



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
Bachelor of Arts in Broadcast Communication

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The Political Economy of ABS-CBN's Online Coverage of the Mamasapano Clash

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Date of Submission

16 May 2017

Thesis Classification:

F

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ABS-CBN'S ONLINE COVERAGE OF
THE MAMASAPANO CLASH

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Submitted to the

COLLEGE OF MASS COMMUNICATION

University of the Philippines Diliman

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS IN BROADCAST COMMUNICATION

MAY 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of the following people:

My parents, for providing me with the means to finish my education and constantly making sacrifices for me.

Ma'am Josefina Santos, for providing me with the motivation and guidance I needed to finish this study.

Margarette Espiridion, for giving me the motivation to finish this thesis and for giving me a love that will never be matched. I love you so much and I always will.

My friends at the UP Journalism Club for being a second family to me and making an excellent peer group and for always being there in times when alcoholic intoxication is necessary.

To Bianca Concepcion and Ciarra Lynn Collado who were my first real friends in the College of Mass Communication, thank you for always being there for me in my times of need.

To Alyanna Chio and Feli Recto for providing me with emotional support after the breakup with *you know who* prior to me finishing this thesis, against your advice we got back together anyway,

To Professors Renato Manaloto and Zosimo Lee of the Philosophy department for providing me with a sense of humanity. All those classes I took from the Philosophy department have shaped me to become a better, more critical person.

And lastly, to the Great Architect of the Universe.

DEDICATION

To all those who have loved,
May you continue to fight for what you believe in,
Even when everything seems impossible
Tirelessly fight for that which you love

ABSTRACT

Bas, D.M.C (2017) *The Political Economy of ABS-CBN's Coverage of the Mamasapano Clash*, Unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication

In the coverage of conflicts in Mindanao, the media plays a significant role in disseminating information to the public. However, the Muslims involved in these conflicts have not been given equal representation leading to the continuing propagation of the “Us vs. Them” narrative in the media and the negative connotations regarding Islam.

This study focused on ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash that occurred on the 25th of January 2015 and examined news articles published its online arm. This study heavily discusses media ownership and control as it tried to determine the causal link between ABS-CBN's ownership and the coverage of the Mamasapano Clash.

Using textual analysis, data analysis, and institutional analysis, this research tried to determine the political economic factors that may have affected the way ABS-CBN reported on the Mamasapano Clash which coincidentally happened when the bill on the Bangsamoro Basic Law was being discussed in Congress.

The researcher made use of the political economic concepts of structuration and spatialization as part of the theoretical framework and gathered articles pertaining to the Mamasapano Clash from ABS-CBN's online sites and analyzed documents from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in

order to ascertain who the controllers of ABS-CBN are and to determine what else they are invested in other than media.

The researcher found that although the combatants of the Mamasapano Clash (namely the MILF and PNP) were given equal prominence in terms of the number of articles published on them, the manner of representation was not, with the tragedy of the deaths of the SAF44 being more highlighted initially.

Throughout the research, the researcher also found that the controllers of ABS-CBN have indeed heavily invested in numerous business ventures in Mindanao and speculates that this affected the way that the issue was framed in their coverage.

Keywords: Representation, Muslims, Moros, Maguindanao, ABS-CBN, News, Political Economy

ABSTRAK

Bas, D.M.C (2017) *The Political Economy of ABS-CBN's Coverage of the Mamasapano Clash*, Unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication

Sa pagbabalita ng mga labanan sa Mindanao, may malaking papel ang media sa pagkakatatagan ng impormasyon sa masa ngunit ang mga Muslim na naging bahagi ng mga labanan na ito ay hindi nabigyan ng pantay na representasyon sa balita kaya lumilitaw ang naratibo ng “Us vs. Them” sa media at nagiging negatibo ang pagtingin sa Islam.

Naging pokus ng pananaliksik na ito ang pagbabalita ng ABS-CBN sa Mamasapano Clash na naganap noong January 25, 2015 at sinusuri ang mga artikulo na inilabas sa online page ng ABS-CBN. Tinatalakay ng pananaliksik na ito ang media ownership at control dahil isinusuri nito ang relasyon ng pagmamayari ng ABS-CBN at ang pagbabalita nito tungkol sa Mamasapano Clash.

Gamit ang textual analysis, data analysis, at institutional analysis, tinukoy ng pananaliksik na ito ang mga political economic factors na nakaapekto sa pamamalita ng ABS-CBN sa Mamasapano Clash na nagkataon ay naganap kasabay ng pagdinig sa Bangsamoro Basic Law bilang isang bill sa Kongreso.

Ginamit ng mananaliksik ang mga konsepto sa political economy na structuration at spatialization bilang bahagi ng theoretical framework at nilipon ang mga artikulo na may kinalaman sa Mamasapano Clash mula sa online site ng ABS-CBN at sinuri ang mga dokumento mula sa Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) upang matukoy kung sino ang mga magsusupil ng ABS-CBN at kung ano ang mga investment nila bukod sa media.

Natuklasan ng mananaliksik na kahit nabigyan ng pantay na pagbalita ang MILF at PNP base sa bilang ng mga artikulo na inilabas tungkol sa kanila, nagkaroon ng pagkakaiba sa paraan ng representasyon kung saan mas binigyang pansin ang trahedya ng pagkamatay ng SAF 44 sa simuli ng pagbalita ng ABS-CBN tungkol sa insidente.

Natuklasan ng mananaliksik na ang mga magsusupil ng ABS-CBN ay maraming investment sa iba't-ibang uri ng negosyo sa Mindanao na sa tingin ng mananaliksik ay nakaapekto sa pag-frame ng insidente.

Keywords: Representation, Muslims, Moros, Maguindanao, ABS-CBN, News, Political Economy

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Chapter I

Introduction

The study seeks to understand the framing of online news about the Mamasapano Clash by ABS-CBN Online by analyzing the articles published by ABS-CBN within five months of the massacre taking place and by analyzing ABS-CBN as a structure whose corporate owners have investments in other businesses and how these interests affect the newsmaking process. It is necessary to have an understanding of the military operation that took place in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in order to fully appreciate this thesis.

A. Background of the Study

On the 25th of January 2015, the Philippine National Police (PNP) launched a covert operation called Oplan Exodus (also known as Oplan Wolverine by the media) in Mamasapano, Maguindanao with the objective of pursuing high-value targets tagged as “high-ranking terrorists”. The operation led to the death of 44 members of the Philippine Special Action Force (SAF) and 18 fighters from the side of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and five from the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). The then ongoing negotiations for the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) were put on hold by the Congress and had an immediate significant impact on the peace process which had been going on for decades. Senators Alan Peter Cayetano and Joseph Victor

Ejercito publicly announced the withdrawal of their support for the BBL days after the incident became public. (ABS-CBN, 2015)

Negotiations for peace were attempted in the past and the first attempt for a lasting peace agreement came in the form of the Tripoli agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1976. The Marcos administration sought to cease hostilities between the MNLF and the Philippine armed forces by providing an autonomous region for the Muslims of Mindanao but the proposed framework which was supposed to include thirteen provinces was never fully realized and only four out of the thirteen provinces opted to become a part of the autonomous region.

The MNLF accused the Philippine government of violating the Tripoli agreement and continued its armed struggle against the state and succeeding presidents from Corazon Aquino up to Benigno Simeon Aquino III have tried to negotiate with the now divided Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front which represent the Bangsamoro and the Lumad of Mindanao. (Schiavo-Campo & Judd, 2005)

B. Importance of news coverage

Coverage of conflicts like the one mentioned above are important because war and conflict are matters of public interest which means that people have a right to know what happened because the issue of conflict in Mindanao is a sensitive topic considering the conflicting territorial claims that has transpired for nearly five centuries, there is no doubt that proper representation of all

parties involved need to be taken into consideration especially with the negative stereotypes often associated with Muslims in the Philippines. There is also a need to remind the general public that it is not only the state and the Moros who suffer casualties – the Lumad (The non-Muslim indigenous tribes residing in Mindanao) for example are also stakeholders in the ongoing conflict and it may come as a surprise to some that there are Christian settlers in Mindanao as well who from time to time have also suffered casualties.

C. The aftermath of the coverage

The Philippine media's initial coverage of the incident highlighted the 44 casualties coming from the Special Action Force and the evident failure of the operation. Initial coverages by the media focused on the gruesome nature of the deaths of the members of the SAF 44 in response to a video uploaded on social media showing a member of either the MILF or BIFF shooting an incapacitated member of the SAF execution style which was later proved to be authentic. It was only days after the initial reports that the media began to include the deaths of the 18 members of the MILF and the five members of the BIFF in their coverages.

Netizens on social media were quick to demonize the MILF and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) for the deaths of the members of the SAF and some commenters even proposed that all-out war should be declared against all Muslims in Mindanao in retaliation to the event that

transpired and this has partly to do with the way that the news of the conflict was framed. (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2015)

The Mamasapano Clash was in the headlines for weeks and was consistently the top story of most media outlets.

D. CMFR Study on the coverage

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) monitored the media outlets that covered the Mamasapano Clash and found that the media organizations exacerbated the confusion caused by the finger-pointing between government officials and agencies. Media outlets were observed to be publishing unconfirmed details and opinions presented as established facts which disoriented, confused, and misinformed the general public. Even worse, the manner of reportage fueled the long-standing prejudice and antagonism against Moros held by many Filipinos. (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2015)

The CMFR noted that the coverage of the Bangsamoro clash “*was unethical, inflammatory, and sensational*” and that it undermined the negotiations for peace in Mindanao. Among the notable media outlets singled out by the CMFR, was ABS-CBN.

E. Statement of the Problem

I have always taken an interest in armed conflicts and question the reasons why they occur but only recently have I paid attention to the ongoing conflict in Mindanao.

I originally held the belief that we were fighting a just war against the Muslims in Mindanao but as I dabbled into social and political philosophy and Philippine history, I realized that this conflict affected more than just the Moros and the AFP, but also the Lumad and other non-Muslims (which includes Christians).

War is not black and white and for the longest time, the “Us. Vs Them” rhetoric has been the dominant narrative in the Philippine media when it comes to the coverage of the conflicts that have occurred in Mindanao. In this study, I aim to answer the question: what struggles do Muslims face in terms of media representation during the coverage of conflicts?

The question I ask is not new and Muslims have been misrepresented for the longest time even before the dawn of media in the Philippines but in answering the question, I aim to add to the discourse by also pointing out analyses on their misrepresentation in the media persists and how and why ABS-CBN in particular covered the Mamasapano Clash in the way that it did.

Miriam Colonel Ferrer believes that the Bangsamoro Basic Law is a necessary step in creating peace in Mindanao and that some institutions and groups exploit or gain benefit from the ongoing conflicts to the point that they would undermine the negotiations for peace in war-torn Mindanao. Among the

benefits from sustained conflicts are “power, privileged positions, money (from monopolies, taxes, exploitation of resources, properties, and services” and I share Ms. Coronel’s belief that the war in Mindanao has to be put to a stop.

F. Objectives of the study

Bias in the media is unavoidable due to the filters present in the newsmaking process and the nature of media as business .Some of the most important factors to consider for the study is the size and ownership of ABS-CBN. Since the establishment of ABS-CBN, the Lopez family has used the company along with other media outlets under their ownership to protect their business interests and to criticize their political and business enemies (McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 2007). The research questions listed below aim to guide the course of the study so that the research does not deviate from its objective of understanding why there is bias in ABS-CBN coverage of issues and conflicts in war-torn Mindanao.

I have outlined the specific objectives I sought to address throughout the study:

- (1) To find out how the Bangsamoros were represented in ABS-CBN’s online coverage of the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao
- (2) To identify the owners and controllers of ABS-CBN as an institution
- (3) To identify the possible political economic connections that may have motivated ABS-CBN’s coverage of the Mamasapano Clash

(4) To pinpoint the possible effects of the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law on ABS-CBN's assets in Mindanao

G. Significance of the Study

The study will prove significant to students of Broadcast Communication who wish to study about the Political Economy of ABS-CBN and understand how this affects the way they cover conflicts in Mindanao in general. The data gathered may serve as foundation for similar researches concerning political economy.

People who wish to learn more about the conflict in Mindanao will benefit greatly from this study as the researcher historicized the conflict in the course of the study

Media critics will be able to use the framework used in this research as a new lens for making sense of the news. In learning how to do an analysis through the lens of political economy, media critics will have a new means of criticism.

