



Unconventional Warfare

Are US Special Forces engaged in an 'offensive war' in the Philippines?

Focus on the Philippines

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VJ VILLAFRANCA / M4 COLLECTIVE

Since January 2002, US Special Operations Forces (SOFs) have been stationed in the southern Philippines and have not left since then.

Initially the deployment sparked controversy and stirred opposition given that a long-standing campaign against US military presence in the country had earlier resulted in the insertion into the post-Marcos 1986 Constitution of provisions limiting the presence of foreign troops and in the eventual closure of US military bases in 1992. While a subsequent treaty paved the way for the re-entry of US troops to take part in so-called training exercises, the deployment of the US SOFs was a big step farther: For the first time, US troops were openly going to a combat-zone with real enemies. In an attempt to stop the deployment, a petition invoking the constitutional provisions on foreign troops was

lodged before the Philippine Supreme Court.¹ It was junked. While the Court agreed with the petitioners that US troops are indeed constitutionally banned from engaging in an “offensive war” in the country, it held that whether they are actually doing so is “a question of fact” that has to be proven.²

Five years after the initial deployment, this report gathers the available information and evidence regarding this “question of fact” with the intention to show that there are grounds for revisiting the role and actions of the US military in the Philippines, both in terms of its constitutionality and in terms its impact on regional peace and stability.

'A Question of Fact'

Though it is now known that US President George W. Bush had from the beginning offered to send the troops in a direct military role,³ US and Philippine government officials have consistently maintained that the SOFs are not engaged in “actual combat” or in an “active military role” in the country.⁴ In light of the Supreme Court ruling, this position is evidently intended to justify the constitutionality of the deployment and to counter the legal arguments of the opposition. With few exceptions, the media has tended to follow this line without probing further, as though the “question of fact” has become a fact that is no longer in question.⁵

But new and accumulated information on the actual operations of the US troops in the country over the years indicate that the question is still far from being adequately answered. Though seemingly only a legal and technical issue, much is at stake. The deployment of US Special Forces troops in the country has arguably had significant implications for issues of peace and security in the southern Philippines, on democracy in the country and its sovereignty, on the geo-political balance in the region, and on the US' global military posture. But – because of domestic historical factors and the current balance of political forces – it is on the claim that the US Special Forces are not engaged in “actual combat” that their continuing presence in the Philippines seem to stand.

This report revisits and explores this claim. At the outset, it is worth clarifying that it is beyond the scope and capacity of this report to exhaustively and conclusively probe the subject owing to the following limitations:

First is the deliberate secrecy with which the US troops' mission in the Philippines is being executed.

Because of domestic historical factors and the current balance of political forces – it is on the claim that the US Special Forces are not engaged in “actual combat” that their continuing presence in the Philippines seem to stand.

As will be discussed later, the unit in question specializes precisely in covert and clandestine operations. No journalist is known to have accompanied US troops in action and most of the information they report is limited to what is given to them during press briefings and interviews.

Second is the apparent mismatch between how the mission has been presented to the public and how it is privately understood and carried out by the US troops and by the governments.⁶ Such a divergence broke out in the open at least once, in February 2003, when the Pentagon announced that the US troops were coming for actual combat operations⁷ and accused Filipino officials of asking them to mislead the public.⁸ As GlobalSecurity.org, a reference for security-related issues, observed: “US operations in the Philippines are particularly hard to track as political realities make it difficult for the United States to publicly identify counter-terrorism operations and thus current operations are generally identified or associated with other training exercises or with humanitarian operations...”⁹ Moreover, the SOFs in the country are known to have conducted “psychological operations” or “psyops” for “handling the Philippine media” because it was felt that local journalists have a “decidedly anti-American bias.”¹⁰ In the US military, “psyops” are defined as

“Yet a nagging question remains: are American troops actively engaged in combat alongside Filipino soldiers under the guise of an alleged training and assistance exercise? Contrary to what petitioners would have us do, we cannot take judicial notice of the events transpiring down south, as reported from the saturation coverage of the media...The petitions invite us to speculate on what is really happening in Mindanao, to issue, make factual findings on matters well beyond our immediate perception, and this we are understandably loath to do. It is all too apparent that the determination thereof involves basically a question of fact.”

- Supreme Court decision on petition against deployment of US troops, April 2002



US TROOPS with Filipino soldiers in Jolo, Sulu.

“planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign government, organizations, groups, and individuals.”¹¹

Third is the reluctance of residents living in the area of operations to publicly relate what they have witnessed, for fear of reprisals from the military. In a region where rampant accusations of abuses and human rights violations allegedly committed by the military have gone unresolved, these witnesses refuse to talk knowing that their testimonies directly contradict the public pronouncements of military

officials stationed in their provinces.

Despite these limitations, this report at least hopes to offer leads or raise questions that others in government and in civil society – those who are in the position to compel and protect witnesses or demand explanations – may choose to probe further. It relies on publicly available information provided by US troops themselves who, in writing about their missions for military publications, have gone on record to describe their experiences in ways that cast their operation in a different light. It is based on first-hand interviews with witnesses who have dared to come out and who claim to have seen US troops

Special operations: those “conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments” and that require “covert, clandestine, or discreet capabilities.”

- US Special Operations Command, Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, July 2003



in action. It gathers various separate news articles, reports, and papers offering little-known or little-discussed information on the mission and puts them together to provide a bigger and more coherent picture. Finally, it studies and analyzes overall US global military strategy in order to contextualize their mission in the Philippines.

Based on the findings of this report, there is reason to believe that the “question of fact” the Supreme Court raised may be ready to be proven.

Special Operations

In trying to answer the question of whether US troops are engaged in an “offensive war” in the Philippines, it is first important to draw a distinction between US soldiers who join the regular joint combined training exercises in various parts of the country¹² (see table on pages 20-21 and 32-37) with those who are part of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P).¹³ What was cancelled by the United States government in December 2006, in response to the refusal of a Philippine court to transfer custody of a US Marine convicted of rape to the US, was only the annual training exercises slated for February 2007, not the deployment of the JSOTF-P in the southern Philippines. Media coverage and public discussion on the presence of US troops in the country have tended to lump those who take part in the JSOTF-P with those who take part in the exercises but there are important differences.¹⁴

While participants of the regular training exercises come from many different branches and services of the US military, those under the JSOTF-P are drawn specifically from the Special Operations Forces (SOFs), or those units that specialize in conducting “special operations.”¹⁵ According to the SOF’s own definition, “special operations” are those “conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments” and that require “covert,

clandestine, or discreet capabilities.”¹⁶ The US Army Field Manual, a guide for military missions and procedures, notes that SOF’s are the “force of choice” for “dynamic, ambiguous, and politically volatile situations.”¹⁷

In the US military, a “Joint Task Force” is established whenever there is a need to bring together units from more than one service for conducting specific missions.¹⁸ What is now known as the JSOTF-P evolved in July 2002 from the earlier Joint Task Force-510 (JTF-510) which was deployed to Basilan island, in the Southern Philippines, in January 2002. JTF-510 is described by the US Pacific Command as its “crisis response, rapid deployment” unit.¹⁹ According to an Army Major in a paper for the US Army Command and General Staff College, this task force has established a “forward operating base” in Zamboanga City.²⁰

While the number of participants in the training exercises is publicly disclosed prior to each exercise, this information has been withheld in the case of the JSOTF-P since its creation.²¹ Based on various media reports, the number of troops deployed to the southern Philippines has ranged between 160 and 350 but it is not clear what the actual total number is for a specific period. US embassy spokesman Matthew Lussenhop at one point claimed it “wouldn’t be above 100.”²² But US Lt. Col. Mark Zimmer, JSOTF-P public affairs officer, said it varies “depending on the season and the mission.”²³

While many of the exercises are conducted inside Philippine military training camps or other designated training areas, the JSOTF-P has been operating in an area in which actual hostilities with forces seen as hostile to the Philippines government

It is important to draw a distinction between US soldiers who join the regular joint combined training exercises in various parts of the country with those who are part of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines.

have ensued and are still ongoing. The exact coverage of its area of operation remains unclear. Moreover, the training exercises are conducted with no specified target or enemy in mind; the JSOTF-P, on the other hand, has been explicit in targeting “terrorists,” in particular the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and lately, the Jemaah Islamaiah, both of which are listed as “designated foreign terrorist organizations” by the US Department of State.²⁴ Indeed, from the very beginning, US and Philippine government officials announced that the deployment was part of the US-led “global war against terror.” Unknown to many, the JTF’s deployment here was labeled by the US military as “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines” (OEF-P) to signify that the nature and the goal of the deployment was in the same league as the original “Operation Enduring Freedom” – the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.²⁵ According to an article in the *New York Times*, the deployment to the Philippines was probably “the largest deployment of Special Forces into a combat zone” since Afghanistan, where Special Forces were also at the forefront.²⁶ While US officials have since

“The deployment of U.S. troops was contentious in-country because the local press asserted that U.S. forces could not legally participate in combat operations. However, a correct reading of the Philippine Constitution reveals that it prohibits only the stationing of foreign forces in the Philippines after the 1991 expiration of the Philippines-U.S. agreement on military bases. The constitution does not prohibit combat operations and provides an exception to this-if there is a treaty in force-and a treaty has been in force between the two countries since 1951. A lack of understanding of Philippine laws contributed to U.S. decisions to unduly restrict the employment of SF advisers.”

