war.

Brief Historical Background

US interests in the Philippines goes back to 1898 when the US "helped" Philippine forces win independence from Spain. Upon its defeat, Spain surrendered to the US rather than to the Philippines, and ceded the Philippines to the US for \$20 million. On December 21, 1898, US President William McKinley issued his "Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation" and instructed American military commanders to extend the sovereignty of the US over the entire Philippine archipelago, by force if necessary.

The basic interest for annexation was economic. In a January 9, 1900 speech to the US Senate arguing for colonization, Indiana Senator Albert Beveridge asked "where shall we turn for consumers of our surplus?" His answer "china is our natural customer. **The Philippines will give us a base at the door of all the East.** No land in America surpasses in fertility the plains and valleys of Luzon ... The wood of the Philippines can supply the furniture of the world for a century to come."

In the book by Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (1995), the same senator was quoted again. **"The Philippines are ours forever ... And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable market ... The Pacific is our ocean."**

Gen. Arthur McArthur was the head of the colonial pacification campaign in 1901. In his assessment on the Philippines to the US Senate, he said that the "Philippines constituted the finest group of islands in the world. Its strategic position is unexcelled by that of any other position on the globe. The China Sea, which separates it by something like 750 miles from the continent, is nothing more or less than a safety moat. It lies on the flank of what might be called a position of several thousand miles of coastlines, it is in the center of that position. It is therefore relatively better placed than Japan, which is on a flank, and therefore remote from the other extremity; likewise India, on another flank. It affords a means of protecting American interests which with the very least output of physical power, has the effect of a commanding position in itself to retard hostile action."

There was widespread armed resistance against the American presence during the first fifteen years, despite compromises by their leaders, notably the Sultan of Sulu, Datu Piang of Maguinclanao and Datu Mandi of Zamboanga. Between 1903 to 1936, Americans estimated that between 15,000 to 20,000 Moro lives were lost from the fighting.

In the words of an American officer, "no one dreamed that the Constabulary was to engage in hundreds of 'cotta forst' (fort) fights and to quell twenty-six uprisings of sufficient seriousness to be listed as campaigns before it turned over the task of establishing laws and order, still uncompleted, to the Philippine Army in 1936."

Endless bloodshed and destruction became the order of the day because the situation seemed so skillfully woven to neutralize the Moros right in their own backyard. The Alangkat Movement in 1926-27 in Cotabato valley was the initial response to this. At the height of the war with Japan, a series of massacres fueled by agrarian disputes. In Cotabato alone, about 1,000 people on both sides were brutally hacked to pieces in the towns of Buluan, Tacurong, Midsayap and Pigkawayan. The marketplace in Pigkawayan was enclosed in barbed wire and the Moros inside were sorted out and slaughtered en masse. About 200 men, women and children perished in this slaughter.

Another corollary result of this phenomena, **the colonial contradiction between Filipino and Americans was obscured by the more visible religious Muslim-Christian contradiction, expressed in bloody conflict over agricultural land.**

By 1950, an estimated 8,300 families had been brought to government settlements in Mindanao, 1,500 more arrived between 1950 and 1954. By 1963, the National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration was administering colonies, including over 25,000 families and 695,000 hectares. Following the fashion set by the state, legions came on their own. The movement speeded up dramatically under the Marcos regime - more than three million Christians are estimated to have settled in Mindanao between 1966 and 1976.

The consequences were simply devastating. According to official statistics, the population of the island stood at 2.5 million in 1948; by 1976, it had risen to 8.7 million. Moros, who formed 98 percent of the island's population in 1913, accounted for only 40 percent by 1976. **They owned all the land in Mindanao on the eve of colonization. Today, they own less than 17 percent. Over 80 percent of Moros are now landless tenants.**

The American capitalists intensified their spoliation in Mindanao. In 1957, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company was awarded 1,000 hectares of land in Makilala, North Cotabato for a rubber plantation. In 1963, Dole Philippines, subsidiary of the Castle and Cook Company acquired vast tracts of land in Tupi and Polomolok, Cotabato for its pineapple plantations. In 1966, Weyerhaeuser Corporation obtained 72,000 hectares of forest lands in Mindanao for its logging operation.

The opportunities for profits were and remain endless. Bernard Wideman reported in mid-1970s: "The foreign corporations would earn profits of \$1,785 per hectare a year, but the laborer actually cultivating the one hectare would earn annual wages of only \$240."

Conditions were even worse for certain whole categories of workers. "In banana plantation, where combined Stanfilco (a subsidiary of Dole), Philpak (Del Monte) and Tadeco (United Fruit) account for 77.96 percent of production, the average annual profit in the late 1970s reached \$9,700 per hectare. The corporations paid between \$35 and \$70 per hectare per year to the farmer from whom they leased the land.