This study will also benefit the Filipino people in general because it will show them how political economy and the filters in media shape the kind of news they receive through the mainstream media thus making them more critical of the news.

H. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Since it is impossible to analyze every aspect of the events that had transpired in Mamasapano, the researcher focused on specific aspects surrounding the incident and the online coverage that followed.

The study will cover the online news coverage by ABS-CBN that took place within the first five months of the Mamasapano Clash.

The study will not cover the television coverage that took place alongside the online coverage due to the cost of individual videos which the researcher cannot afford to pay.

This study will also analyze the structure of ABS-CBN as a corporation and will pinpoint who its controllers are and what they have to gain by framing the news concerning Mindanao conflicts like what happened in Mamasapano in the way that they did.

The study will establish the possible correlations between the economic interests, the corporate structure of ABS-CBN, and their manner of presentation in their coverages of Muslim Conflicts specifically the events that transpired in Mamasapano.

The study will not do an in-depth historic analysis of the Lopez family as that has been accomplished in textbooks and other researches.

I. Rationale

The researcher chose to study this topic in particular because although a political economic study of ABS-CBN has been done before, there has been no

study about how the political economy of ABS-CBN affects their coverage of conflicts in war-torn Mindanao.

It is important to study the political economy surrounding ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano incident, the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, and any issue having to do with Muslims in general because ABS-CBN has a national reach and is one of the largest media conglomerates in the country. In doing this research, we are able to understand why our Muslim brothers in Mindanao are often misrepresented in the news as violent terrorists.

In doing conducting this research, I hope to uplift the image of the Moros in the media by making the readers understand the political economic motivations media institutions may have which in turn affect the way they frame the news.

Chapter II

Integrated Literature

A. An overview of Mindanao

In terms of land mass, Mindanao is the Philippines' second largest island located in the southern portion of the country. Mindanao has a total land area of around 10,199,886 hectares which equates to 34 percent of the country's total land area and out of this land area, 5,624,010 hectares are classified as forest lands while a total of 4,122,060 hectares or 40.41 percent represents habitable and disposable lands. Only 453,816 hectares of land remain unclassified.

(Muslim, 1994)

Around 3.1 million hectares of land in Mindanao are in the hands of 145 major corporations. Fifty-three of these corporations engage in the exportation of cash crops occupying a total of 158,947 hectares, eight cattle ranches hold 27,612 hectares through pasture leases while 70 logging concessionaires control around 3,000,000 hectares of timberlands. Additionally, there are 14 mining corporations who control 24,713 hectares of land. (Muslim, 1994)

Because of the large amounts of undeveloped fertile land in Mindanao, it has been called the country's pioneer frontier. The region did not experience any substantial population growth until migration was promoted in the late 1950s (this will be elaborated on later).

The chief crops grown in Mindanao are maize, rice, abaca, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, cotton, coconuts, and additionally, coffee and cacao. Mindanao is evidently abundant in natural resources which is why numerous agri-fishery and forestry industries are able to thrive in the region. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016)

The population of Mindanao as of 2007 is 16,939,967.

Mindanao has a high concentration of Muslims in its population which makes it unique in a country that is predominantly Roman Catholic.

B. Mindanao's Population

Mindanao is populated by several ethnolinguistic groups categorized into three basic groupings namely: the Christians, the Moros or Muslims (who now wish to be called the Bangsamoro) and the non-Muslim indigenous inhabitants of Mindanao called the lumad who are composed of eighteen tribes who can be further categorized into different ethnolinguistic groups. These are the Atta, Bagobo, Banwaon, B'laan, Bukidnon, Dibabawon, Higaonon, Mamanwa, Mandaya, Manguwangan, Manobo, Mansaka, Subanen, Tagakaolo, Tasaday, Tboli, Teduray, and the Ubo. Majority of the Lumad can be found in the hinterlands or along the coastlines. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016)

Mindanao is divided into four administrative regions namely, Western Mindanao, Northern Mindanao, Southern Mindanao, and Central Mindanao.

1. Western Mindanao (Region IX) covers the provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi.

2. Northern Mindanao (Region X) covers the provinces of Misamis Occidental, Misamis Oriental, Camiguin, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, and Surigao del Norte.
3. Southern Mindanao (Region XI) covers Surigao del Sur, Davao del Norte, Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur, and South Cotabato.
4. Central Mindanao (Region XII) covers the provinces of North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, and Lanao del Sur.

C. The Muslims of Mindanao

The Muslims inhabitants of Mindanao are often called Moros (the shift in preference to Bangsamoros was only a recent introduction). The term Moro is a Spanish word which is a play of the word Moor, the people inhabiting the ancient Roman province of Mauritania in Northern Africa (present-day Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco). The word Moro is a corruption of the word Moor. (Muslim, 1994)

Spain was occupied by the Moors for more than seven centuries (711 to 1492). After regaining its independence and subsequently discovering that the inhabitants of Mindanao practiced the same faith as the Moors, they decided to call the Muslims in Mindanao as Moros.

The term Moro became synonymous with “savagery, barbarism, piracy” (Muslim, 1994) and this was due to the conditioning of the Northern Filipinos by their colonial masters to hate the Moros.

While it is true that to be called a Moro in the past was considered insulting or degrading to a Filipino, the word has transformed into a symbol of Moro nationalism and with more Filipinos becoming comfortable with being referred to or identified as a Moro, the word has served a more unifying purpose.

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) is largely responsible for the appropriation of the term Moro in a positive sense although more and more writers are beginning to use the term Bangsa Moro (Moro Nation) to refer to the Muslims in Mindanao (as a way of distinguishing them from the Filipino nation) and this term has gained popularity to the point that in the Bangsamoro Basic Law, it is actually the preferred term that the Moros wish to be addressed (Bangsamoros). (Muslim, 1994)

There are presently 13 ethnolinguistic groups that comprise the Moro namely the Kalagans of Davao, the Sanguils of South Cotabato and Davao del Sur, the Maguindanaoans of the Cotabato provinces (Maguindanao, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat); the Iranus of coastal Cotabato, the Kolibugans of the Zamboanga provinces; the Yakans of Basilan province; the Tausugs, Samas, and Badjaos in Sulu, Zamboanga, and Southern Palawan and Davao; the Jama Mapuns of Cagayan de Sulu, and the Palawanons and Molbogs of Southern Palawan. (Totanes, 1998)

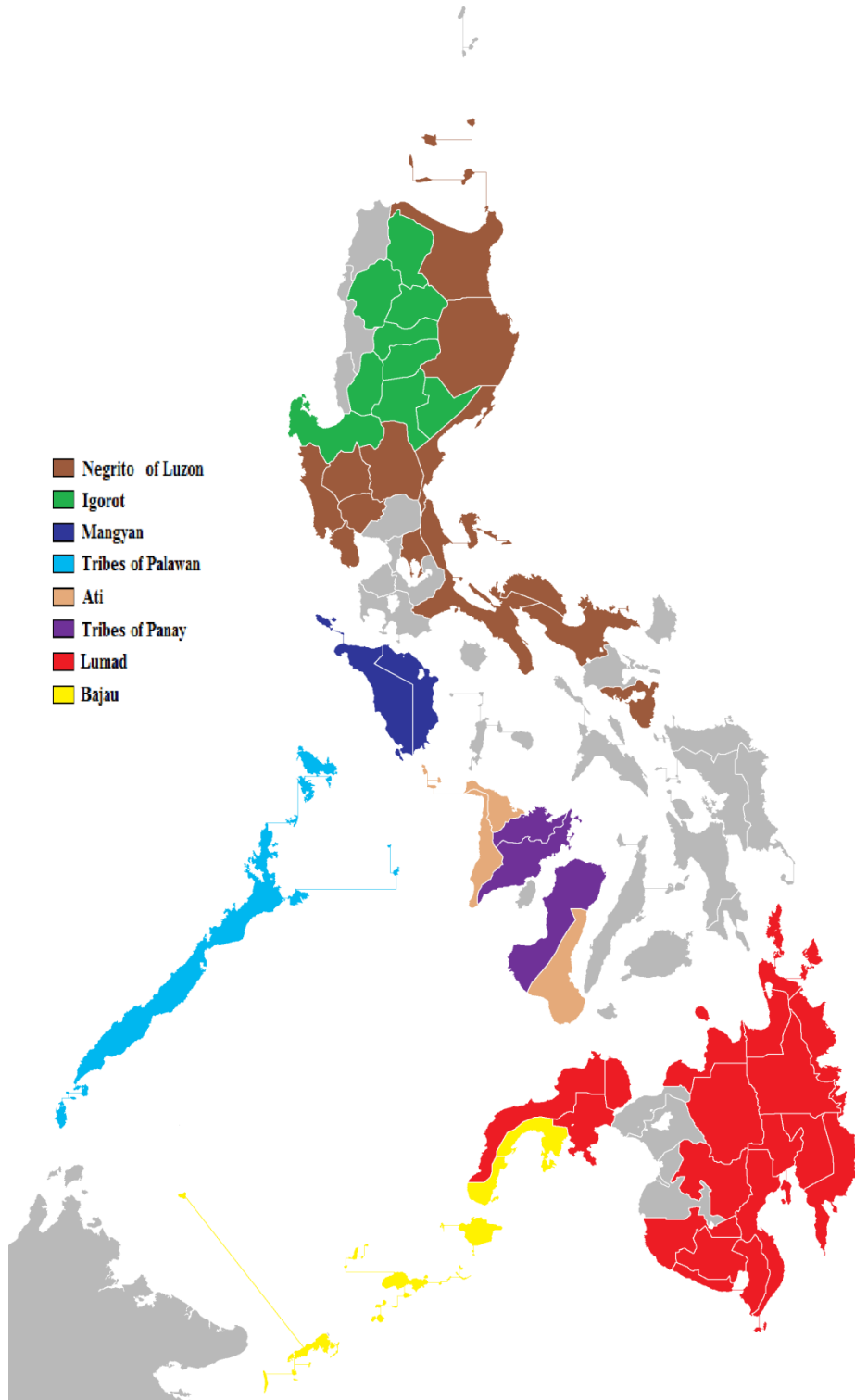


Image 1. A map depicting the distribution of the Lumad tribes throughout the Philippines

As of the latest consensus, the Philippines has a Muslim population of 5,127,084 (National Statistics Office, 2010). 94 percent of this population or 4,838,060, live in Mindanao.

D. The colonial roots of conflict

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers to the Philippines, the country was composed of communities independent of each other (Totanes, 1998). Many of the original inhabitants either practiced paganism, Islam, or a combination of both. The Moros lived in established communities found in Sulu, Mindanao, Palawan, and Islam was able to reach Manila prior to the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century. Islam was brought to the country not only through the traders from Arabia, South China, Indonesia, and Borneo, but also from missionaries who bore titles like *aulya*, *makhdumin*, *sayid*, or *sharif* which implied that these people were learned and well-versed in Islamic doctrine.

The social organization of the Moros under the Datu system and their fervent belief in Islam provided them with a framework for resistance against colonization. Spain was unable to incorporate most of Mindanao and Sulu into the political system it had established which is why consequently for three centuries, the Moros developed their own culture and society independently from the rest of the Philippines which was under Spanish rule. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

The early contact between the Moros and the non-Muslims did not yield pleasant results. Instead, it produced a tradition of animosity which has persisted

for more than three centuries. The Moro sultanates conducted frequent slave raids as far north as Isabela and became feared in many coastal communities. The non-Muslims spread tales of the violence suffered at the hands of the Moros until they eventually came to be perceived as “pirates, bandits, and killers” (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997). The reason why the Moros conducted routine slave raids is because the mode of production in the Sulu seas made slaves the principal resource of power.

The arrival of the Spaniards and their conquering of the communities in the northern part of the Philippines only intensified the image of the Moros as slave-keeping pirates when slaves who managed to escape from the Muslims spread stories about the “barbarity” of the Moros.

The Spanish easily conquered Luzon and Visayas and the northern parts of Mindanao and successfully converted a large percentage of the population into Christianity and in their attempt to colonize Mindanao completely, the Spanish attempted to make use of Christianity as a tool.