- Col. David Maxwell, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines commander, *Military Review*, May-June 2004



played down the Philippines' being part of the "global war on terror," President Bush in a speech as late as October 2004, continued to single out the country as one front in this war --- alongside Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁷

Finally, the regular training exercises are close-ended and usually last for no more than a week or two, after which the participating units return to their home bases; on the other hand, the JSOTF-P's stay has been indefinite. Contrary to former National Security Adviser Roilo Golez's assurance in 2002 that the US troops will "be gone" after six months, the troops remain.²⁸ Despite persistent queries from reporters and civil society organizations, US and Filipino officials have refused to give an exit-date. Capt Eddie Paruchabutr, former JSOTF-P information officer, could only say, "It's continuous as long as we are allowed to stay."²⁹

Special Warfare

While US and Filipino officials publicly emphasize mostly the "humanitarian" and "civil-military operations" (CMOs) of the JSOTF-P, members of this unit have privately cast their experience while in the country in a different light. Although written principally for internal US military consumption and little read outside of defense circles, their writings shed light on how they actually understand the nature of their mission in the Philippines.

For example, in an article for the US Army Combined Arms Center's *Military Review* journal, the first commander of the JSOTF-P Col. David Maxwell states that their mission was "to conduct unconventional warfare in the southern Philippines through, by, and with the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] to help the Philippine government separate the population and destroy the terrorist organization." Their key tasks included "denying the ASG sanctuary," "surveilling, controlling, or denying ASG routes," and "surveilling supporting villages and key personnel." In an apparent rebuff to the Supreme Court, Maxwell pointed out that – contrary to the Justices' reading – the Philippine constitution "does not prohibit combat operations." According to Maxwell, the "correct reading" of the constitution would show that it proscribes only the stationing of forces, not combat operations. Re-appointed as JSOTF-P commander in October 2006, Maxwell described the operations he led as being

**"The mission on Basilan was to conduct unconventional warfare operations in the Southern Philippines through, by, and with the AFP to help the Philippine government separate the population from and to destroy terrorist organizations."
- Col. David Maxwell, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines commander**



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US TROOPS in Jolo, Sulu.

conducted “under the guise of an exercise.”³⁰ Maxwell’s description is shared by members of the 1st Special Forces group who wrote a 45-year history of their unit’s engagements in the Philippines for the publication *Special Warfare*, the bulletin of the US Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. According to their own account, their unit took part in “the ongoing unconventional warfare operations...”³¹ Dr. C.H. Briscoe, the command historian of the US Army Special Operations Command interviewed soldiers “who participated at all levels of operations.” He wrote how their mission “transformed from unconventional warfare to foreign internal defense and development.” According to him, the ensuing ground campaign was best described by referring to the “counterinsurgency model.”³²

Eric Wendt, also writing for the same publication, cited the Joint Task Force’s actions as “a superior example of successful counterinsurgency.”³³ Similarly, Cheryl Walley, another US military historian, noted how the Special Forces in the country turned “from performing tactical missions to implementing the counterinsurgency

model that had been practiced by the American military in Vietnam.”³⁴ An analyst writing for the National Bureau of Asian Research observed that, “[A]lthough US training of Philippine forces in both Luzon and Mindanao is labeled counter-terror, in fact, the effort seems to be more counterinsurgency against the paramilitary forces of the Abu Sayyaf and the MILF [Moro Islamic Liberation Front].”³⁵ Incidentally, the US soldiers who performed these missions in Vietnam also claimed to be “advisers” even when they were later known to have been involved in combat.

The terms “unconventional warfare,” “foreign internal defense,” and “counterinsurgency” are rarely, if at all used, by US and Filipino officials in publicly describing the JSOTF-P’s work. But they are the words of choice of members of the US military writing on their own mission in the Philippines.³⁶ In US military jargon, “unconventional warfare” and “foreign internal defense” are among the key missions of SOFs.³⁷ Considered their *raison d’être*, “unconventional warfare” refers to all those operations that SOFs conduct “through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized,

trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source.”³⁸ This covers “guerilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.”³⁹

The operations under “foreign internal defense” refer to those activities conducted “to organize, train, advise, and assist host-nation military and paramilitary forces.”⁴⁰ According to a US Army Field Manual, the goal of this mission is to ensure that the kind of assistance that the US gives to its host’s troops “support US national interests.”⁴¹ “Counter-insurgency” covers all those “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions” performed by a government to defeat internal enemies.

‘In the thick of it’

Since the US Special Forces is a highly specialized and small branch of the US military, they are deployed only to those places and for those missions where their specialization and capabilities are most needed. A Field Manual points out that missions to which Special Forces are to be deployed should first be assessed and that they should be sent only to those missions that require skills and capabilities that only the unit can provide. As the manual stresses, “Special Forces offers unique military options unavailable from any other source.”⁴² Though little is reported in the media about the details of actual operations beyond the contents of press releases from US information officers, eyewitness testimonies of local residents who claim to have seen them in action, as well as certain media reports, indicate that the Special Forces’ exceptional skills have indeed been applied in their operations.

US and Philippine officials portray the US troops role as passive “advisers” indirectly engaged in the operations from a distance. But reports indicate that their role has been more active and direct. From the beginning, the US troops were authorized under the terms-of-reference between the US and Philippine governments to fire back if shot at. Under this arrangement, US Special Forces have “intentionally ventured into known Abu Sayyaf territory in an attempt to reassure locals while also dissuading the rebels from operating openly, as well as possibly tempting them to confront the Americans militarily,” notes an analyst with the Washington DC-based Center for Defense Information.⁴³

unconventional warfare: refers to all those operations conducted “through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source.”; covers “guerilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.”

- **Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, July 2003**

foreign internal defense: refers to those activities conducted “to organize, train, advise, and assist host-nation military and paramilitary forces” and ensure that operations “support US national interests.”

- **Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, July 2003**

counter-insurgency covers all those “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency. It is an offensive approach involving all elements of national power; it can take place across the range of operations and spectrum of conflict.”

- **US Army Field Manual 3-07-22**

“The US military helps to advise and assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines. We share information and train. But we are not directly involved in the operation in Sulu. We have no combat or frontline presence.”

- **US embassy spokesperson Matthew Lussenhop, September 2006**

In a little-reported incident in June 2002, US Marines exchanged gunfire with alleged members of the Abu Sayyaf group. In another incident, though not during a patrol, at least one US soldier was reported to have been “killed in action.” In March 2006, a Huey helicopter carrying US troops to Sulu was attacked by unidentified assailants.

Even as “advisers,” Briscoe, the Army historian, notes that the “guys were in thick of it” and were anxious to “get in the fight.”⁴⁴ According to Briscoe, the US troops “expected to shoot or to be shot.”⁴⁵ Such an expectation would not seem misplaced for, as one writer for a war veterans’ publication pointed out, “Though the Philippines [sic] constitution prohibits foreign soldiers from fighting within the island nation, US troops are exposed to the same risks they would see in combat.”⁴⁶ In fact, on at least one known occasion, they have actually fired back. In a little-reported incident in June 2002, as reported by the *Los Angeles Times* and confirmed in the *Army* magazine, US Marines exchanged gunfire with alleged members of the ASG.⁴⁷ In another incident, though not during a patrol, at least one soldier was reported to have been “killed in action.”⁴⁸ In March 2006, a Huey helicopter carrying US troops to Sulu was attacked by unidentified assailants.⁴⁹

US officials describe Special Forces’ role as “training, advising, and assisting” Filipino troops, without elaborating on what exactly “assisting” means. During the on-the-job training against hostile forces, giving advice, helping, and actually being part of the action may well have overlapped. As Walley explains,

“Security-assistance missions preclude the trainers from being combatants or from performing duties in which they are likely to become combatants. But the trainers’ credibility and effectiveness as teachers mandated that they accompany the AFP troops on their graduation exercise, of which combat was an integral part.”⁵⁰ While their primary role was to train, Briscoe points out that the “unspoken” mission later changed to include “facilitating the rescue” of ASG hostages. As Briscoe details in his account of the rescue effort, this entailed assuming a more assertive and central role in the planning, decision-making, and execution of the operations.⁵¹

