A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE MINDANAO CONFLICT

by Atty. SOLIMAN M. SANTOS, JR.
Quezon City, Philippines
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1. **Holistic** – all aspects, not just socio-cultural and political but also historical, economic, educational, religious, moral, ideological, legal, psychological, interpersonal, and yes, military.

   1.1 In the case of the Mindanao Conflict, "all of the above" and more.

   1.2 TJS George: "The theories that run the gamut from religion to misgovernment were relevant only only in so far as they were all pieces of an enormously complex jigsaw. To pick any one of them as the outstanding cause for the upheaval would be a hindrance to understanding the total picture."

   1.3 Not only multi-dimensional but also evolving, with different dimensions coming to the fore at different times.

2. **Mindanao** – a tri-people dynamic

   2.1 Western-influenced Christian Filipino majority – mainly Catholic migrant settlers of the 20th Century from Luzon and Visayas and their descendants; 12 million or 75% of population; majority in 18 out of 23 provinces

   2.2 *Moro* (Muslim Filipino) minority – 13 ethno-linguistic groups which are mostly Islamized; 4 million or 20% of population; majority in 5 provinces and 11 municipalities (or a total of 72 municipalities)

   2.3 *Lumad* (indigenous highlander tribes) minority – 18 or so ethno-linguistic groups which were not Islamized, are mostly Protestants; 2 million or 5 % of the population; majority in 8 municipalities

   2.4 **Tri-People Approach** – emphasizes the existence of the three peoples which have to share Mindanao, the ideal of their equality and unity, and Mindanao itself as the basis of a new or additional identity as Mindanaoan or *Mindanawon*. But this should not negate Moro and Lumad identities, which are still struggling for better recognition.

3. **Mindanao Problem** (or Conflict) **and Muslim/Moro Problem**

   3.1 *Mindanao Problem* – a problem of relationships among the three peoples there *and* with the central Philippine government, with the *Moro Problem* as its historically and currently most critical expression, its cutting edge or key link. Note the *vertical* (Mindanao people to central government) and *horizontal* (people to people) dimensions of the problem.

   3.2 *Moro Problem* - the historical and systematic marginalization and minoritization of the Moros in their own homeland (Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan), first by colonial powers

Spain, then the U.S., followed by successor Philippine "colonial" governments dominated by an elite with a Western-Christian orientation.

3.3 Patricio P. Diaz: *Muslim or Moro Problem* concerns the socio-cultural and economic life of the Muslim or Moro people, especially their present state of underdevelopment.. *Mindanao Problem* concerns the socio-economic and political struggles of Muslim leaders among themselves and against intruders into their homeland starting with the Spaniards about 1600, followed by the Americans in 1900, and now with the "Imperial Manila" government and the dominant Christians.

3.4 Recognition of the broader Mindanao context is not incompatible with the necessary focus on the Muslim or Moro Problem to give it its just due, albeit informed by Mindanao's tri-people character.

4. **More & Deeper into the *Moro Problem***

4.1 Dr. Macapado A. Muslim's schema on historical roots and contemporary causes of the recurrent Moro armed struggle (see separate sheet): 6 key elements of the Moro Problem, 10 foundational causes (1898-1972), and triggering event(s). Shows holistic complexity of the problem. In short, *their very survival as a people or nation* was/is threatened, thus their resistance.

4.2 Philippine government perspective – the *integration* of the Moros into the Philippine state and nation, which is predominantly Christian

4.3 Peter Gordon Gowing (articulating the Moro perspective of its *Philippine or Christian problem*) – the *restructuring of the political relationship* between the Moro people and the Philippine republic so as to:
- mitigate threats of cultural assimilation by the Christian majority,
- assure the patrimony of their homeland and resources for their descendants, and
- exercise control over those aspects of their political and social lives which most impinge on their selfhood as Muslims.

4.4 Dr. Cesar Adib Majul: The problem is "actually multi-faceted or represents a constellation of various problems" but is "mainly a national problem," *the result of the policies of the central government.*

4.5 Dr. Sukarno D. Tanggol: Two concepts constitute the core of the Moro grievance –
   4.5.1 The principle of *self-determination* calls for an appropriate and substantial degree of self-rule in terms of powers and area where the Moro people will have the opportunity and capability to effectively address their marginalization.
   4.5.2 The principle of *social justice* calls for the correction of the neglect of and injustices against the Moro people in the past.

4.6 Fr. Eliseo R. Mercado, OMI: Two fundamental Moro aspirations – *economic well-being*, and *preservation and development of their Islamic and cultural heritage.*

4.7 W.K. Che Man: "…at issue *primarily is a conflict of cultures* [almost like "clash of civilizations"]…the continuation of centuries of confrontation between Muslims and foreign intrusion… the movements essentially represent struggles for survival, for the preservation of *Muslim identity and way of life…* the ethnic protagonists perceive their conflict not in socio-economic terms but as *ethnic, religious and nationalist.*"

4.8 MNLF: "…the Bangsa Moro people's revolution is waged primarily in defense of the *Bangsa (nation)*, the *homeland*, and *Islam*." [the three classic causes of the Moro struggle for self-determination]

4.9   MILF: "…the end in view of establishing a *system of life and governance suitable and acceptable to the Bangsamoro people.*"

Three Tracks of the **Current Form of Evolution of the Conflict on the Moro Front**

1) Implementation of the GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement (1996-Present)

2) GRP-MILF Peace Negotiations (1997-Present)