The Spanish wanted the Moros to acknowledge their sovereignty over their territory and to promote trade with them, to stop their practice of slave raiding and lastly, to “hispanize and Christianize the Moros” in the same way that they conquered the lowland Filipinos or the indios. (Muslim, 1994)

The Moros, who were already established commercial and political powers in Southeast Asia, responded to the demands of the Spanish with violence and war. The Moros conducted coastal raids in Luzon and Visayas but toward the end of the 19th century, Spain was able to develop a technological advantage

which allowed them to penetrate deeper into Muslim Mindanao namely, the steamboat (armed with guns).

Eventually, the Spanish reached Maguindanao and establish forts in the heart of Muslim Mindanao (like in Cotabato and Marawi). Jolo, which was the center of Moro power, fell at the hands of the Spanish colonizers in 1876. The sultan of Jolo signed an agreement two years later in which he recognized the sovereignty of Spain provided that Sulu was to retain its customs, religion, and laws. Consequently, more Spanish forts were established in Jolo, Siasi, and Bongao however, the Spanish never completely won. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997). Pockets of resistance eventually made shambles of Spain's Moro policy and the negative image of the Moro continued to perpetuate in Luzon and Visayas. The Moros of course, also held a negative image of Christians as "cowards, cheats, and landgrabbers who if given the opportunity, would attempt to destroy Islam." This mindset would later prove to be problematic upon the arrival of the Americans as colonizers.

The Americans adopted a different approach when it came to the occupation of Muslim Mindanao. Initially, they adopted a policy of non-interference in Moro affairs, recognizing the treaty that the Sulu sultanate and Spain signed in 1878. They instead opted to make Sulu an American protectorate rather than occupying it by force like the Spaniards attempted to for three centuries. (Schiavo-Campo & Judd, 2005)

The Americans had the same policy with the Moros as the one that they used with the indigenous Indians of America. They considered the Moros as savages

who needed to be introduced into the “civilized system” and the Americans introduced their system of government, education, healthcare, and taxation and even encouraged Christian Filipinos to migrate into Muslim Mindanao and this move caused bloody resistance from the part of the Moros. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

Eventually, the United States colonial government moved to expedite the integration of the Moros into a “united, self-governing Philippines” and years of conflict led the Moro resistance to weaken which allowed the Americans to provide Christian Filipinos with control over domestic matters in Southern Mindanao.

During the Commonwealth Period however, former Philippine President Manuel Quezon opted to do away with the special treatment that the Moros were receiving from the Americans and instead shifted the government’s policy to “exploiting Moroland for the benefit of Christian settlers and their businesses”

The Moros continued their resistance against state policy and even by the time that the Japanese entered the country as colonizers, they resisted. The Moros possessed a strong consciousness as a group which allowed for a strong resistance against three waves of colonizers but their struggles against the ruling powers were characterized by “the absence of consistent and effective coordination and cooperation” which left Moro society by and large, still fragmented. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

As the country recovered from the Second World War, efforts to settle Christians into Muslim Mindanao intensified and this was most evident during the time of Ramon Magsaysay as President. Between the 1950s and 60s, Christian “prospectors, industrialists, loggers, and politicians, in collaboration with the Moro elite”, managed to dispossess the Moro and Lumad of their lands through the use of title frauds and costly legal processes which the former could not afford. The Moros not only lost their ancestral lands, but were also imposed upon new laws and culture which alienated them from the lands that they used to call home. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

Land is commonly treated as communal property between the Moros and they began questioning why it was the case that a piece of land owned by their clan for generations could suddenly be owned by a Christian for the simple reason that the Christian could produce a paper and the Moro could not. Christians began wondering why it was the case that when they bought land from one Moro, the relatives of that Moro would demand to be paid for the land purchased as well. (Totanes, 1998)

An unforeseen major development allowed for the resurgence of Islam postwar. Muslim preachers from all corners of the globe began holding organized missions in Mindanao and scholarships to Islamic institutions in universities in Cairo and Medina were awarded to young Moros and more and more Moro leaders were being invited to Islamic conferences and this surge in Moro social and cultural awareness paved the way for the strengthening of the Moro sense of nationalism and the term Bangsa Moro emerged. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

E. Contemporary Moro Resistance

In the March of 1968, the country was shaken when news broke out that twenty-eight to sixty-four Moro youths were massacred at the hands of the Philippine Army. The young Moros were allegedly trainees of the Jabidah Forces who were supposedly preparing for a secret plan of the Marcos administration to provoke a war between Sulu and Sabah which would place the Philippines in a position to invade and reclaim Sabah. (Vitug & Gloria, 2000)

The sole survivor of the massacre explained that the trainees were supposedly shot because of their refusal to attack Sabah. The army, fearing that the trainees would leak the plans to invade Sabah, shot the young Moros in an attempt to tie up loose ends. When word of the massacre spread among the Moro community, their opposition of the Manila government intensified. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

Those with power in the Moro community were enraged at the massacre that took place and pockets of resistance were soon formed. Then Cotabato Governor DatuUdtogMatalam set up the Muslim Independence Movement, Maranao Representative Rashid Lucman on the other hand responded to an offer by the Malaysian forces to train and arm young Moros against the Philippine government.

Three key figures from the Moro resistance emerged during this time, Nur Misuari from Tapul Sulu who was a teacher at the University of the Philippines,

Abdul Khayr Alonto from the Maranao royalty and Hashim Salamat who was an active leader of the Philippine Students' Union in Cairo.

Maranao Representative Rashid Lucman established the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) which considered itself to be the umbrella organization of all Moro resistance groups but not long after, Nur Misuari established the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which distinguished itself as separate from the initiatives of the Moro. Misuari expressed a disdain for the aristocratic leadership of the resistance groups formed by the Moro elite and with the help of weapons provided by Islamic states, the MNLF began its armed struggle in 1972 and against all odds became recognized as the official representative of the Moro people, even receiving observer status in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) (Vitug & Gloria, 2000).

Lucman's BMLO initially "cooperated" with the Marcos administration however, because it continued to carry the theme of Moro independence, Marcos declared Lucman as an enemy of the state. By 1975, the war had reached a stalemate and it was the MNLF's turn to represent the Moros. In 1976, the Tripoli agreement was signed which would have created an autonomous region for Muslims in the Philippines where they could autonomously practice their own government and judicial system under Sharia law. The original thirteen provinces which were supposed to be included as part of the agreement were Basilan, Sultan Kudarat, Sulu, Lanao del Norte, Tawi-tawi, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Palawan, and Maguindanao. Marcos eventually u-turned on his

promises and the agreement eventually broke down leading to a major split in the MNLF. Hashim Salamat challenged Misuari's leadership and created a separatist organization called the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Disagreements with regard to policies led to the creation of another breakaway group from the MNLF. Abdul Khayr Alonto surrendered to the government in 1978 and was replaced in the MNLF by Dimas Pundato. Four years later in 1982, Pundato announced the creation of the MNLF Reformist group. (Vitug & Gloria, 2000)

It is worth noting that the mainstream Misuari group is largely Tausog while the Salamat faction was largely composed of Moros from Maguindanao and the Reformists group led by Pundato was largely Maranao.

Though the original demand of the MNLF was the secession of Mindanao from the rest of the Philippines, it eventually changed its terms of agreement to the acceptance of autonomy which came in the framework of the Tripoli agreement signed by the representatives of the Bangsa Moro Liberation Movement on December 23 in Tripoli, Libya. (Tolibas-Nuñez, 1997)

Thirteen provinces were to be covered by the original Tripoli agreement namely Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Lanao del Sur, Lanao del Norte, Davao del Sur, Davao del Norte, South Cotabato, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, Dapitan, Dipolog, Pagadian, General Santos, Iligan, Cotabato, and Puerto Princesa. (Schiavo-Campo & Judd, 2005)

Then Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos did not honor the Tripoli agreement however and opted to instead create Regions IX and XII as autonomous regions but excluded Palawan, Davao del Sur, and South Cotabato from either region. The Bangsa Moro saw this as an act of non-compliance with the original agreement and the negotiations for the Tripoli agreement resumed under the term of Corazon Aquino who wanted to create autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordilleras in accordance with the 1987 constitution through the Organic Act for Muslim Mindanao (Republic Act No. 6734) although numerous prejudiced rumors spread during the time plebiscite that took place for the ratification of the Tripoli agreement (Eke & Alali, 1991) and among these were that the Moros would take back Christian land and that people would no longer be allowed to raise pigs and that husbands would now be able to marry up to four wives. The Organic Act was rejected except in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Though the Organic Act was rejected by the MNLF and the MILF due to the result of the plebiscites which were unfavorable to them, the peace agreement signed by Aquino and Misuari was still upheld except for a few skirmishes between government forces and Moro separatists.

As of writing, there has yet to be a lasting peace agreement between the state and the Bangsamoro which would have come in the form of the Bangsamoro Basic Law had it not been rejected by the senate in the March of 2016. The centuries-old biases against the Moros rooted from our colonial past still persist.

F. Summary

The island of Mindanao had signs of civilization even before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. The Moros and the non-Muslim inhabitants of Mindanao became displaced from their ancestral lands due to centuries of relocation policies which moved Christians from the Northern Philippines to Mindanao making the Moros and the Lumad minorities in what used to be their ancestral domains.

Biases which have its roots in Spanish propaganda efforts still manifest themselves today and people still view Moros according to negative stereotypes associated with them without recognizing their historic claim over the lands in Mindanao.

CHAPTER III

Review of Related Literature

In order to better understand the subject of this thesis, the researcher purposely reviewed relevant texts discussing ABS-CBN's history, structure, ownership, and political economy and different factors that affect the way that news is framed.

A. ABS-CBN's History and Political Economy

The Alto Broadcasting System-Chronicle Broadcasting Network is owned by the Lopez Family. The company's origins can be traced back to 1952 when Eugenio Lopez, Sr. founded the Chronicle Broadcasting Network. (McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 1994) Alto Broadcasting System which started as the Bolinao Electronics Corporation by Antonio Quirino and American Engineer James Lindenberg, was conceived at a time when American Surplus electronics and military communications equipment were being sold to Filipinos after World War II. The Network officially became known as the ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation on February 1, 1967.

Eugenio Lopez, Sr. and then Vice-President Fernando Lopez came from a long line of businessmen and politicians and had been known historically to use

the print and broadcast media to “hammer away at their enemies and to reward their allies in order to further their economic interests”. (McCoy, *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 1994)

The Lopez family used their ownership of the Philippines’ largest media conglomerate to threaten to expose the corruption in the Marcos administration when then Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos got into a dispute with the family regarding a business investment. Marcos backed when the Lopez family exposed to corruption in his administration but eventually, he declared Martial Law and consequently sequestered all of the Lopez family’s media and most of their businesses. (McCoy, 2009)

Prof. Josefina Santos in her Master’s thesis *Pampulitikang Ekonomiya ng ABS-CBN at Globalisasyon (The Political Economy of ABS-CBN and Globalization)*, found that the Lopezes owned most of the stocks and shares in ABS-CBN and that members of the family and close associates hold most if not, all of the key positions in the board of directors which means that they are virtually unopposed with regard to how they think the company should be run. That being said, it implies that the Lopez family has a monopolistic control over ABS-CBN and that they have the power to dictate the price of advertising time due to the present concentration of power and wealth. (Santos, 2000)

The Lopez family has not only invested in their media conglomerate but also in other fields of business such as electricity distribution through Meralco, water distribution through Maynilad, and even real estate and land development. Historically, the Lopezes even used the Vice Presidency of Fernando Lopez in

order to expedite business processes. The Lopez family engages in a practice called *synergy* where they use all available resources and assets to reduce costs, maximize profit, and to have a competing edge against its rival networks. (Santos, 2000)

One implication of the monopolistic control ABS-CBN by the Lopez family is that their decisions as to how the company should be run is virtually unopposed and that they control everything right down to the news making process.

B. Factors that affect the way news is framed

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent* believed that the role of the mass media is to serve as a system for communicating messages to members of the general populace in order to inform, entertain, or to educate its members. The problem though with corporate media is that although they try to present themselves as objective arbiters of truth, it is categorically impossible for news reporting to be at all objective since there are certain filters going on in the news making process.