At first, the US troops were only allowed to operate at the battalion-level. Such a set-up frustrated US troops. At one point, former US Pacific Command chief Admiral Dennis Blair reportedly “tried to get too aggressive” while others in the military pressed for a “longer and more intense mission.”⁵² The JSOTF-P commander Maxwell argued that confining the troops at the battalion was a “strategic error.”⁵³ That error has since been apparently rectified and US troops have since been authorized by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to operate at the company-level and have joined patrols “as often

as possible.”⁵⁴ This set-up is similar to the US war on Afghanistan where Special Forces troops joined and commanded 120-man companies of the Northern Alliance.⁵⁵

It was apparently on one of these patrols that in June 2005, residents claimed US forces allegedly joined the Philippine military in their operations against Abu Sayyaf members in Maguindanao province in mainland Mindanao – even when no training exercises or civil projects were announced then.⁵⁶ A P-3 Orion plane was sighted flying over the area.⁵⁷ In November of that year, the AFP launched operations allegedly against the Abu Sayyaf, even as those who were fighting back claimed to belong to the Moro National Liberation Front, a group whose peace agreement with the government has frayed but which is not tagged a “terrorist group” by either Manila or Washington. Eyewitnesses of the encounters claimed to have seen US troops actually join the Filipino soldiers in operations at the immediate vicinity of the fighting.⁵⁸ They were seen aboard military trucks with their Filipino counterparts and in rubber boats, mounting heavy artillery, operating military equipment, removing landmines, or evacuating casualties. Throughout the clashes, a spy plane – which locals claim had been flying over the skies for months – was seen hovering above the area where fighting was ongoing.⁵⁹

‘Special Reconnaissance’

US officials dismissed these reports as “absolutely not true.”⁶⁰ According to the JSOTF-P public affairs officer Lt. Col. Mark Zimmer, “We are not in any way involved in military operations conducted by the Philippine Armed Forces.”⁶¹ Another spokesperson said they don’t comment on the details of their operations.⁶² But even a Filipino general, Gen. Nehemias Pajarito, while maintaining that the US troops were not involved in combat, confirmed at least one sighting.⁶³ According to him, the US troops were only repairing water pipes while the operations were ongoing.⁶⁴ Another Filipino colonel confirmed to have requested the US troops’ help in clearing landmines.⁶⁵ The US troops’ role in evacuating troop casualties had previously been reported and confirmed by the US military itself.⁶⁶ In an article in a US Air Force magazine, US soldiers were reported

FIVE YEARS ON...



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US TROOPS with Filipino soldiers in Jolo, Sulu.

November 2001: US President George Bush offers to send US troops to the Philippines for a “direct military role” in combating the Abu Sayyaf.

January 2002: The first batch of US Special Operations Forces are deployed to Basilan.

April 2002: Philippine Supreme Court junks petition questioning constitutionality of the deployment of US troops, saying whether they are involved in an “offensive war” first needs to be proven.

June 2002: US troops who participated in the operation describe their mission as “unconventional warfare operations” in a military publication. In Basilan, US troops exchange gunfire with alleged Abu Sayyaf members.

October 2002: One US soldier is “killed in action” in a bombing incident in Zamboanga City.

February 2003: US Department of Defense official announces that US troops to be deployed to Sulu island will engage in actual combat operations. Philippine government denies this. Planned deployment is postponed but the US’ characterization of the deployment is not taken back.

November 2003: signing of Mutual Logistics Support Agreement which, according to Army Magazine, made Philippines a “supply base” of the US.

May 2004: In a military publication, US military commander in Basilan Col. David Maxwell writes that their mission in the Philippines was to conduct “unconventional warfare” to “destroy” the Abu Sayyaf Group “under the guise of an exercise.”

June 2005: Witnesses claim US troops took part in hostilities against the Abu Sayyaf in Maguindanao.

October 2005: Australian media reports that Australian troops are involved in “covert operations” against terrorists in the Southern Philippines.

November 2005: Witnesses claim US troops took part in operations against the Moro National Liberation Front in Sulu.

February 2006: Filipino general confirms sighting of US troops at the vicinity of November 2005 fighting but denies they were involved in combat.

October 2006: Australian troops reported by Australian media to have joined US and Filipino soldiers in pursuit of the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

to have “helped infiltrate and extract ground forces.”⁶⁷ In subsequent operations in September 2006, a Filipino military spokesperson also confirmed that US troops assisted in evacuating soldiers.⁶⁸

As for their role in spying, the Associated Press confirmed that the operations were “backed at times by US surveillance aircraft.”⁶⁹ An unmanned aerial vehicle later crashed and was recovered by local citizens.⁷⁰ Though a US military spokesperson then claimed the spy planes were used for “humanitarian” projects,⁷¹ other US officials, including a general, have stated that they have been used to hunt down targets.⁷² According to a report to the US Congress, P-3 aircraft were used in the Philippines to provide “intelligence and communications support” to the AFP.⁷³ In September 2006, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita himself acknowledged that US troops were using surveillance equipment to track down the ASG.⁷⁴ That the surveillance was meant for combat was confirmed by former National Security Council adviser Golez himself when he was quoted as saying that American pilots on surveillance flights could “call in air strikes” if they spot ASG fighters.⁷⁵

From the beginning, according to a local journalist, US troops had used “unmanned planes, electronic tracking devices, eavesdropping mechanisms, experimental laser beacons, and a full range of

US intelligence gadgets.”⁷⁶ Their use attests to the “special reconnaissance” mission that is one of the specializations of Special Forces troops. According to the Army Field Manual, the objective of this mission is “to confirm, refute, or obtain – by visual observation or other collection methods – information on the capabilities, intentions, and activities of an actual or potential enemy.”⁷⁷ One of these methods is the tapping of cell phones – a task which US soldiers reportedly found challenging because of the mixing of local languages and the volume of messages.⁷⁸ In these operations, the Special Forces were aided by the Central Intelligence Agency. In their annual report, in notes under “support to military operations,” the CIA claimed to have supported the Joint Task Forces by using “human intelligence” and through other technical operations.⁷⁹ The former Philippine Ambassador to Washington, Albert Del Rosario, also confirmed the establishment of an “intelligence fusion center” manned by both US and Filipino troops and the setting up of satellite equipment.⁸⁰

US soldiers have also been deeply involved in operations from their vantage point in the military headquarters. During the rescue of Abu Sayyaf hostages, it was reported that some US soldiers were stationed in the command post of the Philippine military.⁸¹ What exactly their role is in decision-



US TROOPS join rescue and relief operations after the landslide in Guinsaugon, Leyte in February 2006.

REM ZAMORA

making and how they relate with Filipino officials they claim to be “advising” is not known since little has come out of the room. Because US soldiers are legally barred from being put under the command of foreign officers, the question of who ultimately calls the shots is unclear. In at least one incident, however, Briscoe narrates how the US commanders did “steer the AFP leadership” into supporting a particular plan of action.⁸² “Unconventional warfare” missions are defined as those in which indigenous forces are “directed” by US troops.⁸³

Apart from the US troops, Australian soldiers are also said to have joined AFP troops in what Australian media described as “covert operations” in the country.⁸⁴ Members of the elite Australian Special Air Service (SAS) were reported to have engaged in what one Australian newspaper as “the closest the SAS has come to conventional combat operations in Southeast Asia since the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s.”⁸⁵ Incidentally, the Philippine and Australian governments are currently in the process of working out a “Status of Forces Agreement” similar to the one the Philippines has with the US in order to establish the legal framework covering the presence of Australian troops in the country.⁸⁶

‘The full range of operations’

In denying that US troops are engaged in “actual combat” in the Philippines, US and Philippine officials have sought to reduce the coverage of the definition of “actual combat” to only those actions which involve the direct application of force. This implies that US troops could only be considered as engaging in combat when they themselves personally pull the trigger and fire guns at their enemies. As has been discussed earlier, they have actually found themselves in this position. Still, US public information officers stress that their actions are confined to performing “non-combat” roles, such as training or undertaking humanitarian missions or engineering projects. Under their limited definition, teaching Filipino troops what to do during actual operations, tapping cell phones, flying spy planes, mine-clearing, or psychological operations are not considered part of an “offensive war.” “Unconventional warfare” is not “warfare.”

But even as US and Filipino officials take pains

In denying that US troops are engaged in “actual combat” in the Philippines, US and Philippine officials have sought to reduce the coverage of the definition of “actual combat” to only those actions which involve the direct application of force.

to publicly draw distinctions between US troops’ missions, the US military apparently does not. As the Army Field Manual clearly states, “Military power is not limited to acts of violence and overt hostilities to achieve strategic objectives.” This view is particularly valid for the Special Forces, the Manual notes. It makes it clear that “The principles of war apply to the full range of operations, specifically where the use of force is more selective and where restraint and nonlethal aspects of power are dominant.”⁸⁷ David Tucker, a professor of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School and Christopher J. Lamb, a fellow at the National Defense University in the US, explain that both direct and indirect use of force may be “mutually supportive, producing a greater effect together than separately.” They also point out that not all Special Forces missions can be neatly categorized as direct or indirect. They particularly cite as an example “unconventional warfare” which, they say, “might include direct engagement of enemy forces by US personnel.”⁸⁸ “Counter-insurgency” is likewise defined by the US Army as an “offensive approach.”⁸⁹

While it is true that the US Special Forces are also engaged in humanitarian missions, in development projects, and in the training of local troops, these activities are still seen by the US military as part of the waging of war. That these activities are being emphasized over direct and more aggressive activities serve to reinforce the notion that the US troops are not engaged in combat – even when both their combat and non-combat missions have one objective: to fight and defeat their enemies.