3) Post-9/11 Terrorism (e.g. Abu Sayyaf) and Counter-Terrorism

5.   **Three Moro Streams**

5.1 **Moro *National* Liberation Front** (MNLF)

5.1.1   secularist-nationalist-modernist, founded by Prof. Nur Misuari
5.1.2   made the name "Moro" respectable and the basis of a common identity and consciousness as a nation (*Bangsa*) of the 13 ethno-linguistic groups of Muslims
5.1.3   "Liberation through Peace and Development" as new line
5.1.4   integration into the Philippine political and economic mainstream, with some access and power-sharing
5.1.5   limited autonomy subject to the control of the Philippine constitutional system, processes and institutions of national sovereignty, including existing laws

Note: The MNLF has recently split into about four factions, the two main ones are: the government-recognized anti-Misuari **"Council of 15"** and the **Misuari group** which the government calls the "Misuari Breakaway Group" (MBG) but is actually the real MNLF mainstream and main armed force.   Both factions largely retain the above orientation but the Misuari group is veering to its original independence line with and to some extent already resorting to armed struggle. A third faction, the **Islamic Command Council** (ICC), is staunchly anti-Misuari while more pronouncedly Islamic in orientation.

5.2   **Moro *Islamic* Liberation Front** (MILF)

5.2.1   radical Islamic revivalist, founded by the late Ustadz Salamat Hashim
5.2.2   overarching orientation is Islamic, though shares some nationalist and modernist elements
5.2.3   tendency is to exit or separate/secede from the Philippine system rather than to access it
5.2.4   maximum long-term aspiration for an independent Islamic state, as the optimum arrangement for the practice of Islam as a way of life and governance

5.3   Islamic Revival – main tenets or beliefs:

5.3.1   *Din wa Dawla* (religion and state) – have no separation. Islam is a total and comprehensive system or way of life, the blueprint for which is the Qur'an.

5.3.2   *Qur'an wa Sunna* (the way of the Prophet Muhammad) – are the foundations of Islam, its early roots to which Muslims should return for authentic renewal.

5.3.3   Puritanism and Social Justice – as Islamic values and practices, while rejecting Western cultural values and mores as alien to Islam. The failure of Muslim societies is due to departure from the straight path of Islam by following a Western secular path.

5.3.4   *Hakimiyya* (Allah's sovereignty) and *nizam al-Islam* (Islamic order or system) – are the ultimate aim where *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) is supreme and should replace Westernized law.

5.3.5   *Jihad* (holy war or struggle) – means defensive and offensive external struggle against threats to Islam, as well as inner struggle to control one's own base desires or impulses.

5.3.6   Although Westernization is condemned, modernisation as such, especially its science and technology, is accepted but subordinated to Islamic beliefs and values.

5.4   Interrelationship of the MNLF & MILF

5.4.1   Although split on still existing grounds of ideological orientation, political strategy, personality clashes and ethnic allegiances, the MNLF and MILF have on the whole not gotten in the way of each other's tracks and have in recent times even been moving towards some convergence or modus vivendi through a unity process.

5.4.2   Blood is thicker than water. For Moros, this identity as a nation (Bangsamoro) is not as strong as their identity as Muslims and as particular ethnic groups/tribes. To the credit of the MNLF and MILF, they continue to uphold and promote Bangsamoro as a unifying identity among the ethnic groups/tribes but this has diminished vis-à-vis Muslim identity and unity *and* ethnic/tribal belonging.

5.4.3   The MNLF and MILF are more complementary than conflicting. What seems diametrically opposed have some point of complementarity. (Eastern "to be AND not to be" as distinguished from Western "to be OR not to be")

5.4.4   Prof. Julkipli M. Wadi: "The MNLF and the MILF are separated ideologically, they are like security guards with shifting schedules. When one takes a nap, the other takes over."

5.5 **Abu Sayyaf** (*Harakatul al-Islamiya*)

5.5.1 Two Views

5.5.1.1   <u>bandits</u>, outlaws
"entrepreneurs in violence"
product of four kinds of violence:
random, syndicated, revolutionary, state
could be a phenomenon of social protest

5.5.1.2   movement of young Moro <u>rebels</u>
political group
radical and militant "Islamism"
independent Islamic state
extreme means

5.5.1.3   *Question(s)*: bandits or rebels? Social/post-modern bandits? Quasi-rebels? "Like outlaws" but with an agenda and ideology? Now international terrorists?

5.5.2   Situate its Origins in:

5.5.2.1   long struggle for *Moro identity*

          5.5.2.2 long history of *outlaw identity*

          5.5.2.3 recent efforts for *Islamic identity*

6. Mindanao Peace Process

6.1 Two Current Tracks (vertical dimension)
    6.1.1   *Principal*: implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement
    6.1.2   *Secondary*: GRP-MILF peace negotiations
    6.1.3   *Supplemental*: Civil society support and citizen participation in the peace process, including as third-parties, mediators and monitors

6.2 Other Tracks of a Broader Process
    6.2.1   People-to-people or tri-people peace process, especially at the community and interpersonal levels (horizontal dimension)
    6.2.2   Lumad indigenous people's agenda of the most vulnerable and marginalized minority
    6.2.3   Economic/development component

6.3 Two Basic Concerns (Fr. Mercado)
    6.3.1   Address root causes of the conflict (structural – vertical)
    6.3.2   Heal deep social, cultural and religious cleavages (relational – horizontal)

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