Because mass media is run like a business, it will need money to operate and the number one source of funding of the media is advertising and a threat that comes with having advertising as a source of money is that funding can cut if a story to be published might affect an advertiser which has a stake in the network. Corporate media are accountable to their owners who are profit-

oriented and the stakeholders who control the funding. Media institutions can only appear objective but because of the profit-oriented nature of media, news that won't sell will often not be published and this reflects the systemic bias present in corporate media.

In addition to the economic factors affecting the way that corporate media frames the news, the dominant ideology also affects the manner by which the news is presented (Herman and Chomsky). In the first edition of *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Media*, the final filter was originally anti-communism and it eventually developed into anti-terrorism due to changes in the political climate during the past four decades. Ideology serves as a filter because news is tailored to conform to the prevailing ideological hegemony. In the United States, for example, patriotism is an example of an idea valued in American society and news cannot be published if it were to show the slightest anti-American sentiment.

In addition to the factors that affect the way news is told, the Agenda Setting Theory also known as the Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media was originally put forth by theorists Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the year 1972 in a social sciences journal. McCombs and Shaw suggest that the media has a capacity to affect what people think about or set the public agenda.

McCombs and Shaw state in their abstract when they first published the theory that:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn

not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign.

What McCombs and Shaw are ultimately suggesting in their theory is that although media may not exactly tell us what to think about, it does however have the capacity to tell us what to think about and this is the entire gist of the agenda setting function.

The agenda setting theory operates on the idea that (1) media coverage does not reflect reality because news is filtered and shaped and that (2) the concentration of media on particular issues may lead to the public perceiving those issues as more important compared to other issues also occurring within the same timeframe.

The theories of the Political Economy of the Mass Media used in conjunction with the agenda setting function will serve as effective guides in deconstructing the way the Mamasapano Incident and Bangsamoro Basic Law were framed and how it may have affected public discourse and determining the political economic factors surrounding ABS-CBN’s coverage of the two issues but it is also important to note that bias can also stem from the individual nuances of television itself as a medium.

When television news programs recreate an event through images, they are actually distorting the truth whether intentionally or not, and television viewers often fall victim to this phenomenon. Even when these recreations are properly labeled when broadcast, viewers will not know which parts of these re-

creations are fiction or not because the re-creations themselves are merely attempts to portray events that have already occurred are not the actual events that have occurred. To avoid ambiguity, news shows should be called re-presentations rather than re-creations and these come in the form of language and pictures. How then can viewers properly arm themselves against what Bertrand Russell calls *the seductions of eloquence*?

One way of properly guarding oneself against the intricacies of language is by recognizing the difference between the *world of events* and the *world of words* about events. It is the role of honest reporters to use the appropriate words and tone in presenting events that come as close as possible to evoking the event but the problem is that no two people will use the exact same words in describing an event which means that people must therefore acknowledge that there are multiple possible alternative verbal descriptions for an event. The words used to describe an event can only achieve an abstracted re-presentation of the event which means that viewers should not assume that the words used to refer to the event can represent exactly what happened. Because there is more than one way of narrating what had transpired during an event, viewers must be on guard against the assumption that what is heard during a news report is the absolute truth.

Another aspect of language that viewers should be aware of is that it operates at various levels of abstraction. There is a level of language that operates to describe an event, then there is also the level of language which evaluates an event, and there is the level of language which infers what is not

known based on what is already known. Television viewers should be aware of the differences between descriptions, evaluations, and inferences being made in television news.

Another aspect of language that should be paid attention to is the connotative meanings that almost all words have. Even when journalists attempt to use only descriptive language about the event they are saying, there will still be a degree of ambiguity because there is more than one way of deciphering a news report and which means that despite the journalist's careful choice of words, there is always room for misinterpretation which means that it is impossible for news reports to be absolutely objective. If the goal of a reporter is to deliver a news report objectively by avoiding words that may favor or disfavor any particular group, then they ultimately defeat their own purpose because language tends to be laden with emotion. When people talk, it will always contain a feeling, an attitude, and judgment because every "language contains the history of a people's feelings about the world" so to speak. Smart audiences would be aware of this and would not blame anyone for the current state of affairs. (Hartley, 2012)

The next issue to address is the problem of pictures. Time and time again, it has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Steve Powers believes that one can also say that the lack of a picture – a censored image – is also worth a thousand words. In some instances, a word can also be worth a thousand pictures especially when it comes to understanding the world.

The problem with pictures is that they can only communicate in particularities. Images are only concrete representations. A picture cannot present ideas and concepts – language is used to translate the image into an idea which twice detaches the image from the truth. By itself, a picture cannot communicate abstract concepts. One cannot produce an image of the sea, one can only show a specific fragment of the “here and now” which means that you can only take a picture of a particular part of the sea at that given moment. Pictures celebrate the particularities of the universe’s infinite variety while language makes them comprehensible.(Powers & Postman, 2010)

The fact that television news can only portray the world through pictures, fragmented moments in time, and that there can be numerous interpretations of the same texts means that the television viewer must approach all the information he receives through television news with a prepared mind, an articulate value system, an educated opinion, and a sense of proportion because otherwise, television news will make no sense and have absolutely no coherence whatsoever.

C. News as frame

Gaye Tuchman (1978) believed that “News is a window on the world.” Through the frame of news, people learn about themselves, the people around them and the institutions that are part of the world that they belong to.

Tuchman suggests that news has the ability to impart to occurrences their public character. If news is to be viewed as a window pane, it must be understood that that pane does not exist solely as a pane but also as a part of a structure which constitutes that frame.(Tuchman, 1978)

Newspapers and television stations are complex organizations subject to certain inevitable processes which impose upon newswriters professional standards. Tuchman does not regard the individual as a person with individual biases or concerns but rather, emphasizes the way which professionalism and decisions resulting from professionalism are the result of the needs of the organization which the newsmaker is a part of.

Professionalism is able to serve organizational interests by reaffirming the institutional processes within which newswriting is embedded which take place within the structure of the news organization. (Tuchman, 1978)

D. The Ethics of Conflict Journalism

There is an ethical demand on the part of journalists when it comes to war especially when numerous interests are clashing and different stakeholders are concerned. Among the maxims prescribed by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in their code of ethics is “Minimize harm” and in the context of conflict coverage, this means recognizing that the way we represent either side of the conflict can have permanent damaging effects.

News that is published should be helpful to the public in terms of understanding crucial issues thereby allowing them to make informed decisions.

In order to minimize harm, journalists should always question their use of photographs or videos especially if the content or subject matter is disturbing or has the capacity to significantly impact the viewers emotionally.

The maxim of minimizing harm means taking into consideration that there are always possible consequences that can arise from the decision to publish and if harm need be done, it must be justified.

In the context of the study, this is useful because in the coverage of the Mamasapano Clash videos of the execution of one of the members of the SAF44 surfaced online and stills from this video were published in television coverages that followed after the Mamasapano Clash. Media institutions also highlighted the gruesome nature of the deaths of the members of the SAF44 after the Mamasapano Clash took place. The question that arises from this taking into consideration the maxim “minimize harm” is, should they have?

E. Research Gap

Although there have been many articles published on how the media in general was inflammatory and sensationalist in its coverage of the Mamasapano Clash, there have been no research works that explore the possible political economic dimensions of the coverage that transpired. This research aims to

bridge the gap on research pertaining to the relationship of political economy and the Mamasapano Clash coverage.

F. Summary

The texts reviewed for this chapter are earlier studies which discuss the history of ABS-CBN in relation to the Lopez family as its controller, how the corporation was used in the recent past for political leverage and how the structure and ownership of media can indeed affect the way that news is delivered and framed.

We also learn from the texts reviewed that there is an ethical standard which ought to be followed in the reportage of conflicts and that reporters should be as sensitive as possible so as not to misrepresent either side.

The texts reviewed also show how the misrepresentation of the Moros in conflicts between them and the state has been going on since the time of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

The theories discussed in this chapter establish how the structure of news organizations and their corporate nature inevitably affect the way that news is framed. Alfred McCoy in *An Anarchy of Families* for example described how the Lopez family used ABS-CBN to “hack away at their enemies and reward allies” but he did not describe the mechanisms through which this took place.

Overall, the texts reviewed justify the approach from which the researcher tackle the problem and serve as a foundation for the research.

CHAPTER IV

Study Framework

A. Theoretical Framework

The researcher made use of political economy theories which guided the interpretation of the data gathered. The theories used for this study are Political Economy of Mass Media, and structuration which will aid in achieving the best substantive results for this research. Political economy will discuss the ownership of ABS-CBN Corporation along with the other filters affecting the media while the structuration and spatialization theory will discuss the way the news is framed and who the key actors are in the agenda-setting process.

Structuration

The political economist Vincent Mosco defines structuration as the “process by which structures are constituted out of human agency, even as they provide the very medium of that constitution” proposing that social institutions such as class, race, and gender have a way of affecting our social dynamics and vice versa.

The concept of structuration is important to the study because it bridges the relationship between society’s structures (which in this instance, is news) and human agency.

Even though the agency of individuals create the structures in society, the very structures that people create have a way of affecting their lives as well

and some of the ways by which individuals are constrained by society's structures is through the use of economic, political, and cultural power.

Social structures create divisions within society resulting from the agency of individuals and social groups who use their own power to constitute themselves in the world and in relationship to others. People make use of power in order to increase their power giving them the ability to shape the very structures of society itself.

In the context of the research, the concept of structuration bridges the coverage of the Mamasapano Clash and the motivations of the controllers of ABS-CBN.

ABS-CBN is in itself a structure and part of this structure are the writers, journalists, and editors who are affected by the power relations within the organization which thus affects the way news is framed and this will be elaborated on in the following chapters.

ABS-CBN is a structure that exists within a network of structures which is why it has to constantly compete with other networks in order to maximize its effect on the political and economic structures of society and to forward the interests of its controllers. Too much competition is bad for those seeking to maximize profit in any market which is why corporate concentration is essential to limiting the amount of competition and parallelly, the amount of information available.

Spatialization

According to Vincent Mosco, spatialization denotes the process of overcoming the constraints of space and time in social life. Karl Marx remarked at how capitalism had the tendency to “annihilate space with time” referring to the power of capitalism to constantly improve the means of transportation and communication, increasing the speed and efficiency of the transportation of “goods, people, and messages” (Mosco, 1996)

The concept of spatialization explains how organizations make use of communication to extend their power and creating corporate concentration or the strengthening of an organization in a way that allows it to dominate other markets

Corporate concentration allows large companies to have more stringent control over the processes of production, distribution, and even the exchange of communication that takes place in society. By limiting the amount of competition available, powerful corporations are also able to limit the diversity of information available in society.

Ownership is a primary concern in studying media concentration primarily because of the concern that “ownership concentration will restrict the flow of communication and information in society by limiting the diversity of producers and distributors.”

Rather than merely examining who the owners of a particular media institution are, it is important to understand the relationships between the members of the board of directors and what they have at stake. (Mosco, 1996)

The Political Economy of the Mass Media

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky began their discussion of their political-economic theory by saying that:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda.

What Herman and Chomsky meant by this is that the media plays an integral role in integration of individuals to the institutions, cultural values and beliefs in society but since the media is dominated by an elite few due to the concentration of wealth, media instead serves to legitimize the ideology of the ruling class rather than to inform the masses or serve the public interest.

Herman and Chomsky proposed five structural filters by which the ruling elite can forward their own interests and set the public agenda in order to set the parameters for public discourse thereby affecting what consumers of media are to think about and discuss.

The five filters as theorized by Herman and Chomsky are:

- (1) *The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms,*
- (2) *advertising as the primary income source of the*

mass media, (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by the government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) Flak as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anti-communism” as a national religion and control mechanism”

Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model suggests that media institutions ultimately serve corporate interest in order to manufacture consent for the policies of the ruling class. The propaganda model allows us to understand the internal and external pressures that ultimately affect the way news is delivered and shows us the limits of “objectivity” in the corporate media.

Following Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model, the researcher will check for bias in the articles to be analyzed by assessing (1) The author’s use and presentation of sources, (2) the use of words to create positive or negative impressions, (3) and what the company stands to gain with the overall framing of the news.

B. Integrated Framework

Throughout the study, the researcher referred to the three main concepts of spatialization, structuration, and news filters to give structure to the study and the findings.

With the concept of structuration in mind, the researcher determined that the controllers of ABS-CBN have high degrees of political and economic leverage made possible through corporate concentration which affects the

discourse in the public sphere, namely in social media websites such as facebook where ABS-CBN publishes their online texts.