The JSOTF-P actively promotes their “civil-military operations” or CMOs in the local press. This includes school-building projects, construction of deep wells, roads, bridges and other infrastructure, medical and dental missions, and the like. But the military’s own

“Military power is not limited to acts of violence and overt hostilities to achieve strategic objectives.”

- US Army Field Manual No.3-05.20

conception of what these projects are for is clear in their definition of CMOs as a “group of planned activities in support of military operations that enhance the relationship between the military forces and civilian authorities and population and which promote the development of favorable emotions, attitudes, or behavior in neutral, friendly, or hostile grounds.”⁹⁰ Testifying about their CMOs in Basilan, former US Pacific Command chief Admiral Thomas Fargo noted that their projects “acted as force multipliers for US and AFP operations because the programs separated the citizens of Basilan from supporting the terrorist threat.”⁹¹

The goal is not just to earn the sympathy of the locals, but to extract information necessary for combat. As a military writer wrote, the underlying aim of the humanitarian projects is “not simply to provide feel-good projects that achieve positive perceptions among the local populace.” According to him, “the purpose is to utilize the correct... carrots... that will yield actionable intelligence that can be used to target and destroy the insurgent infrastructure...” After the carrots come the sticks. According to Wendt, “After the infrastructure has been identified and exposed by the local population, its members can be killed or captured.” This strategy to gain detailed local knowledge takes a long time and requires that the troops are “embedded” in the community in order to become more familiar with both the terrain and the local culture.⁹²

Even the infrastructure projects – the extension of airport runways, construction of piers and jetties, the paving of roads, and so on which have won over many local authorities – have larger military goals. Pointing out how they enabled troops to move around more quickly, Walley notes that the projects “benefited US trainers and advisers and contributed to force protection.”⁹³ They were also useful for meeting the troops supply and logistics needs.⁹⁴ Likewise, the training of AFP troops serves combat-related goals. In the terminology of the US military, indigenous troops act as “force multipliers” in projecting power and in achieving US military objectives but – as the Army Field Manual puts it – “with minimum visibility, risk, and cost.”⁹⁵ In other words, the members of the AFP are trained so that they can be put out front and first in line when the enemies start firing.

‘Long-term low-visibility presence’

All these interrelated missions conform to the overall military strategy of the US government, as articulated in various official documents, including the *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), the *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the *National Military Strategy* (NDS), the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), and the *National Strategy to Combat Terrorism* (NSCT), among others.⁹⁶ Rather than just lone-standing missions, the US troops’ actions in the Philippines are part of a comprehensive and wide-ranging transformation of the US’ military organization and its global posture.

At one level, the deployment of troops in the Philippines is in keeping with the US’ determination to “focus decisive military power and specialized intelligence resources to defeat terrorist networks globally.”⁹⁷ This is because, in the minds of US military planners, the challenge to US interests no longer comes just from state but also non-state actors especially those taking shelter in states that are incapable of controlling their territory. “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones,” notes the NSS.⁹⁸ Incidentally, this “failing state” label has been increasingly pinned on the Philippines, with former US embassy officials describing Mindanao as “a doormat for terrorism in the region” or as the “next Afghanistan.”⁹⁹ Faced with these kinds of threats, the NSS asserts that “The fight must be taken to the enemy, to keep them on the run.”¹⁰⁰ As US President George Bush himself said, “The fight against terror is not just in Afghanistan. We’re gonna fight terror wherever it exists.”¹⁰¹ In this fight, the lines between a defensive

Rather than just lone-standing missions, the US troops’ actions in the Philippines are part of a comprehensive and wide-ranging transformation of the US’ military organization and its global posture.

war and what the Supreme Court terms “offensive war” are blurred, if not indeterminate. For as the NSCT points out, “[T]he best defense is a good offense.”¹⁰²

As a result, the QDR calls for a shift in emphasis “from conducting war against nations – to conducting war in countries we are not at war with”¹⁰³ – a category that fits the Philippines. Seymour Hersh, the prominent investigative journalist, has written about a presidential order that allows the Pentagon “to operate unilaterally in a number of countries where there is a perception of a clear and evident terrorist threat.” Though the list of countries was not revealed, the description again covers the Philippines: “A number of the countries are friendly to the US and are major trading partners. Most have been cooperating in the war on terrorism.”¹⁰⁴

In these countries, the US will strive to work with willing governments but it reserves the right to act alone and preemptively if they so refuse.¹⁰⁵ One analyst described the new strategy thus:

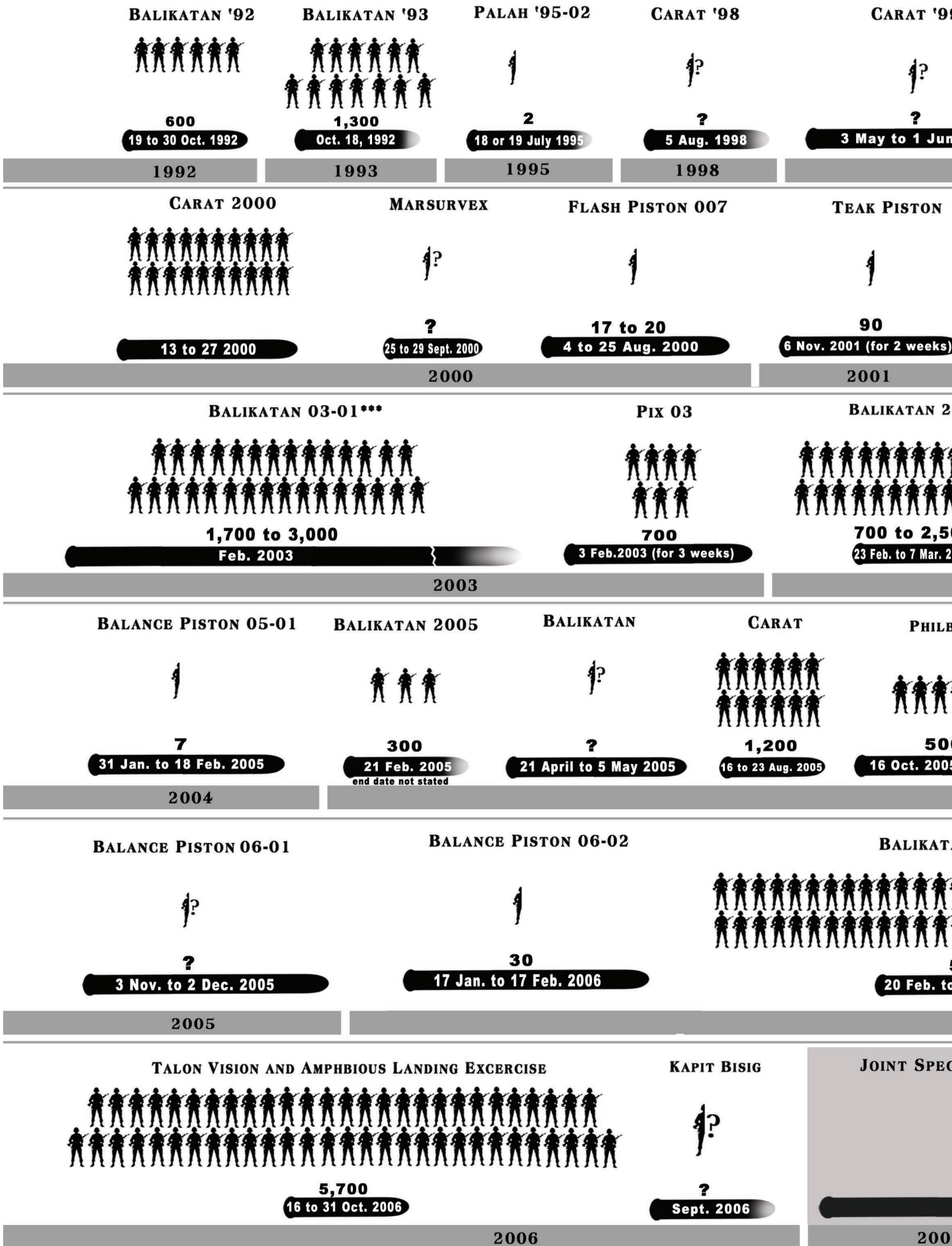
“[T]he missions... in the Philippines established an acceptable American military presence in the Southeast Pacific and re-established professional military relationships.”