In 1972-73, some 156 logging operations in Mindanao obtained a total concession area of almost five million hectares, 13

percent of which were held by four US timber companies. In 1971, a Senate committee noted the military's extensive participation in perpetration of outright violence to gain possession of lands. Not only were the logging concerns responsible for evicting the Moro people from millions of hectares, they also destroyed forests at a rate nine times higher than the rate of reforestation. The coming of capital to Mindanao in the most literal sense, a war not only against the inhabitants but also against the land itself.

Essentially, the settling of Mindanao meant the grabbing of the ancestral lands for conversion into homesteads, plantations, infrastructure and industrial enclaves for foreign investors.

The future full-scale wars in the island are in many ways the logical extension of the process started by the American conquest of the Moro homelands at the beginning of the century.

The war began 1968-1969 with the rise of Christian terror squads that were supported by the PC and AFP. Ilagas, the largest group was led by seven municipal mayors and three provincial governors. In 1975, their strength was estimated at 35,000. Reports indicated that they were financed largely by timber merchants who sought Moro lands for their logging operations. The AFP conducted elaborate "search and destroy" missions in coordination with the terrorists.

For the first two years, the war was confined to areas where the overwhelming majority of the population was Christian. Its sole objective was to evict the remaining Moros.

Obviously, the Moros neither wanted the war nor were prepared for it. The Sulu Moros, who later came to dominate the leadership of the MNLF, did not participate in the war until early 1972. A decisive counteroffensive began to take place only with the spontaneous uprising in Marawi on October 21, 1972, one month after Marcos declared martial law.

Between 1972 and 1976, the first two years of war, annual military expenditures rose from 518 million to 3.5 billion, or by almost 700 percent. By May, 1979, the Marcos regime was spending \$137,000 a day on the war. Meanwhile the AFP personnel rose from 60,000 to 250,000. In the late 1975, at the height of the war, three-fourths of the troops were deployed in Mindanao.

Abdurasad Asani, a south-Filipino Muslim, had drawn the following balance for the London-based magazine, Impact: 50,000 killed, two million refugees (one out of every three or four Muslims had become refugees), 200,000 houses burned, 535 mosques and 200 schools demolished, 35 cities and towns wholly destroyed. **In less than a decade, the Muslims have vacated over a million hectares of land.**

Cong. Eduardo Ermita, the current head of the GRP panel disclosed **in 1996 that "over a period of 26 years since 1970, more than 100,000 persons were killed ... the AFP has spent about P73 billion in connection with the Mindanao conflict since 1970."**

Casualties of War in Mindanao (1970-1996)

100,000+ persons have been killed

- 30% government casualties
- 50% rebels
- 20% civilians
- 18 people were slain everyday

55,000 were injured not counting the rebel side

AFP SPENDING ON WAR

1970 - 1996 (never-ending conflict)

* 73 billion pesos (26-year period) or an average 40% of its annual budget

Cost of Peace Negotiation with MNLF

- less than 60 million pesos

It was the low intensity conflict (LIC) during the Aquino regime, Proponents of the LIC called for rethinking of traditional tactics and implementing "total war" on economic, social, political and psychological fronts.

One feature of this was the putting up of civil defense structures where civilians are armed and organized into right-wing paramilitary outlets. This is to "enhance local peace and order situations and involve civilians in the defense of their own communities, thus freeing up soldiers to take the offensive against the revolutionary forces.

Of the 77 major formation of the vigilantes nationwide, 17 were found in Mindanao.

A PNF report, on April 6, 1987 stated that "a CIA branch of 70 agents were recently established in Mindanao, the reportedly frequent visits of USIS official William Parker to Lt. Col. Franco Calicla, in Davao City and President Reagan's recent authorization of \$10 million and twelve new agents for CIA covert operations in the Philippines."

Just a month after the government and the MNLF signed the 1996 peace agreement on September 2, 1996, guns were firing in Mindanao. On October 18, 1996, the military moved against an MILF encampment in Baiwas, Sumisip, Basilan. The fighting spilled over two other municipalities and by October 24, a full-scale war had erupted again.

What are the "new" reasons for the continuing war?

War is again unleashed to facilitate the entry of Mindanao into the world capitalist system. Government flagship projects dubbed "Philippines 2000", "Mindanao 2000" and "ARMM 2000" are being pursued.

A component of the rush to global competitiveness is the development of one's comparative advantage. In the case of Lanao, the government has interpreted this to mean opening up vast tracts of land for contract growing and other extractive industries. Roads, power plants, port and other infrastructure projects are proceeding. Agro-industrial processing plants are being built.

Who poses hindrance to these projects?

It is the MILF. **And the government has pursued an every three-year war in Mindanao to get rid of the MILF.**

On June 16, 1997, the AFP wanted to drive the MILF out from the region's largest and most valuable natural gas deposit in Liguasan marsh. The war started in Pikit, North Cotabato after the reported MILF harassment against an oil exploration team of the National Power Corp.