Referring to the concept of spatialization allowed the researcher to have an understanding of who the members of the Board of Directors of ABS-CBN are and exactly what it is that they have at stake and how these investments may have possibly affected the way that the coverage of the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao took place.

The concept of the five news filters as discussed by Herman and Chomsky proved essential in pinpointing the causal links between the biased coverage that took place and the political economic interests of the controllers of ABS-CBN. The concepts of Size, Ownership and Structure and Anti-Terrorism helped to explain why the coverage took place in the way that it did and helped to determine which words in the articles were good determinants or manifestations of media bias.

C. Operational Framework

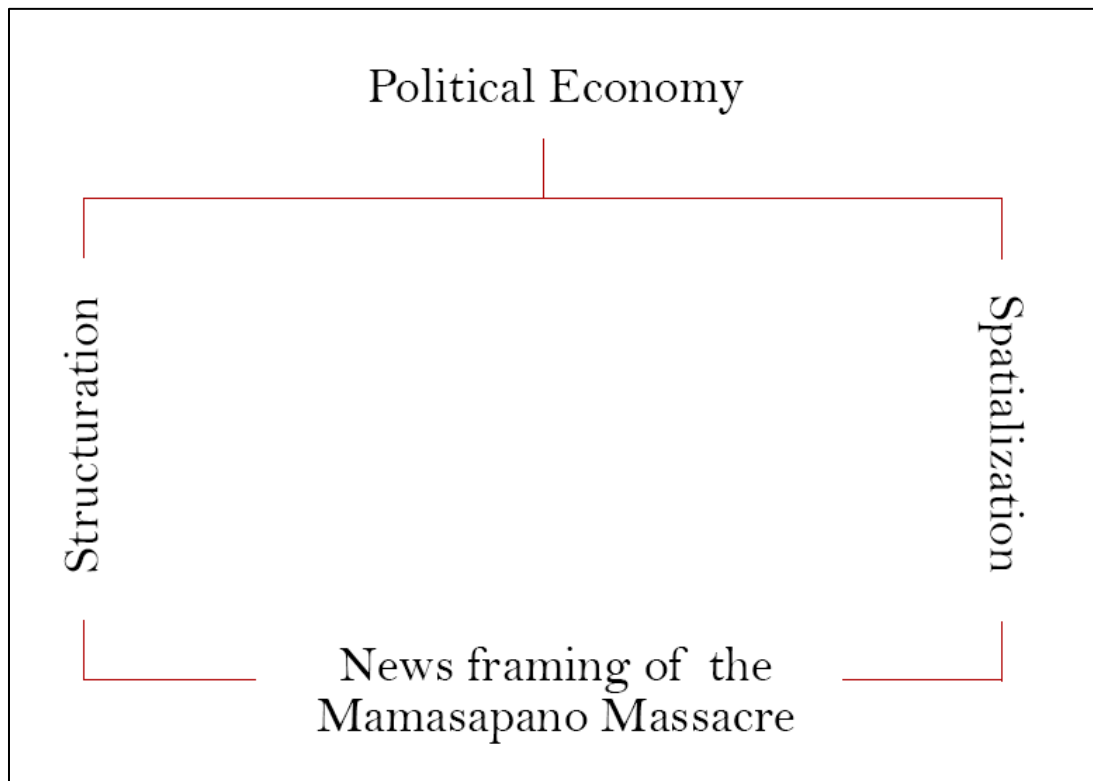


Illustration 1. *The interaction of the different factors affecting the framing of the Mamasapano clash in Maguindanao.*

Guided by the concept of structuration, the researcher examined ABS-CBN as a structure and as a part of a larger business conglomerate to show the amount of corporate concentration that the owners of ABS-CBN have created giving them power over how the shape the social institution that is news.

Spatialization as a concept was used to study the board of directors of ABS-CBN and to determine what business interests the Lopez family had in

Maguindanao that may have possibly affected the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law which would have had an impact on the status quo.

The five filters of newsmaking were used to see how the online articles themselves are framed in such a way that benefits the corporate interests of the owners of ABS-CBN.

Synthesis

Throughout the study, the researcher made use of the concepts of spatialization, structuration, and news filters to establish the political economic connections between ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash and their business interests in Mindanao.

CHAPTER V

Methodology

In order to elaborate on how this study was conducted, this chapter discusses the researcher's design, objectives, and how he was able to arrive at his speculations.

The researcher individually collated the articles published by ABS-CBN Online on the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao specifically articles which pertained to the clash itself and not the Senate hearings that followed. The researcher checked for the frequency and analyzed the articles based on the perceived presence of bias and then related it to the political economy of Mass Media.

Methods

Sampling Method

Due to the qualitative nature of the first part of the study, news articles and videos from ABS-CBN's online arm will be purposefully sampled to ensure the relevance of the selected articles to the objectives of the research. The researcher sampled all 330 articles published by ABS-CBN from the time the Mamasapano Clash broke out until the time it died down and coverage began focusing on the hearings on the Mamasapano Clash.

The second part of the study which involves the data analysis and institutional approach will rely heavily on data gathered from the Securities and

Exchanges Commission (SEC) which requires all registered companies in the Philippines to give an annual report which contains their corporate institutional structure and all expenditures and investments in the year submitted.

Textual Analysis of news and news placements

The researcher gathered texts from ABS-CBN's online website as well as those on Facebook. The researcher used two methods in interpreting the texts. The first is a quantitative approach which checks for the frequency of the publication of articles from January 26 to February 13 while the other is a qualitative approach which discusses the articles using semiotic analysis.

Quantitative Method

In order to guide the quantitative aspect of the research, the researcher made use of the following chart in order to pinpoint the following indicators of bias on a quantitative level.

Quantitative Analysis Guide

Indicators:

1. Length of News
2. Frequency
3. Degree

Qualitative Method

In order to make it easier for the researcher to determine the presence of bias in the online articles published by ABS-CBN, the researcher made use of the following concepts and indicators.

Concepts	Indicators
Bias	Choice of Words Frequency of certain words Fairness in terms of representation Balancing of perspectives Flak (which in this instance, applies to both ABS-CBN and the Moro stakeholders) Anti-Terrorism

Semiotic Analysis Guide

The research made use of a semiotic analysis guide because of its qualitative nature. In analyzing the media texts, the researcher employed the use of the semiotic analysis guide below:

1. Language – this included the use of words either in English or Filipino. Special attention was given to words with negative associations.

2. Treatment used – this included the way the parties involved in the story were represented
3. Messages relayed – this included what messages were being delivered based on the interpretation of the researcher.

These categories were used as a guide for interpreting the aforementioned texts. After analyzing each news article or text, the researcher then compared and contrasted the articles and highlighted prominent similarities and observable trends and observed the frequency of the use of particular words and the manner of portrayal of the parties involved in the stories.

Study of Institution

Conglomeration

Having made use of the concept of spatialization, the researcher zeroed in on ABS-CBN as an institution by reviewing its annual reports in order to determine its size and structure as an organization and to determine who the members of the board of directors are which in this case is the Lopez family whose source of power comes from their economic and political influence. The researcher also determined the amount of economic interests that the Lopez family has in Mindanao by finding out what companies other than ABS-CBN they are invested in. These economic interests will be presumed to be the recipients of protective power.

Research Design

The study combined qualitative research with data and institutional analysis. The qualitative aspect of this study examined online texts and made no use of gathered data or statistics. Due to the subjective nature of the study, the researcher will make use of semiotics to decipher the texts gathered. The data analysis aspect of the study will peruse obtained documents and other sources of data while the institutional analysis will examine ABS-CBN as an institution in order to examine who the owners are and to discuss the history of ABS-CBN in passing.

The qualitative and quantitative approach will answer the following objectives:

- (1) To distinguish how the Bangsamoro were represented in ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash
- (2) To determine the extent of coverage that ABS-CBN gave to the Mamasapano Clash
- (3) To determine the manifestations of bias that took place in ABS-CBN's coverage

The study of institution on the other hand, aims to address the following objectives:

- (1) To analyze ABS-CBN as an institution

- (2) To determine the political economic connections that may have motivated ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash
- (3) To reveal the economic interests of ABS-CBN's owners in Mindanao
- (4) To examine the possible effects of the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law

Research Instruments

The researcher was the primary research instrument in this study because the study draws from the researcher's personal interpretations of the news articles and videos from ABS-CBN. The researcher then analyzes the recurring themes and manner of framing used in these texts.

The secondary research instrument is the data gathered from the Securities and Exchanges Commission for the researcher to establish the links between the manner of framing of the gathered texts and ABS-CBN structuration and the owners' economic and/or political interests.

Data Gathering

The researcher downloaded or copied published online news articles through ABS-CBN's Facebook page and website. The selected texts were chosen on the basis of their degree of perceived bias which was determined by quantitative data or by checking for the frequency of certain words which

The selected texts should have been published from January to May 2015 when the Mamasapano Clash and the BBL's passage were at their peak. The researcher also gathered data from the Securities and Exchanges Commission by obtaining access cards priced at one-hundred pesos (Php. 100) each which allowed the researcher to view documents from the SEC from any computer with internet access.

Researcher

Darien Mitchell C. Bas is a graduating student of Broadcast Communication at the University of the Philippines Diliman. The researcher's academic track is Broadcast Criticism and has taken up relevant Broadcast Communication electives useful to the study namely BC 180 (Political Economy of Broadcasting), BJ 101 (Introduction to Broadcast Journalism), and BC 181 (Criticism of Broadcast Texts). The researcher submitted a final paper for BC 180 with the same topic and developed it as his thesis topic. His inspiration for choosing the topic of this research is the position paper requirement during his application for the UP Journalism Club which required him to write on his stance about the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. Initially the researcher was against the ratification of the BBL but after receiving comments on his position paper, came to the personal realization that there is a need for such an agreement. He is mentored by Arthur M. Alvendia who was a member of Marcos Executive office at the age of twenty-two (22) and former Secretary of Transportation Charlie Borromeo who played key roles in the sequestering of

Lopez family assets during Marcos' time as president and lectured the researcher about the nature of the Lopez family and how they used their companies and assets in synergy.

Chapter VI

Research and Discussion I

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

A. Quantitative Approach

After gathering the online articles published by ABS-CBN pertaining to the Mamasapano Clash, the researcher checked for the frequency of the publication of the articles and found that on average, ABS-CBN published 14 articles about the Mamasapano Clash on a daily basis up until February 9 when the hearings for the Bangsamoro Basic Law were suspended indefinitely. Below is a timeline that shows the frequency at which ABS-CBN published articles about the Mamasapano Clash.

Date (2015)	Number of Articles published
January 26	7
January 27	10
January 28	24
January 29	25
January 30	22
January 31	10

February 1	7
February 2	16
February 3	22
February 4	30
February 5	16
February 6	15
February 7	5
February 8	5
February 9	12
February 10	15
February 11	15
February 12	22
February 13	7
	Total number of articles published: 330

Table 1. The total number of articles published by ABS-CBN pertaining to the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao from January 6 to February 13.

The researcher found that out of the 330 articles sampled between January 26 and February 13 (After February 13, ABS-CBN Online started publishing

more about the hearings pertaining to the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao, rather than the actual clash itself), ABS-CBN published around 17 articles daily.

The average length of a single news article averaged at around 610 words per article published usually an hour in between articles for days when they publish in the double-digit frequency.

Out of the 330 articles sampled, the researcher found that less than only 20 of the total articles focused on the perspective of the Bangsamoro/Moro stakeholders and that the perspective given most prominence to is that of the fallen SAF44 and their families and articles which were pinpointing who was to blame for the operation that took place based on the researcher's reading of the headline of the articles and interpretation of its content.

Below is a list of articles published by ABS-CBN Online which feature the perspective of the MILF/MNLF throughout their coverage of the conflict.