- Dr C.H. Briscoe, US Army historian



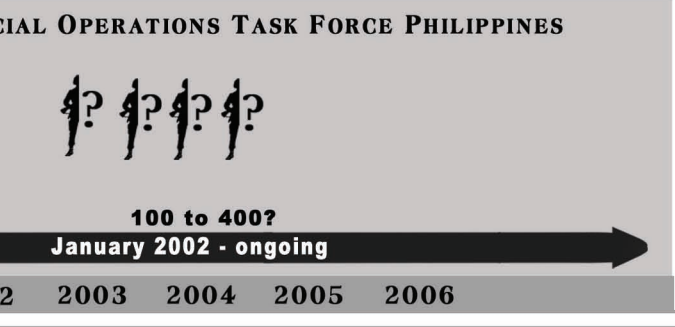
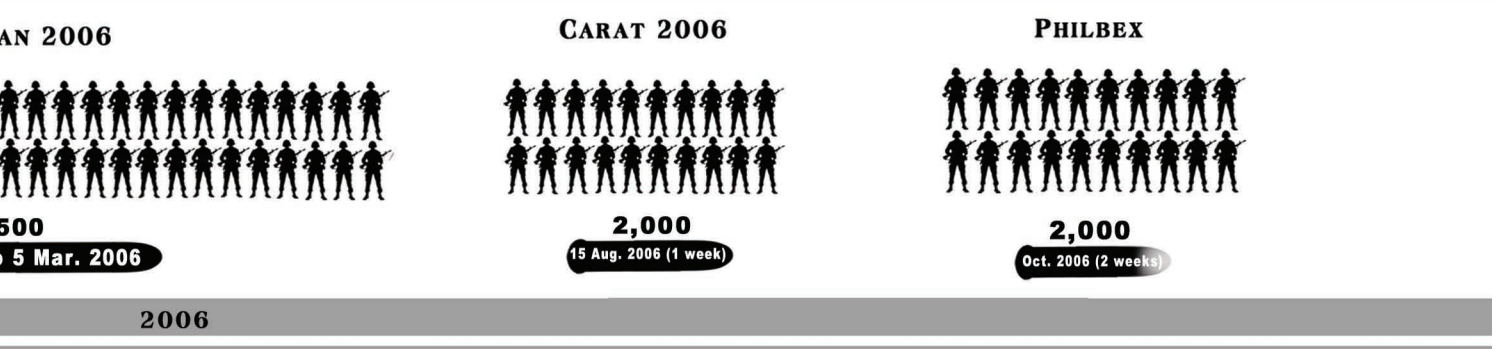
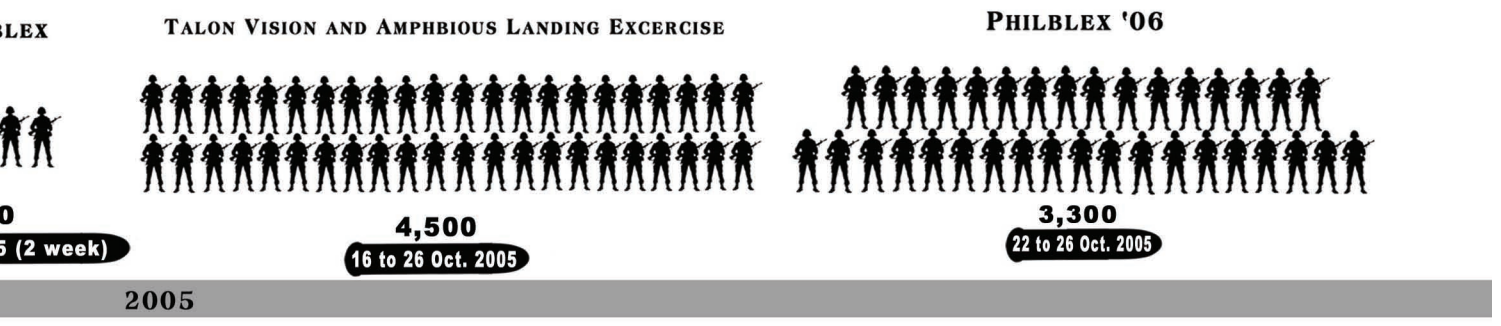
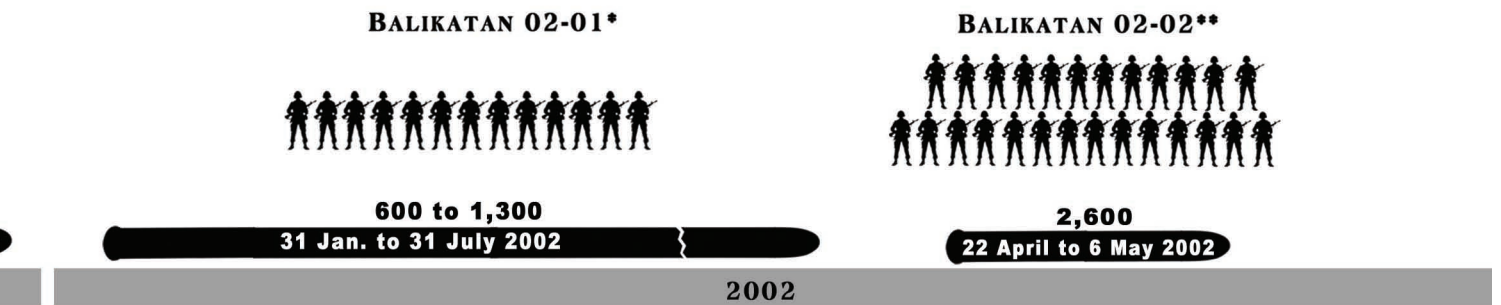
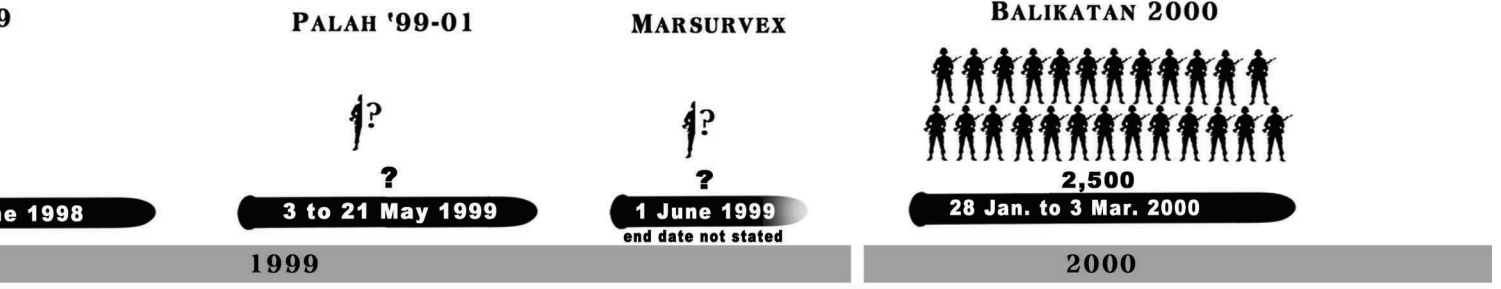
US Military Presence in the Philippines: Joint

see page 32-37 for details



Exercises and the JSOTF-P (1992 to present)

detailed information



Legend

- number of US Troops involved (1:100)
- number of US Troops not specified
- duration



LUIS LIWANAG

US TROOPS n a medical mission in Zamboanga.

“countries that harbor terrorists, either by consent or because they are unable to enforce their laws within their territory, effectively forfeit their rights of sovereignty.”¹⁰⁶ This implies that regardless of any constitutional prohibition against its forces being involved in combat inside Philippine territory, the US has the right to do what it takes. In fact, according to a memorandum prepared by the former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers – who had earlier been reported as pushing for deeper involvement in the country -- the Philippines has been included in the list of “emerging targets for preemptive war” of a new US military unit authorized to conduct clandestine operations abroad.¹⁰⁷

The Special Forces’ mission and presence in the Philippines fit the QDR’s vision for this global war, indicating that in light of the US’ overall strategy, they have goals far larger than publicly expressed locally. The QDR states that the SOFs will “increase their capacity to perform more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas.”¹⁰⁸ For what the document describes as “direct action,” the SOFs are envisioned to possess the abilities “to locate,

tag, and track dangerous individuals and other high-value targets globally” – actions which they have been performing in the southern Philippines. In this, the prominent role played by surveillance and intelligence-gathering reflects the US military’s push towards establishing an “unblinking eye over the battle-space” by using more spy planes and mobilizing more local spies.¹⁰⁹

Beyond pursuing “terrorists,” however, the SOF’s stationing in the Philippines is an important component of the US’ evolving global military positioning. As the US embarks on the most radical realignment of its worldwide presence since World War II, the aim, according to the QDR, is “to develop a basing system that provides greater flexibility for US forces in critical areas of the world, placing emphasis on additional bases and stations beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia.” This includes the need to “provide temporary access to facilities in foreign countries that enable US forces to conduct training and exercises in the absence of permanent ranges and bases.”¹¹⁰ It also entails a change in emphasis from “from static defense, garrison forces” – such as those the US had in Subic and Clark – “to mobile, expeditionary operations”¹¹¹ as exemplified by the operations of the JSOTF-P in Sulu.