Estrada declared an all-out war in 2000 under the pretext of giving "not an inch will be ceded. Essentially, his objective was to clear the common boundary of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao from MILF's political influence. Estrada and Arroyo are hell-bent on dismantling the ten major camps and at least 25 sub-camps or training camps across 13 provinces. Later, Camp Abubakar was disclosed to be converted into a special economic zone.

Erap All-Out war (2000)

- P6 billion was spent on war or a billion peso higher than what the government spent on building schools nationwide.
- Cost of one 105mm howitzer - 7,300 pesos (2000 price) or an equivalent of a chair and table set for at least 36 students in Grade 1 and 2.
- Cost of one 105mm howitzer fired to Buliok Complex is 730,000 or an equivalent to 1,123 bags of certified rice seeds at P650 per bag.

Paving the way for the American capital to operate meant further marginalization of the Moro people and the Lumads.

Items (outlay or losses)	Monetary value (in pesos)
3-mos AFP military operations	P900M - P1.8B (PDI) P50M per day or P7.5 M (UNDP/AFRIM)
Assistance to evacuees (partial)	P32M
Damage to crops, livestock, fisheries (partial)	P23M (DA-Maguindanao/AFRIM)

Damage to roads, irrigation systems, Post-harvest facilities and other infra	P202M (CDRC)
Foregone tourism	P62.1 M (CDRC)
Burned houses and lost possessions (including looted belongings) in 8 barangays in Maguinclanao and Lanao del Sur	P15.7 M (AFRIM)
Total	P1,436,800,000 - P8,036,800,000 Or approx. P1.436B - P8.037B

PDI - Philippine Daily Inquirer UNDP United Nations Development Program; DA - Department of Agriculture; AFRIM - Alternative forum for Research in Mindanao; CDRC - Center for Disaster Relief and Cooperation
Note: US\$1 is approximately equivalent to 53 pesos

What triggered the February 11, 2002 declaration of war by Arroyo?

The Memorandum of Instructions from Arroyo to her defense secretary dated February 11, 2003.

It was an order to totally implement the OPLAN GREENBASE. Oplan Greenbase was to capture and occupy simultaneously within one week the Buliok complex fronting the Liguasan marsh. This complex comprise the Kabasalan island complex, the Rajamuda complex and the Buliok complex. Once the objective is achieved, the AFP must clear the Liguasan marsh of all MILF structures military, political and social and lawless elements and relocate the civilians living in the marsh.

The same memorandum instructed the DoE to revive the geophysical survey and exploration contract between Petronas Carigali and the Philippine National Oil Company Exploration Corporation. It also ordered the NEDA Director-General to implement the muchdelayed 25-year Liguasan Marsh Development Framework Plan and **to reconstitute the Liguasan Marsh Development Task Forces soon as the AFP takes full control of the marsh from the MILF.**

The same memorandum also reminded that the high-value target of the plan was to capture Salama Hashim dead or alive. The neutralization of Tahir Alonto will only be effected after the MILF leaders are arrested, jailed or killed.

An incomplete comparison between the social cost of war in 2000 and 2003 is as follows:

Partial cost of war in Mindanao in 2000 and 2003

Items (outlays or losses)	Mindanao 3-month war monetary value - '00 (mid-April - mid-July)	One month war in Minda -03 (Feb-March 2003)
assistance to evacuees estimated total refugees 500,000 refugees (partial)	P32M	P18.4M (DSWD-P13.3M LGUs - 1.7M; Private-P3.3M - P1.6M from Libya - P30.6M relief and rehab of 15 brgys of Pikit "peace zones" Total: P50.6M 200,000 refugees
damage to crops, livestock, fisheries/ rehab budget	P124.76M P75.3M	P46.8M/P30.68M
damage to infrastructure	P202M	P50M - power pylons repair damage to equipment in 1 bombing - P5M partial total - P75M

The data on the increasing cost of war is presented below:

Increase cost of insecurity since February 2003

Item	Cost
Additional 7,000 soldiers from '03	P800,000,000
Mindanao Peace & Dev't Fund (from Mindanao Legislators/OP)	P500,000,000
Balikatan Exercises	P96,300,000
2-yr contract with Washington -based Rhoads Macguire and PR partner Weber Shandwick ending Dec. '03 to promote AFP modernization	P37,000,000 (\$684,500)
MIAA purchased brand new hi-tech security equipment from Germany	P20,000,000
Cost of 16 bomb suits for EOD experts	P1,700,000
Rent of US body armor for RP soldiers	P270,000 (\$5,000)
Reward for information on Davao airport bombers	P600,000
Total	P1,445,870,000

The South China Sea has a proven oil reserve estimated at 7.5 billion barrels. A 1994 Geological Survey estimates that the total sum of undiscovered reserves in Spratlys and Paracel islands is around 28 billion barrels. Other estimates by China say the total potential of this area could be as high as 213 billion barrels.