Title of Article	Date Published (2015)
Marwan still alive: MNLF	January 28
MILF chief: We remain committed to peace process	January 28
MILF to investigate Mamasapano Clash	January 28
MNLF calls for tolerance amid recent clash	January 29
MILF names their dead in Mamasapano Clash	January 31
Don't call Mamasapano carnage a massacre: MNLF	February 2

Checks and balances in place in Bangsamoro – MILF	February 2
Marwan killed in Mamasapano, says MILF	February 3
MILF commander denies any involvement in clash	February 3
MILF commander: My men stayed put during Mamasapano clash	February 4
MILF insists on coordination	February 8
MILF we have become the punching bag	February 9
MILF to return guns of killed SAF men	February 10
MILF: We didn't know Marwan, Usman were there	February 10
MILF agrees to return SAF weapons	February 10
MILF denies 250 fighters killed in Mamasapano	February 10
We are not terrorists, says MILF official	February 10
Fund drive launched for slain MILF fighters	February 10
MILF: Mamasapano clash video not conclusive	February 11
MILF belies arms build-up	February 12
	Total number of articles: 20

Table 2. *Articles published by ABS-CBN on the Mamasapano Clash from the perspective of the Moros. (See Appendix A)*

Below is a list of articles published by ABS-CBN that focused on the SAF

44:

Title of Article	Date Published (2015)
43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces	January 26
Celebration turns to mourning for SAF men	January 27
Killing of SAF men ignites online firestorm	January 27
Pagbuburulan ng mga nasawing SAF, inihahandana	January 29
WATCH: Man salutes fallen commando, then weeps	January 29
Palace seeks donations for kin of fallen SAF men	January 29
What many SAF commandos were looking at before they died	January 29
SAF trooper's widow begs PNoy: Please help us	January 30
A day of sorrow for fallen commandos	January 30
Killers came from 3 directions	January 31
DSWD to provide counselling to kin of slain elite cops	January 31
SAF survivor urged: Go back, tell the real story	February 4
AFP chief becomes emotional for Fallen 44	February 4
AFP chief on Fallen 44: Sayangpoyungbuhay	February 4

5 members of Fallen 44 laid to rest in Cordillera	February 4
Congressmen pass the hat for Fallen 44	February 4
SAF sniper's body mutilated, widow says	February 4
SAF commandos battle post-traumatic stress	February 5
Kin of Fallen 44 won't get US reward: official	February 6
Mamasapano survivor: We waited 16 hours for rescue	February 8
SAF commandos recall 24-hour ordeal	February 9
SAF braved unfavorable terrain, armed groups for Marwan op'	February 9
Officer confirms man in video is SAF trooper	February 11
SAF survivors open up to senators	February 13
	Total number of articles: 24

Table 3. *Articles published by ABS-CBN featuring the perspective of the PNP/SAF44. (See to Appendix B for the complete articles)*

Below is a list of articles that covered the Mamasapano clash itself:

Name of articles	Date published (2015)
Death toll in Mamasapano carnage now at 49 - ARMM police	January 26

LGU, civilians also did not know of PNP-SAF operations	January 26
43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces	January 26
DND assures no spillover of Mamasapano clash	January 26
Why soldiers didn't help cops in Maguindanao	January 27
Mamasapano clash was overkill: ex-DILG chief	January 27
Tales of brutality in Mamasapano clash	January 28
What CHR thinks of Mamasapano 'misencounter'	January 28
Poe calls for probe into Maguindanao bloodbath	January 28
Senators seek probe into deadly Mamasapano clash	January 28
Mamasapano mayor says clash area is MILF community	January 29
Mamasapano evacuees reluctant to return home	January 31
Palace denies US involvement in Mamasapano ops	February 1
Mamasapano carnage scaring away investors - business group	February 2
Miriam: Commander liable for Mamasapano carnage	February 2
Mamasapano is PNoy's 'Bay of Pigs': Saguisag	February 3
'No US soldier killed in Mamasapano'	February 3
	Total number of articles: 17

Table 4. Articles focusing on the Mamasapano clash itself (See Appendix C)

The researcher observed that there were 20 articles featuring the MILF/BIFF and their side of the conflict while the PNP/SAF44 on the other hand received a total of 24 articles with only a difference of four more articles compared to the MILF/BIFF. While the data shows that both sides were more or less equally treated in terms of the total number of articles published about them, the researcher observed that there is a noticeable difference in the way that the articles were framed.

The articles which featured the MILF and MNLF focused on the two groups' insistence for the continuation of the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law despite the encounter that took place between the Moros and the SAF44. There was one article in which the MILF, MNLF, and BIFF published the names of their dead although this was published only 2 weeks after the Mamasapano clash took place. In comparison, the names of the members of the SAF 44 who were deceased was published within three days of the Mamasapano Clash taking place.

The coverage that the SAF 44 received is different from the coverage that was given to the MILF and MNLF in that the way in which the SAF 44 was covered focused on the tragedy aspect of the conflict that took place with an emphasis however, on the tragedy as experienced by the members of the SAF 44, their relatives, and members of the military. ABS-CBN Online even went as far as covering the funeral processions and wakes of some members of the SAF

44 in six of the articles published while for contrast, the MILF and the BIFF only received one article in which the names of their dead were published one other article which featured the fund drive for the fallen members of the two groups.

The researcher observed that based on the use of some adjectives in the headlines of the articles published, the Moro stakeholders were antagonized while the deaths of the SAF 44 were treated as tragic. Take for example the headlines of the following articles:

Title of Articles
1. 43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces
2. Killers came from 3 directions
3. AFP chief on Fallen 44: Sayangpoyungbuhay
4. Death toll in Mamasapano carnage now at 49 - ARMM police
5. Mamasapano clash was overkill: ex-DILG chief
6. Tales of brutality in Mamasapano clash
7. Poe calls for probe into Maguindanao bloodbath
8. Mamasapano carnage scaring away investors - business group
9. Miriam: Commander liable for Mamasapano carnage
10. Mamasapano is PNoy's 'Bay of Pigs': Saguisag

Table 5. Articles which the researcher viewed as having an antagonizing effect on the Moros. (See Appendix D)

The words present in the headlines of these articles feature words such as *carnage, overkill, brutality, bloodbath, and killers*. From the researcher's

perspective, these articles presented the Mamasapano Clash as a major carnage which claimed the lives of the SAF 44 and framed the Moros as violent killers who committed an act of overkill.

Although there were articles which allowed the MILF and BIFF to defend themselves (a total of 20 to be exact) and allowed them to explain that they wished to continue the then ongoing negotiations for peace, these articles were outnumbered by the articles which highlighted the tragedy suffered at the hands of the SAF 44 and the hearings that took place concerning the Mamasapano Clash itself where politicians and police officials were pointing fingers over who was ultimately responsible for the failure of Operation Exodus.

It is important to note that out of the 330 articles published by ABS-CBN Online between January 26 and February 13, there was not one article which provided a historic context of the conflict.

In order to better understand how exactly the Moros were framed in the context of the Mamasapano Clash, the articles sampled will now be analyzed from a qualitative approach using semiotic analysis.

B. Qualitative Approach

In order to determine which articles stood out as particularly biased among the 330 sampled articles, the researcher purposely selected the articles which contained the most amount of perceived bias based on *the language used, the treatment used, and the messages relayed*.

The researcher made a tally of how many times the following words were used throughout ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash between the time the issue broke and the time it died down. The researcher's basis for choosing these words in particular is their association with the Moros based on stereotypes that have persisted since the time of Spanish colonization (e.g Muslims are violent killers/terrorists)

Word used	Frequency of use
Kill/Killed	334
Killer	6
Muslim	88
Moro	502
Rebel	200
Terrorist	166
Massacre	39
Carnage	45
Bloodbath	23
Victim	7
Overkill	15
Brutal/Brutality	24

Table 6. Words present in the articles sampled which have negative associations with the Moros

In order to answer the question of how the Moros were framed in ABS-CBN Online's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash, the researcher searched all the articles for the adjectives and descriptive words stereotypically associated with the Moros. For the purpose of creating a qualitative analysis of the coverage of the Mamasapano Clash, the researcher analyzed the articles in which these words were most present.

The article *43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces* was the first article published by ABS-CBN about the Mamasapano Clash

The "misencounter" between policemen and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Sunday, which resulted in 43 elite cops killed, is the worst for government security forces in recent memory.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas described the incident, which happened in the town of Mamasapano, Maguindanao, as "single largest loss of lives in recent memory involving our security forces."

The Mamasapano Clash was framed as "the single largest loss of lives" in recent history involving government forces. The article is ended with the quote:

"We are forming a board of inquiry because we'd like to get to the bottom of this. Our fallen heroes sacrificed their lives for the attainment of peace," Espina said.

The researcher noticed that the author of the article decided to end the article with a quote from PNP Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina which presents the SAF 44 as heroes. Although the author herself did not directly say

that the SAF 44 were heroes, the researcher believes that this could be a reflection of the personal bias of the author because in choosing to frame the SAF 44 as heroes, it indirectly implies that there is a villain which in the context of the Mamasapano Clash, would be none other than the MILF and MNLF and the researcher believes that any reader who had read this first article will be conditioned to believe that the Moros are indeed villains.

The following day, January 27, ABS-CBN Online published an article titled *Erap to gov't: Don't trust MILF* in which he claims that the MILF cannot be trusted for the reason that the Mamasapano Clash was supposedly not an isolated incident and that the Moros have been killing people for the past.

"Yes, this will affect the peace talks. So many lives have been sacrificed. How can this be an isolated incident? They have been doing that for the past how many years. How many towns have been burned? How many people have been killed? We have exhausted all means in making peace with them. What else?" he said.

Erap's opinion on the Mamasapano Clash was contrasted with that of Monagher Iqbal, head of the Bangsamoro Peace Panel who defended the actions of the MILF and the MNLF.

Mohagher Iqbal, head of the rebel peace panel, said the police failed to coordinate their operations with the ceasefire committee.

"They entered our area and attacked us, what are we going to do?" he asked. "What happened was self-defense."

Iqbal said he was confident the peace deal would not be affected because both sides were committed to it.

Although two sides of the story were presented in this article, and the Bangsamoro spokesperson Iqbal was able to present the Bangsamoro as still being committed to the peace process, the two sides were not given equal prominence. The three paragraphs above quoted from the article are the only paragraphs where the MILF/BIFF were cited. The rest of the article focuses on former President Erap Estrada's failed attempts at peace negotiations with the Moros during his time as president.

"There was lack of coordination and things like that. You can never trust the MILF and [Moro National Liberation Front]. That is what I believe in...I experienced it," he said.

He said that during his presidency, one of his first statements was that there could be no economic growth without peace and order.

He said that when he first reached out to then MILF chairman Hashim Salamat, the Moro leader said: "If the president wants to see me, he can come here to Mindanao and choose the place, whether in Davao or Zamaboanga City."

"I said to myself: who are you to tell the president where to see you?," Estrada recalled.

Estrada said he gave the MILF a maximum of six months to forge a lasting peace agreement with the government. Peace talks, however, fell apart after the MILF asked for a substate in Mindanao, which Estrada rejected.

The former president said that even during the peace talks, the MILF attacked Kauswagan town in North Cotabato and killed soldiers and even children.

"Six children were burned to death and two soldiers were beheaded. That is the time I put on my fatigue uniform. I went to Kauswagan. I looked at the children and the soldiers and that was when I declared all out war," he said.

The researcher believes that one of the messages that a reader could receive from the article based on its treatment and language used (even though most of the article consists of quotations from Estrada) is that an all-out war

against the MILF/MNLF is necessary because they are supposedly, not worthy of trust and that there is a form of *othering* that took place, especially with the way that the article was written. The researcher believes that the article above does nothing to do away with the “Us vs. Them” narrative already

Succeeding articles highlighted the gruesome nature of the deaths of the SAF 44. The article *Tales of brutality* for example which was published a day after the previously mentioned article, describes how the PNP SAF members were killed at the hands of the Moros.

Villagers in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have come forward with stories on how Moro rebels brutally killed Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos during an encounter last Sunday.

Some villagers said some of the wounded policemen were mercilessly gunned down as they struggled to escape the rebels.

They said the rebels killed the wounded with gunshots to the head and collected their weapons and other equipment.

Another villager, who asked to be identified only as Hamim, said some rebels even stomped on the heads of the slain policemen before firing shots at them. Some of the locals said the SAF men battled some 300 MILF fighters.

The article above describes in gruesome detail the deaths of the members of the SAF 44. More than half of the article is dedicated to describing the nature of their deaths at the hands of the MILF and MNLF although, the article does end with a call for the continuation of the peace process in the form of quotations from Major General Edmundo Pangilinan and the governor of ARMM:

Major Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of the 6th ID, said the incident – while tragic – should provide more “pressing reasons” for the government and the MILF to pursue peace.