“From conducting war against nations – to conducting war in countries we are not at war with”
- **Quadrennial Defense Review 2006, list of areas to which US military will shift its emphasis**

In fact, while discussing the current realignment of US military presence, former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has confirmed plans to establish “nodes” for Special Operations Forces in Asia.¹¹² Former US Pacific Command head Admiral Thomas Fargo has announced their intention to expand SOF presence in the region through the establishment of more “cooperative security locations (CSLs),” or military installations to which the US will have access to, in the region.¹¹³ The Overseas Basing Commission, an official body tasked to review the US overseas military infrastructure, has confirmed that the Philippines is one of the countries in Asia where such “CSLs” are being developed.¹¹⁴ In November 2002, the Philippine and US governments signed the Mutual Logistics and Servicing Agreement which, according to a military publication, made the Philippines a “supply base” of the United States.¹¹⁵

In these plans, Special Forces hold a special place. More than other units, SOFs have usually been the contingent to count on in order to “gain or maintain US access to strategically important foreign countries.”¹¹⁶ In fact, another military contingent also composed mostly of Special Forces, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, has

also been established in Djibouti in West Africa in 2002. With its mission and objectives very similar to the JSOTF-P, the Task Force has been described as a “model for future military operations.”¹¹⁷ These small and inconspicuous units fulfill the stated need of “maintaining a long-term, low visibility presence in many areas of the world where US forces do not traditionally operate.”¹¹⁸ As the Army historian puts it, the deployment in Sulu has “established an acceptable American military presence in the Southeast Pacific...”¹¹⁹ In other words, the JSOTF-P may not only be conducting war within the Philippines, it may have also entrenched a new form of U.S. bases in the country.

Re-establishing its presence in the Philippines is key to deepening US military presence in the region and worldwide, a goal articulated clearly and openly by US officials in the belief that the US’ “primary line of defense remains well forward...”¹²⁰ Regardless of the specific interventions against Abu Sayyaf members or Iraqi fighters in another part of the world or other enemies elsewhere, the overarching objective of that global presence is to enhance the United States’ war-waging and interventionary capacity in pursuit of its interests worldwide.

Summary

In light of the above, there is sufficient reason to further probe the claim that US Special Operations Forces are engaged in an “offensive war” in the southern Philippines “under the guise of an exercise,” as previously alleged by petitioners before the Supreme Court.

To summarize, the following are some of the leads that would seem to support this contention:

- The deployment is considered by the US military as part of its “global war against terror,” a war with actual enemies as targets. US troops are authorized to fire at these enemies. It has been reported that they have engaged in a firefight against alleged members of the Abu Sayyaf. At least one of the US troops has been “killed in action.”
- The very nature of the participating US military unit, the Special Operations Forces, indicates that the mission is not confined to training or conducting humanitarian missions. The SOF is a special branch of the US military specifically trained and deployed for covert operations, including guerilla warfare, sabotage, surveillance, and other combat operations. While their operations also include non-combat humanitarian projects, training and other civic actions, these are also seen by the US military as integral to their combat missions.
- US soldiers themselves describe their mission as being that of “unconventional warfare,” “foreign internal defense,” and “counter-insurgency” – missions in which Special Forces specialize because of their unique capabilities and which include combat components. The current commander of the US troops has even gone on record to state his disagreement with the Supreme Court’s ruling barring foreign troops from engaging in combat within Philippine territory. He describes the mission as being conducted “under the guise of an exercise.”
- Eyewitness testimonies by residents who

saw US troops in action confirm that the Special Operations troops applied their unique capabilities in their mission on various occasions. These witnesses attest to seeing US troops in the vicinity of fighting during actual hostilities, operating military equipment, defusing landmines, and performing other war-related actions. The sighting of spy planes, including the recovery of one that crashed, confirms the use of US military equipment by US troops for war-fighting purposes.

- Official and public documents articulating US military doctrine and strategy locate the US’ deployment to the Philippines in the context of its larger global war effort. They also confirm the US’ determination to wage war even inside the territories of countries they are not at war with and they explicitly assert the US’ “right” to act unilaterally to defeat its enemies, regardless of the domestic limitations set on its troops by the government of the territory in which they operate.

Opponents and critics of US military deployment to the Philippines have raised serious larger questions on their presence and actions.

First, there is the concern that, instead of resolving the problems in Mindanao, the intervention of the US may be exacerbating the conflict and deepening divisions. By promoting military solutions to what are believed to be deeper structural problems caused by historical injustice, economic marginalization, and cultural discrimination, the reliance of the AFP on the US military enables the government to evade the root causes of war in the region. These military solutions are resulting in more human rights violations and in the entrenchment of the structures of injustice and dispossession that fuel conflict.

Secondly, there are concerns that the US is using the Philippines as a launchpad for aggressive and illegal military interventions against other targets in the country, in the region, and beyond. US troops who have been stationed in or who have been deployed to the Philippines are known to have participated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. With the Philippines integrated within the US’ global military structure and its forward deployment strategy, the government also



becomes complicit with and party to US actions elsewhere, thereby making the Philippines a target of US enemies.

Thirdly, there are worries about the negative social and environmental impacts caused by the deployment, as with the reported rise in prostitution or the use of dangerous substances during operations. Finally, there are also concerns that the deployment of US troops in the country has larger geo-political ramifications that affect the balance of forces in the region, especially as the US military presence is perceived to be designed to project power throughout Southeast Asia and encircle China.

Recommendations

It is beyond the aim and the scope of this report to thoroughly explore these issues. But they are directly related to the question of whether US troops are engaged in an “offensive war” because their continued presence in the country rests on the “question of fact” posed by the Supreme Court not being proven. As this report has aimed to show, there are sufficient grounds to revisit and contest this question. The following are some initial recommendations with the aim of establishing the answer:

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- *For the legislative department to exercise its mandate to investigate the issue further*

The appropriate committees (on foreign relations, justice, peace and reconciliation, or on national defense and security) of the Senate and the House of Representatives committee should conduct hearings and investigations on the issue, compel and protect otherwise hesitant witnesses who are afraid of military reprisal, and demand the appearance of AFP and US military officials involved in the missions. AFP officials should be asked about the actions of US troops in their operations. US military officials should be required to explain their own characterization of their mission, as published in US military publications. Col. David Maxwell, in particular, should be summoned to explain why he believes US troops are not barred from participating in combat missions, contrary to the ruling of the Supreme Court. The US Ambassador to the Philippines should likewise be asked to categorically state whether the Philippines is indeed considered as one of those cases where the US is “conducting war in countries we are not at war with,” as described in the Quadrennial Defense Review.

- *For civil society groups to re-consolidate and to bring the issue back on the national agenda*

The conviction of a US Marine in a controversial rape case has put the spotlight on the US military presence in the Philippines. But while the regular training exercises have been put on hold, the Special Forces continue to be stationed in the country. Increased public discussion on the issue of US troops in the country may be useful in drawing attention to those troops still in the southern Philippines and for raising larger questions about their aims and their consequences.

- *For civil society groups to consider filing legal challenges before the courts*

In light of new information that has come out since the Supreme Court’s 2002 ruling, civil society groups and social movements, especially lawyers’

and human rights organizations, should consider investigating the allegations further, build a fool-proof case, and, upon assessing the possibilities, consider filing another legal challenge against the deployment.

- *For the legislative department and civil society to push for oversight and accountability mechanisms on the US troops*

Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives should be pressed to constitute an independent monitoring body composed of credible and respected members to continually and systematically monitor and report on US troops in action. They should be allowed to witness actual operations, visit military facilities, and interview soldiers, officials, and residents. They should be empowered and given sufficient resources to pursue their investigation, a venue to air their reports, and a mandate to act on their recommendations.

- *For civil society groups and local communities to more systematically document and more effectively report the actions of US troops in the country*

Local communities who are directly exposed to the actions of US troops should be supported. Training and resources for systematically and credibly reporting their actions should be extended. Mechanisms for disseminating their reports should be strengthened.

Given all that is at stake with the continued deployment of US troops to the southern Philippines, the initiative to shed light on their actions in the country could go a long way towards resolving larger questions of peace and security, as well as issues of democracy and sovereignty in the country and beyond. ■

Notes

¹ Delon Porcalla, “SC asked to stop ‘Balikatan’ games,” *Philippine Star*, February 2, 2002. For more on the legal objections to the deployment, see Roland Simbulan, “US military intervention in the Philippines: A New Phase” *UP Forum*, April 2002; Ma. Socorro Diokno, “Kalayaang Aguila 2002: the Death Knell of Philippine Society,” undated; Manny Mogato, “The Yankees are Back,” *Newsbreak*, February 6, 2002; Manny Mogato, “Beyond War Games,” *Newsbreak*, February 13, 2002; Chay Hofilena and Manny Mogato, “Signed, Sealed, and Delivered,” *Newsbreak*, February 6, 2002.