How does Minsupala fare on this profile?

Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan (Minsupala) are now "confirmed oil country". Discoveries of oil and gas in Palawan and Cotabato reinforced the satellite findings of the National Space Agency that the largest deposits of oil and gas in Asia could lie in the area covered by Minsupala. Minsupala is often referred to as the "Middle East" of the near future.

It is also in the Philippine deep (eastern coast of Mindanao) where an inexhaustible deposit of deuterium is found. Deuterium is heavy water used in the production of liquefied hydrogen gas used as fuel for cars and jet planes and in its solidified state, as fuel for spacecrafts. It is described by Jules Verne in 1874 as the "fuel in the future."

What other resources are found in the country?

The Philippines is the world's second largest producer of geothermal power. The country is also reputed to have 2.8 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves. Liguasan marsh alone has 1.3 trillion cubic feet. A report by Nash Maulana said Sultan sa Barongis, a town in Maguindanao and near Liguasan marsh has been chosen as the site of natural gas exploration project of the Philippine National Oil Company jointly with the Petronas Carigali Malaysian consortium. But Petronas has pulled out in favor of an American company.

What are the scenarios concomitant with the escalating US war of aggression in the island?

The aerial bombardment of the island will most likely follow the operations manual for the aerial bombardment of Iraq written in a book by former military officers Harlan K. Ullman and James Wade, Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance, published by the National Defense University in 1996.

The authors say that their aims can be summed up as: "Paralyze, shock unnerve, deny, destroy through very selective, utterly brutal and ruthless and rapid application of force to intimidate." The intended effect would be like the nuclear bombing of Japan in 1945.

"Shutting the country down would entail both the physical destruction of appropriate infrastructure and the shutdown and control of the flow of all vital information and associated commerce so rapidly as to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese. Simultaneously, Iraq's armed forces would be paralyzed with the neutralization or destruction of its capabilities." (The Internationalist, March 28, 2003 Special Issue, p.5)

There are already countries that have been subjected to bombings. In 1999, Yugoslavia was subjected to 78 days of round-the-clock bombings, transforming a relatively advanced country into virtually a third world country. Afghanistan was bombarded with US' AGM-86D cruise missiles, their AGM-130 missiles, their 15, 000 pound "daisy cutter" bombs, their depleted uranium and their cluster bombs.

CONCLUSION

War in Mindanao is basically a war to ensure US continuing rape and plunder of the island's remaining resource base as well as ensuring that Mindanao play its role to the fullest in maintaining US world hegemony in part of the world. The White House issued a document last September, 2002 which states, 'it is to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength in order to dissuade future military competition. We must be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing or equaling the power of the United States.'

War in Mindanao has also been misrepresented as a matter of incorrect priorities. History shows that it is not a matter of national priority. It is the semi-colonial status of the system that produces war over and over again.

The costs of the war is deliberately justified as result of religious conflicts between the Moro people and the Christians. Because of this, the political and economic content of their war escapes most of the combatants themselves. Of course, it is to the interest of the US and its puppets that the war in Mindanao be conducted on religious grounds, for this allows the government to present itself as an arbiter of disputes between two religion, and hence, an entity above both.

More importantly, the multinationals operating in Mindanao also benefit when the war is viewed in religious terms because the communal conflicts obstructs the growth of an anti-imperialist movement in the island. The position of the corporations at the top is remote from the everyday Moro consciousness.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The long-term objective of the escalating US war of aggression is to decisively wipe out the growing armed resistance of the revolutionary forces in Mindanao. Equally, it also intends to crush people's legitimate movements that continue to assert the Mindanaoans' in particular, and in general, the Filipino people's democratic and nationalist interests and -resist the continuing plunder of island's resources.

There is an overwhelming need to fight the war on correct grounds. We cannot stop the war by pleading with the US and the government for peace. The only way to put an end to the endless wars is to bring down the system that produces war over and over.

It is an urgent and necessary to build a Mindanao-based broad coalition of all nationalist, patriotic, progressive and anti-US led war of aggression individuals, groups, political forces, institutions and nongovernment organizations. This broad formation can significantly help in frustrating the escalating ear of aggression by bringing into the forefront the collective strength and the resolve of all Mindanaoans nurtured, steeled and buttressed by their long and common historical resistance against any foreign invader.

The coalition should work for the development of an anti-US led war movement in order to frustrate the escalating US led war of aggression in the island. It should coordinate the emerging independent initiatives and local protests of people's organizations and movements, and political groups in the whole island against the war. It should also pursue the all-sided political exposure of the Arroyo government whose brazen puppetry to US imperialism has wreck havoc on the lives of Mindanaoans.

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