Pangilinan said tension in Mamasapano has eased and Army units in the area are now helping government agencies in relief activities. In a statement, Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) also said the carnage should not derail the peace initiatives by the government and the MILF.

“As always, it’s the civilians that suffer most from the brunt of armed conflicts,” said Hataman.

The MILF leadership yesterday stood pat on its assertion that the “misencounter” was triggered by the failure of the PNP to coordinate the activities of the SAF in the area with the joint ceasefire committee. The committee is composed of representatives from the MILF, the PNP and the Armed Forces.

The researcher felt that the treatment of the article is inappropriate in the sense that it depicts the MILF first as “merciless killers” and who killed the SAF 44 at point-blank range. The researcher believes that it will be difficult for any reader to appreciate the call for the continuation of the peace process when the MILF had already been depicted as brutal, merciless killers which is already a stereotype associated with them.

The depiction of the MILF is not entirely negative however, as there were articles published by ABS-CBN Online which feature the perspective of the MILF and the MNLF and how they remained committed to the peace process despite the clash that took place between their factions and the PNP SAF.

The article *MILF chief: We remain committed to peace process* for example, allowed the MILF to voice out their perspective on the Mamasapano Clash:

Moro Islamic Liberation Front Chairman (MILF) Al Haj Murad Ebrahim reiterated his group's full commitment to the peace process amid the carnage that has befallen more than 40 of the country's elite cops in an area the group allegedly holds.

In an official statement, Ebrahim said the MILF is convening a Special Investigative Commission (SIC) composed of members of the MILF Central Committee and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) General Staff to resolve issues surrounding the Sunday bloodbath that may affect the peace process.

The quotation above describes efforts by the MILF to investigate the clash that occurred between the SAF and their side although the writer who quoted Ebrahim chose to end the quoted paragraph above with the use of the term bloodbath which the researcher perceives as having the potential to frame the clash that occurred as overkill.

"We hereby reiterate the MILF's full commitment to the peace process with the Philippine Government. An enduring peace and justice remain to be our primary objective. In this regard, all actions and pronouncements of our political and military units of the MILF should advance and adhere to this primary objective as much as possible and with due regard to the safety and security of our people and communities," he said.

He said the committee will gather all information and testimonies on the ground. The report will be submitted "as soon as possible."

The quote above focused on the MILFs reiteration of their commitment to the peace process and to a minor extent, describes how the negotiations for peace in Mindanao have been taking place for a long time prior to the Bangsamoro Basic Law and the Mamasapano Clash in the form of a quotation from Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, MILF Chairman:

“The MILF have been in negotiations with the Philippine Government for some time now. During this time, both parties have established protocols, ways of proceedings and mechanisms, which support and keep the peace,” he said.

Although it is good that the perspective of the MILF regarding the peace process was highlighted and that it was mentioned that negotiations for peace have been ongoing even before the BBL, ABS-CBN Online did not publish any article that historicized the need for peace negotiations.

State forces and the MNLF/MILF are not the only casualties of the ongoing conflicts in Mindanao; ABS-CBN did not publish any articles mentioning that the Lumad and Christian inhabitants of Mindanao are victims of conflict as well. Throughout the 330 articles gathered for this study, the researcher found that the words **Lumad** and **Christian** were only ever mentioned **four times** in four different articles, and only passing mention in quotations mostly. On a positive note, at least the Mamasapano Clash was not framed as a religious conflict.

Summary

Although the MILF/MNLF and the SAF were given relatively equal coverage from the quantitative view, the researcher observed that from a qualitative review of the articles published, there was an evident bias on the part of ABS-CBN Online and one of the ways this manifested is how they highlighted the tragedy of the deaths of the members of the SAF 44 in numerous articles

while only highlighting the tragedy of the deaths of the members of the Moro fighters in two articles. The researcher believes that the "Us Vs. Them" narrative which has existed since the time of Spanish colonization is forwarded with the depiction of the SAF 44 as gallant heroes who suffered overkill/gruesome deaths at the hands of the MILF and MNLF.

The MILF and MNLF were covered neutrally at best and even then, the amount of coverage that they received is heavily outnumbered by the combined coverage received by the SAF 44, the senate hearings and investigations (in most of which politicians voiced out their opposition to the passage of the BBL) and coverage of the clash itself.

Chapter VI

Research and Discussion II

Institutional Analysis of ABS-CBN

After accessing and reviewing the annual reports of ABS-CBN and analyzing the company's corporate structure and investments overtime, the researcher was able to collect the following data.

This chapter will be divided into two parts namely 1) The ownership and structure of ABS-CBN and 2) the investments of ABS-CBN in Mindanao and 3) The possible political economic connection in ABS-CBN's coverage of the Mamasapano Clash.

A. The ownership and structure of ABS-CBN

ABS-CBN is a trans-industrial corporation. A trans-industrial corporation is one whose owners also own or have assets or shares in other industries. Within the context of media, they can use their media corporation as a means to (1) develop synergy among their other different corporations (2) boost the image of their corporations (and conversely counter flak about it) and (3) serve their interests. This becomes largely easier when your media corporation is highly empowered and influential.

In Eileen Meehan's book "Why TV is Not Our Fault" she cites several examples of this at work. One of the most familiar examples would be Disney. Disney's industries within media alone branch out into producing music, TV channels, movies and short films. Outside of this, it has theme parks and merchandising -- from clothing to toys and even furniture. To analyze how they benefit economically by fostering synergy between their corporations, one can look at the example Lilo & Stitch. They benefited by riding on the success of the movie and using this to create merchandise and theme park attractions -- overall, more revenue.

Within the context of the Philippines, ABS-CBN is the country's largest media conglomerate and was founded by the Lopez family who owns the company to this day. Historically, the Lopezes have been known to use the media as leverage against their political and economic opponents as McCoy points out in his book "An Anarchy of Families". From Eugenio Lopez's use of the El Tiempo and the Manila Times to Eugenio Lopez II's use of ABS-CBN to hack away at political adversaries, the Lopez family have always been known to use the media as a means of rewarding allies and protecting their interests.

Below are a list of the board of directors and shareholders of ABS-CBN corp.

Board of Directors

Name of Director	Date first elected
Eugenio Lopez III	April 23, 1992

Augusto Almeda-Lopez	April 27, 1988
Ma. Rosario Santos-Concio	April 27, 2006
Oscar M. Lopez	1966
Presentacion LopezPsinakis	April 27, 1988
Manuel M. Lopez	July 28, 2010
Federico R. Lopez	August 25, 1999
Federico M. Garcia	September 2, 1992
Salvador G. Tirona	July 28, 2010
Antonio Jose U. Periquet (Independent Director)	April 23, 2013
Emmanuel S. De Dios (Independent Director)	April 23, 2013

Table 7. ABS-CBN's Board of Directors

The individuals named in the table above are the current Board of Directors of ABS-CBN. Six out of the eleven members of the Board of Directors are members of the Lopez family.

Eugenio Lopez III is the son of ABS-CBN founder, Eugenio Lopez Sr. who founded the company in 1967. Eugenio Lopez III took over control of the

company after Martial Law when then President Corazon Aquino returned most of the Lopez family businesses.

Augusto Almedia-Lopez is the General Counsel and Executive Vice President of the Lopez Holdings Corporation which is the Lopez family's holding company for investments in public utilities such as broadcasting and power distribution and even property development.

Oscar M. Lopez is the Executive Director of the FG Bukidnon Power Corporation and Executive Director of Lopez Holdings Corporation since 2010. Other corporations where Oscar Lopez is a Chairman of include the Rockwell Land Corporation, the Energy Development Corporation, the First Gas Power Corporation, the First Gen Hydro Power Corporation, and ABS-CBN Holdings Corporation.

Presentacion Lopez Psinakis is the daughter of Eugenio Lopez III who married to Steve Psinakis, a well-known freedom fighter during the time of Martial Law. Presentacion Psinakis is the founder and president of Griffin Sierra Travel, Inc.

Manuel Lopez is the Chairman and CEO of Lopez Holdings Corporation and the Chairman of Bayantel Communications and the Vice Chairman of the First Philippine Holdings Corporation.

Federico Lopez is the current Chairman and CEO of the Energy Development Corporation and First Private Power Corporation, and Bauiang Private Power Corporation.

Four out of the eleven members of the ABS-CBN Board of Directors are appointees and close acquaintances of the Lopez family. These members were appointed into the Board of Directors by the incumbent members. The Board of Directors have the power to appoint new directors into the Board as they deem necessary. Once appointed into the Board, membership is permanent from the date of appointment. Oscar Lopez for example, has been a member of the Board of Directors since the company was restored to the Lopezes in 1966.

Ma. Rosario Santos-Concio or known more popularly as Charo Santos, was a production assistant of ABS-CBN before martial law and produced films critical of the Marcos administration such as Oro, Plata, Mata and Himala. She was the President and CEO of ABS-CBN from March 1, 2008 to January 1, 2016. She is the Chief Content Officer of ABS-CBN and serves as executive adviser to Eugenio Lopez III.

Federico Garcia is a former President and CEO of ABS-CBN and TV Sales executive until Martial Law. Garcia moved to GMA Radio Television Arts from 1974 to 1986 and now serves as an independent director of ABS-CBN.

Salvador Tirona is the Chief Operating Officer of Lopez Holdings Corporation and has also served as its Chief Financial Officer since September of 2005 and is also the Chief Financial Officer of Bayan Telecommunications and at one point served as the Chief Financial Officer of Maynilad Water Services. Tirona serves as an independent director of ABS-CBN.

Antonio Periquet is an independent director of ABS-CBN but also in several other companies such as the Ayala Corporation, DMCI Holdings Inc,

Philippine Seven Corporation, Bank of the Philippine Islands, and the Max's Group Inc.

The researcher observed that when individuals are inducted into the Board of Directors, their membership into the board becomes permanent from the date of appointment which explains why Oscar Lopez is still a member of the Board of Directors since 1966 (minus the time that he was removed from ABS-CBN when Marcos took over the company).

List of Shareholders

Name of Shareholder	Shares held	% to total
Lopez Inc.	200	50.00
Oscar M. Lopez	40	10.00
Manuel M. Lopez	40	10.00
Eugenio Lopez III	40	10.00
PresentacionPsinakis (Daughter of Eugenio Lopez Sr.)	40	10.00

Table 8. ABS-CBN's shareholders. Ninety percent of the company's shares are owned by member of the Board of Directors.

Retrieved from: sec.gov.ph

ABS-CBN is listed under the Philippine stock exchange and although that is the case, ninety percent of the company's shares are all owned by members of the Lopez family or purchased through Lopez Inc., their holdings company.

Because only 10 percent of the total stocks are purchasable by the general public, the Lopez family practically owns the entire corporation and thus have more say in how the company should be run.

It has been established that it is in fact, the Lopez family who owns ABS-CBN and that the members of the Board of Directors are members of the family or people who they have established close ties to. Taking this into consideration, it is time to discuss what other investments the members of the Board of Directors of ABS-CBN may have which are the receivers of protective power.

B. The Investments of ABS-CBN in Mindanao

Lopez Holdings Inc. is the umbrella / holdings company of the Lopez Family. Their holdings corporation also owns ABS-CBN and a myriad of other corporations all over the Philippines. Media is not very lucrative as a corporation, but it is an extremely strategic one if the owner has as many other businesses as the Lopezes do -- and since the Lopezes can influence the decisions of ABS-CBN by virtue of their 90% ownership of the company, we

have a reason to believe that they would use this to benefit the other businesses that they have their fingers dipped in. Lopez Holdings Inc. is a trans-industrial corporation as well as one that is using synergy for the benefit of the Lopez family.

Below are the different media stations under ABS-CBN that are found in Mindanao, both for radio as well as television.

ABS-CBN Media Investments in Mindanao

Location	Station Name
Davao (AM Station)	DXAB
Zamboanga (FM Station)	DYCU
General Santos (FM Station)	DXBC
Cotabato (FM Station)	DXPS
Cagayan de Oro (FM Station)	DXFC
Davao (FM Station)	DXRR

Table 9. The Lopez Family owns six radio stations in Mindanao as part of their conglomerate.

The table above shows that the Lopez family has a significant amount of media presence in Mindanao apart from their primary television channel.