² Text of Philippine Supreme Court decision, April 11, 2002.

³ Larry Nicksch, “Abu Sayyaf: Target of Philippine-US Anti-Terrorism Cooperation,” *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, January 25, 2002.

⁴ As a former JSOTF-P commander Maj. Guy Lemire said, “We’re trainers, not advisers... We do not engage the enemy. We do not go into the field.” (Glen Martin, “Battling Rebels in Philippines: US Playing Critical Role in Campaign against Muslim Insurgents,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 6, 2003); US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld also said US troops do not assume an “active military role” in the Philippines (Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, “Philippine confusion,” *Washington Times*, February 8, 2002). US embassy spokesperson Matthew Lussenhop said, “The US military helps to advise and assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines. We share information and train. But we are not directly involved in the operation in Sulu. We have no combat or frontline presence.” (Julie Alipala and Jeffrey Maitem, “US doubts info that Indon terror suspect slain in Jolo clash,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 14, 2006)

⁵ For example, an Associated Press’ report states that the US is providing “covert non-combat assistance” (Associated Press, “More than 5,000 US troops to hold war exercises near Philippine Muslim rebel lairs,” January 4, 2006). Referring to US troops in the Southern Philippines, Agence France Press reports that they are training Filipino troops, (Agence France Press, “U.S., Philippines To Hold Two Weeks Of Joint War Games”); Reporting on the US troops’ mine-clearing operations, Reuters describes them as being on a “humanitarian mission.” (Reuters, “U.S. troops remove landmines in Philippine south,” December 1, 2005.

⁶ Initially, the deployment of US troops to the southern Philippines was presented as an attempt to once-and-for all neutralize the ASG – but with US’ role confined to only training and advising their Filipino counterparts. That gained traction with a public frustrated with the Philippine military’s decade-long failure to defeat the group. As the years passed, however, and as public outrage at the atrocities of the ASG dissipated, there has also been a discernible shift in the US and Philippine governments’ media strategy: the anti-terror component, while still there, has been toned down; played up instead has been the humanitarian missions, development projects, and other “civil-military operations” that provide economic benefit to local populations.

⁷ “US troops may fight in Philippines,” *CNN.com*, February 20,

2003.

⁸ This provoked uproar in the Philippines and Filipino officials quickly contradicted the Pentagon. Implying that they were referring to the same thing but were using different labels, then Philippine Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes dismissed the clash in wording by saying it was just a “question of semantics.” (Ellen Nakashima and Bradley Graham, “Missed Signals Forced Suspension of U.S. Philippine Mission, *Washington Post*, March 3, 2003) Concerned that they might suffer casualties, US officials claimed that certain Filipino officials told them, “We could always cover it up.” (John Hendren and Richard Paddock, “US troops deployment to RP called off, dispute blamed,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 2003) While that particular deployment was postponed, the US government never retracted its description of the operations. (Ellen Nakashima and Bradley Graham, “Missed Signals Forced Suspension of U.S. Philippine Mission, *Washington Post*, March 3, 2003)

⁹ *GlobalSecurity.org*, “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines”, www.globalsecurity.org.

¹⁰ C.H. Briscoe, “Wanted dead or alive: Psychological Operations during Balikatan 02-1,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004); Dr Richard L. Kiper, “‘Of Vital Importance’: the 4th PSYOP Group,” *Special Warfare*, September 2002.

¹¹ United States Department of the Army, *Field Manual No.3-05.20: Special Forces Operations*, (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, June 26, 2001), glossary-23.

¹² In 2006, up to 37 different training exercises of various durations, locations, and participation were scheduled throughout the year. This was a jump from the previous count of between 17 to 24 exercises for the previous years. (Carolyn O. Arguillas, “Q and A with US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone: ‘Ops-Intel-fusion is not spying,’” *MindaNews*, February 28, 2005; Jojo Due, “Biggest RP-US military exercise starts next week,” *Philippine Business Daily Mirror*, February 17, 2006). The exercises in the Philippines are just some of over 125 exercises the United States conducts in Asia every year. (*GlobalSecurity.org*, “Pacific Fleet Exercises,” www.globalsecurity.org)

¹³ It may well be argued that those who come for training do so for war. Indeed US troops who have trained in the Philippines have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Filipino officials also admit that the training Filipino soldiers get from US troops are to be used in the Philippine government’s war against local communists. (Gil C. Cabacungan, “US to step up anti-terror training of RP troops,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 18, 2006. But this is not within the scope of this report to explore. For its purposes, it will limit the discussion on the actions of the JSOTF-P in the southern Philippines.

¹⁴ It is possible that some JSOTF-P members take part in the regular training exercises and those JSOTF-P missions include training components.

¹⁵ It is also possible that troops from other units may have taken part in the deployment but the bulk of the troops are reported to have come from SOFs.

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¹⁶ US Special Operations Command, “Special Operations Forces Posture Statement,” July 2003; For more on Special Operations Force organization within US military structures, see *Special Operations Forces Reference Manual* at www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/socom/sof-ref-2-1/SOFREF_Ch2.htm.

¹⁷ Field Manual No.3-05.20, 1-4.

¹⁸ Field Manual No.3-05.20, 4-3.

¹⁹ Cherilyn Walley, “Special Forces training exercises continue Balikatan mission,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004; US Pacific Command Website, www.pacom.mil.

²⁰ Maj. Kevin T. Henderson, US Army, “Army Special Operations Forces and Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) Integration: Something a Joint Task Force Commander should Consider,” monograph, United States Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, 19 May 2004; another writer talks about a “Forward Operating Base 11”, Base in Southern Philippines called “Forward Operating Base 11” (Cherilyn Walley, “Impact of the semi-permissive environment on force protection in Philippine engagements,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004)

²¹ At start of the deployment in January 2002, there were supposed to be 160 to 250 who were joining. (Steve Vogel, “Americans Arrive in Philippines U.S. Special Forces To Aid Filipino Army In Threatened Areas,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 2002; Fe B. Zamora, “All US troops will leave on July 31, says Wurster,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 1, 2002; Pat Roque, “US Special Forces in Philippines,” *Associated Press*, February 18, 2002; Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, “Philippine confusion,” *Washington Times*, February 8, 2002). In November 2002, the *Army Magazine* reported that there were 260 members of the task force were in the southern Philippines. (*Army Magazine*, “News Call,” November 1, 2002). In February 2003, 350 Special Forces were reportedly scheduled to be sent to Sulu but this was postponed. (Eric Schmitt, “US combat force of 1700 is headed to the Philippines,” *New York Times*, February 21, 2003; Bradley Graham, “US Bolsters Philippine Force,” *Washington Post*, February 21, 2003) In October 2003, 300 Special Forces were reported to be in Basilan (US spy aircraft deployed in Philippines,” October 13, 2003 *The News International* (Pakistan). By February 2006, 250 more troops were reported to be joining those who were already in Sulu but it was not clear how many were still there at that time (“RP-US to conduct war games amid ‘rape’ controversy, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 10, 2006; “No time frame of US troops’ stay in Sulu, *Mindanews*, January 17, 2006). Shortly after, US military spokesperson Capt Burrel Parmer announced that 400 US troops will be Sulu for various projects. (Ding Cervantes, “5,500 US military personnel coming for Balikatan 2006,” *Philippine Star*, February 17, 2006). In September 2006, 114 US troops were reported to have arrived in Zamboanga City as part of the “normal rotation” of soldiers under JSOTF-P, according to the US embassy. (Julie Alipala, “100 GIs held at Zambo immigration,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 28, 2006).

²² “US troops helping in pursuit of MNLF breakaway group,” *Inq7.net*, November 24, 2005

²³ “Civilians want probe on US military’s alleged supervision in

Sulu war,” *Mindanews*, November 24, 2005.

²⁴ United States Department of State, “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/

²⁵ Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, Commander US Pacific Command, Statement before the House Armed Services Committee on US Pacific Command Posture, March 12, 2003; *GlobalSecurity.org*, “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines,” www.globalsecurity.org.

²⁶ Raymond Bonner, “Special Forces Sweltering Paradise,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2002; Eric Schmitt, “US-Philippine Command may signal war’s next phase,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2002

²⁷ Juliet Labog-Javellana, “Bush gives RP special mention on terror fight,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 2, 2004; It is not clear whether “Operation Ultimatum,” launched in August 2006, is still the same as OEF-P but with another name or another operation altogether but reports stated that the US has been “actively involved” in the “US-backed” mission.

²⁸ (Julie Alipala and Jeffrey Maitem, “US doubts reports of Umar Patek’s death,” *Inquirer*, September 13, 2006; “Troops kill 6 Abus in Sulu Clash,” *Manila Standard Today*, August 25, 2006; *Associated Press*, “Two Philippine soldiers killed as troops press offensive against Muslim militants,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 11, 2006; *Xinhua*, “Philippine defense chiefs say gov’t forces sure to win war against Abu Sayyaf,” October 2, 2006)

²⁹ Golez said, “[W]e assure you after six months the Americans are going to be gone. They’ll be going home.” (Joel San Juan and John Anthony Concepcion, “Abu Sayyaf wiped out in one year; US troops not permanent in RP – Golez,” *Manila Times*, January 29, 2002.

³⁰ Interview with Capt. Eddie Paruchabutr, Joint Special Operations Task Force information officer, March 9, 2006, Zamboanga City.

³¹ Col. David Maxwell, “Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines: What Would Sun-Tzu say?” *Military Review*, May-June 2004

³² Members of the 1st Special Forces Group, “The history of the 1st SF Group in the Republic of the Philippines; 1957-2002,” *Special Warfare*, June 2002.

³³ C.H. Briscoe, “Why the Philippines: ARSOF’s expanded mission in the war on terror,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004.

³⁴ Eric P. Wendt, “Strategic counterinsurgency modeling,” *Special Warfare*, September 2005.

³⁵ Cherilyn Walley, Impact of the semi-permissive environment on force protection in Philippine engagements,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004.

³⁶ Sheldon W. Simon, “Theater Security Cooperation in the US Pacific Command,” *National Bureau of Asian Research Analysis*, Volume 14, Number 2, August 2003.

- ³⁷ Cheryl Walley, “Impact of the semi-permissive environment on force protection in Philippine engagements,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004; Eric P. Wendt, “Strategic counterinsurgency modeling,” *Special Warfare*, September 2005; Cheryl Walley, “Civil affairs: a weapon of peace on Basilan Island,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004)
- ³⁸ Field Manual No.3-05.20, 2-1.
- ³⁹ Mike Skinner, “The renaissance of unconventional warfare as an SF mission,” *Special Warfare*, Winter 2002; United States Special Operations Command, Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, July 2003.
- ⁴⁰ Field Manual No.3-05.20, 2-1; Edward Bruner and Ronald O’Rourke, “Special Operations Forces in Operation Enduring Freedom: Background and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, May 23, 2002.
- ⁴¹ Special Operations Forces Posture Statement, July 2003.
- ⁴² Field Manual No.3-05.20, 2-11.
- ⁴³ Field Manual No.3-05.20, 1-9, 1-22.
- ⁴⁴ Mark Burgess, “The US Deployment in the Philippines: Expand the Mission,” Center for Defense Information, June 7, 2002
- ⁴⁵ C.H. Briscoe, “Balikatan exercise spearheaded ARSOF operations in the Philippines,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004
- ⁴⁶ C.H. Briscoe, “Balikatan exercise spearheaded ARSOF operations in the Philippines,” *Special Warfare*, September 2004
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Training Days JOINT EXERCISES BETWEEN US AND FILIPINO TROOPS 1992 to 2006

Despite the closure of US military bases in the Philippines in 1992, US troops have still been regularly deploying to the Philippines to take part in joint exercises with Filipino troops. The frequency of these exercises increased significantly after the 1998 signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement. Since 2002, around 17 to 24 exercises were held annually.¹ In 2006, the US and Philippine governments announced that a total of 37 joint exercises will be held throughout the year.² They last between a few days to as long as six months. The table below lists only those known exercises based on available newspaper clippings and military websites. Where different information from various clippings on one exercise are found, the ones with the most details are used. The number of troops involved is not constant throughout duration of each exercise.

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
BALIKATAN '92	19 to 30 October 1992	600 US soldiers	Nueva Ecija, Cavite	3
BALIKATAN '93	18 October 1992 (end date not stated)	1,300 US soldiers	Not stated	4
PALAH '95 – 02	18 or 19 July 1995 (end date not stated)	2 US Navy Officers, 13 US Marines	Palawan	5
CARAT '98	5 August 1998 (end date not stated)	Not stated	Zambales	6
CARAT '99	3 May to 1 June 1999	Not stated	Not stated	7
PALAH '99-01	3 to 21 May 1999	Unspecified number from the US Navy	Not stated	8
MARSURVEX	1 June 1999 (end date not stated)	Not stated	Not stated	9

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
BALIKATAN 2000	28 January to 3 March 2000	Around 2,500 US soldiers	Zambales, Pampanga, Palawan, Cavite, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija	10
CARAT 2000	13 to 27 June 2000	2,000 US soldiers	Cavite, Zambales, Nueva Ecija, Manila	11
MARSURVEX	25 to 29 September 2000	Not stated	Not stated	12
FLASH PISTON 007	4 to 25 August, 2000	17 to 20 US Navy Seals	Cebu	13
TEAK PISTON	6 November 2001 (for two weeks)	90 US soldiers	Cebu	14
BALIKATAN 02-01 (*)	31 January to 31 July 2002	Between 660 to 1,300 US troops, including 160-250 from the Special Forces, 340 US and Navy engineers	Basilan	15
BALIKATAN 02-02 (**)	22 April to 6 May 2002	2,600 US soldiers	Various parts of Luzon	16
BALIKATAN 03-01 (***)	Announced February 2003 but was postponed; this was supposed to go on "until both sides agree it is finished"	1,700 to 3,000 US troops, including 350 Special Operations forces in Sulu	Sulu and Zamboanga City	17
PIX 03	3 February 2003 (for three weeks)	700 US Marines	Cavite	18
BALIKATAN 2004	23 February to 7 March 2004	700 to 2,500 US troops	Palawan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Aurora, and Batanes	19

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
BALANCE PISTON 04-3	26 July to 13 August 2004	Unspecified number from US Marine Battalion Landing Team 6 and US Special Forces group	North Cotabato	20
PALAH 04-01	5 August to December 31 2004	Unspecified number from US Navy Seals	No specified	21
MARSURVEX 04-04	"Lined up for fourth quarter" of 2004	Not specified	Not specified	22
BALANCE PISTON 05-01	31 January to 18 February 2005	7 US Special Forces Unit	Nueva Ecija	23
BALIKATAN 2005	21 February 2005 (end date not stated)	300 US troops	Not specified	24
BALANCE PISTON OS-6	11 April to 5 May 2005	28 US troops	Basilan	25
BALIKATAN	21 April to 5 May 2005	Not specified	Not specified	26
CARAT	16 to 23 August 2005	Around 1,200 US sailors	Manila, Zambales, and Palawan	27
PHILBLEX	16 October 2005 (two weeks)	500 US Marines (will also participate in Talon Vision)	Pampanga, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija Cavite	28
TALON VISION and AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISE	16 to 26 October 2005	4,500 US marines and sailors including US Navy Task Force 76 and Amphibious Squadron 11)	Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Zambales, Cavite, Tarlac	29
PHILBLEX '06	22 to 26 October 2005	3,300 Marines from 31 st Marine Expeditionary Unit	Zambales	30

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
BALANCE PISTON 06-01	3 November to 2 December 2005	Not specified	Zamboanga del Sur	31
BALANCE PISTON 06-02	17 January to 17 February 2006	30 US soldiers	North Cotabato	32
BALIKATAN 2006	20 February to 5 March 2006	5,500 US soldiers	Cavite, Pampanga Nueva Ecija, Sulu	33
CARAT 2006	15 August 2006 (one week)	2,000 US soldiers from US Navy	Zambales, La Union	34
PHILBLEX	October 2006 (two weeks, exact dates not specified)	"not less 2,000" from US Marines	Cavite, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac	35
TALON VISION and AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISE	16 to 31 October 2006	5,700 US Marines from 3 rd Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Essex Expeditionary Strike Group, Marines	Tarlac, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Zambales, Palawan	36
KAPIT BISIG	Mentioned September 2006	Not specified	Not specified	37
Not stated	September 2006 (not specified)	US Special Forces	Basilan, Tawi-Tawi	38

ACRONYMS: PALAH - "Exercise Pandagat, Lupa, at Himpapawid"; CARAT - Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training; MARSURVEX - Maritime Survey Exercise; PIX - Philippine; Interoperability Exchange; PHILBLEX - "Philippine Bilateral Exercise

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* It is not clear from press reports what the difference is between Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines and Balikatan 02-1 because different officials say different things and use the names interchangeably. Those who were deployed as part of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines were originally reported to also be taking part in Balikatan 02-01. According to a US Army historian, planners at the US Pacific Command thought of Balikatan 02-1 as a “joint combined exercise,” not a separate campaign of Operation Enduring Freedom. (C.H. Briscoe, “Reflections and observations on ARSOF operations during Balikatan 02-1” *Special Warfare*, September 2004). Also, the 250 Special Forces reported to be going to Sulu in early 2006 were reported to be part of Balikatan 2006

** According to journalist Manny Mogato, this is different from Balikatan 02-01; Balikatan 02-01, according to GlobalSecurity.org, was a “purely training exercise” as compared to Balikatan 02-2.

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