Lopez Investments in Mindanao

Name of Company	Percentage of ownership
Davao CableWorld Network Inc.	57%
SkyCable Mindanao	57.4%
SunCable Systems Davao Inc.	57.4%

Table 10. The table above retrieved from the SEC shows that the Lopez family owns majority shares in three major cable television service providers.

The table above shows that the Lopez family has majority shares in three major cable service providers in Mindanao.

Other Lopez Investments in Mindanao

Rockwell Land	FGEN (First Gen Corporation)
FPIC (First Philippine Industrial Corporation)	ThermaPrime Well Services Inc. (Drilling/Geothermal Energy)
First Philippine Electronics Corporation (FPEC)	SkyCable
Bayan Communications	

Table 12. The Lopez family's other major investments which have a presence in Mindanao.

The tables above show that out of the 17 business ventures that is owned by Lopez Holdings Inc., 11 are media-related businesses such as SkyCable, Bayan Communications, other cable service providers such as Davao Cable Network Inc. and six radio stations in the Mindanao.

Lopez Inc. also owns Rockwell Land (who is expanding their hotel and leisure portfolio in Mindanao), FGEN Corporation which is the holding corporation for the Lopez family's investments in power and energy related businesses. The ThermaPrime Well Services Inc. is in charge of the operation of the Geothermal Powerplant owned by the Lopez family in Kidapawan City. The First Philippine Electronics Corporation the holdings company which is a subsidiary of First Philippine Holdings Corporation. FPEC is in charge of the Lopez family's manufacturing and technology related investments.

The researcher believes that the oligopolic nature of of the Lopez family is manifested in the nature of their investments. Apart from their media investments, the Lopez family and the other members of the Board of Directors are heavily invested in other ventures such as land development, real estate, and power generation.

Some provisions of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (which will be elaborated in the following section) allow for the Bangsamoro to have exclusive rights to regulate particular industries and among these are telecommunications, power

generation, and even land development and distribution, and banking, all of which the Board of Directors in ABS-CBN has a stake in.

The researcher believes that the fact that the Lopez family has numerous investments present in Mindanao is significant because the nature of the business ventures that the Lopez family is invested in allows them to be regulated by the Bangsamoro Basic Law should it have been ratified.

If we refer back to the concept of spatialization, an organization's heavy investment in communications allows them to extend their power and create *corporate concentration* allowing them to dominate the market by allowing them to have control over the processes of production, distribution, the exchange of communication, by minimizing the amount of competition and limiting the diversity of information available.

Vincent Mosco states that the issue of ownership is a primary concern in studying media concentration because the relationship between the Board of Directors in an organization and their interests can affect what information will be available to society.

The researcher's claim can be deductively illustrated through the common logical argumentation form of *Modus Ponens* which states that if P implies Q, and P is true, Q must therefore also be true. In the context of this research for example, the logical argument assumes this form:

Premise 1: If the controllers of ABS-CBN are heavily invested in their business ventures in Mindanao (P), their coverage of the Mamasapano Clash will be biased (Q).

Premise 2: The Controllers of ABS-CBN are heavily invested in business ventures in Mindanao (P).

Conclusion: Their Coverage of the Mamasapano Clash in Maguindanao is biased (Q).

In order for the argument of modus ponens to be valid, the truth value of all of the premises must be true. In this case, the researcher has proved that the Lopez family and the other members of the Board of Directors of the ABS-CBN are indeed heavily invested in their business ventures in Mindanao.

The argument presented above is deductively valid although the relationship between premise P and premise Q can be contested. Premise Q does not necessarily have to follow from premise P because it can be caused by other factors other than the investments of ABS-CBN which are present in Mindanao which is why a causal link between the two premises is necessary and the researcher believes that the causal link between ABS-CBN's Board of Directors' heavy investment in numerous business ventures in Mindanao and framing of the Mamasapano Clash is the political-economic motivations of the Board of Directors.

The researcher notes that just because the Board of Directors of ABS-CBN have their personal biases does not necessarily mean that the writers, researchers, and the journalists who are part of the organization will also share in these biases.

Going back to the concept of structuration though, the researcher notes that institutions like ABS-CBN are a product of human agency and ABS-CBN as a structure can very well constrain the actions of the individuals who are part of the institution such as its newscasters, editors, writers, and journalists because in ABS-CBN's structure, the Board of Directors are at the top.

As Gaye Tuchman notes, media institutions like ABS-CBN are complex organizations subject to inevitable processes which impose upon the workers some professional standards. The concept of professionalism and the decisions that result from professionalism are manifestations of the power that the Board of Directors have in the newsmaking process which is why the Size, Ownership, and Structure of ABS-CBN matters, the results arising from professionalism are often the needs of the organization which newsmakers are part of and in this way, the ideology of the Board of Directors is indirectly imposed upon the individual journalists, writers, and editors.

In relation to spatialization, the concept of structuration points out that although structures like ABS-CBN are constituted out of human agency, ABS-CBN as a structure can constrain the actions of the individuals who are a part of it such as newscasters, editors, writers, and journalists because of the power relations present in ABS-CBN as a structure.

A speculation of the researcher is that the Lopez family is heavily invested in media in Mindanao in order to use this in synergy with its other investments and that their biased coverage of the Mamasapano Clash which continued long-standing stereotypes held against Moros was one way of protecting their

investments in Mindanao which would have been affected by a passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

C. The Political Economic Connection in ABS-CBN's Coverage

Article V Section 3 of the Bangsamoro Basic Law which enumerates the exclusive powers of the Bangsamoro states that the Bangsamoro government shall have the authority to regulate power generation, transmission, and distribution. Aside from this, a part of this section of the BBL also states that the Bangsamoro government will have control over Economic Zones and Industrial Centers and the regulation of trade, industry, investment, and business in consideration of relevant laws.

If the Bangsamoro Basic Law does get ratified, it means that the Lopezes will have a hard time creating any monopolies and their industries because they will have to rebuild strategic connections with the new government. It also means that they will be subject to regulation by the Bangsamoro government.

Based on these findings, we see a clear economic motive for the way that ABS-CBN framed their coverage of the Mamasapano Clash and the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law. ABS-CBN's coverage reflects how the organization is actually protecting the economic interests of the Lopezes in Mindanao.

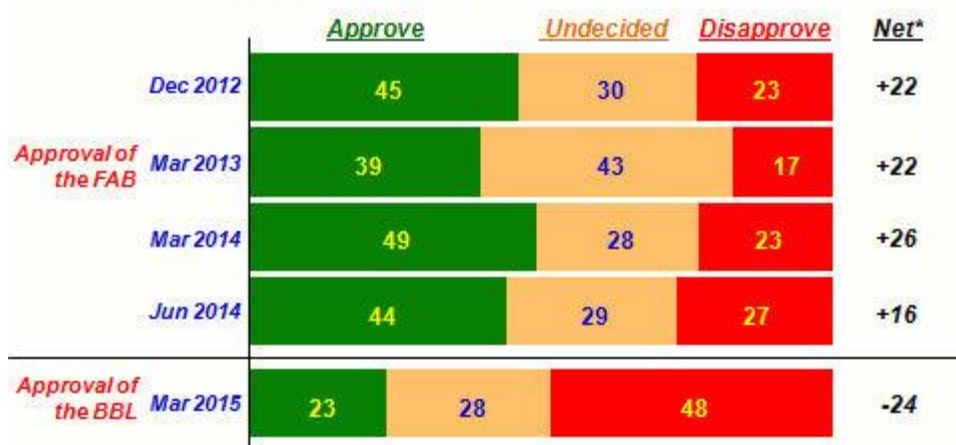
D. Synthesis

Jurgen Habermas mentions that the public sphere is an imaginary place where private individuals come together to guide the affairs of the state and in the age of information and communications technology, the public sphere has manifested in what we know today as social media where people are free to publicly express their beliefs and opinions on issues of concern.

A review of the comments section of ABS-CBN's online articles on facebook reveals that the top comments are those that are against the ratification of the BBL and carry anti-Moro sentiments. Some comments even go so far as calling for all-out war in Mindanao against the Muslims, a sentiment which former President Joseph Estrada shares and has released numerous times in press interviews.

A Social Weather Station (SWS) survey reveals that prior to the Mamasapano Incident, up to 49 percent of Filipinos had a mostly positive attitude towards the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic law but after the incident occurred, public attitude toward the matter changed and in March of 2015 alone, the percentage of Filipinos who disapproved of the Bangsamoro averaged around 48 percent.

**APPROVAL OF THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON THE BANGSAMORO
(FAB) AND THE PROPOSED BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW (BBL),
PHILIPPINES, DEC 2012 TO MAR 2015**



*Net figures (% Approve minus % Disapprove) correctly rounded.

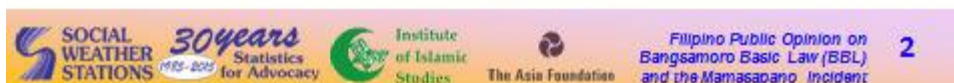


Photo 2. The SWS that took place after the Mamasapano Clash took place reveals that almost half of Filipinos disapproved of the passage of the BBL after the Mamasapano Clash took place.

Photo retrieved from:

<http://www.facebook.com/1.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.abs-cbnnews.com%2Fnation%2F05%2F15%2F15%2Fhow-mamasapano-tragedy-affected-bbl&h=-AQF6-yke>

A further extension of analysis of the data reveals that prior to the media coverage of the Mamasapano clash, majority of Filipinos were actually in favor of the Bangsamoro Basic Law but after media coverage garnered nationwide sympathy, the attitude of Filipinos towards the issue turned around and one of the factors that we can attribute is the way that the media framed the issue with the 44 members of the SAF being the heroes and the members of the MILF and the BIFF being their executioner.

Summary

The coverage of the Mamasapano Clash did affect the way Filipinos perceive the necessity of passing the Bangsamoro Basic Law. Prior to the Mamasapano Clash, many Filipinos were in favour of passing the BBL but after the coverage done not only by ABS-CBN but also other media corporations, the disposition of Filipinos towards the passage of the BBL changed and age-old stereotypes regarding the Moros emerged thanks to the framing of the SAF as heroes and the Moros as violent killers unworthy of trust.

Chapter VII

Summary and Conclusion

The research shows how the Lopez's ownership of ABS-CBN and business interests in Mindanao is possibly the source for a conflict of interests that manifests in the manner that they frame their news in such a way that antagonizes the Muslim rebels in Mindanao to maintain the status quo in order to protect their interest by affecting the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law which would have had inadvertent effects on their business interest there.

Our conclusion also lies in accordance with one of the media filters, according to Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman. According to Chomsky and Herman, dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces, and they are closely interlocked, and have important common interests, with other major corporations, banks and government. This is the first powerful filter that will affect news choices.

For as long as the Lopezes continue to own what supposedly should be a public service, ABS-CBN's coverage of any issue will most likely be skewed to safeguard the interests of its owners whose decisions are unopposed in the company's board of directors.

Chapter VIII

Implication and Recommendations

A. Theoretical Issues

The study explored the idea of how political economy can affect ABS-CBN's reportage on the Mamasapano Clash. The phenomenon itself is not new and affects possibly every news network in existence.

The approach allowed the researcher to analyze ABS-CBN's reportage while taking into consideration the network's political economy which includes its structure and ownership which in turn led the researcher to discover what other investments the Lopez family had which could have been the source of a conflict of interest.

Political economy is well-suited to the needs of this research however, the researcher recommends the use of other ways of discovering the Lopez family's investments as it may be possible that not everything they own or are invested in are not declared in their annual reports submitted to the SEC.

B. Methodological Issues

Data gathering was useful in uncovering the investments of the Lopez family apart from ABS-CBN and was also useful in determining the extent to

which they have investments in Mindanao which may be affected should the ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law become a reality.

Content Analysis was suitable to the study and understanding the semiotics behind selected texts from ABS-CBN online.

Access to ABS-CBN's financial records made possible by making an account with the SEC made the data gathering process more convenient because in the past, data like this had to be gathered from the SEC building itself although, the researcher recommends conducting interviews with insiders within ABS-CBN so as to have a more in-depth study.

C. Practical Issues

This study is quite useful in educating people about an alien concept such as political economy and how it can affect a network's reportage on certain issues especially now in a time where people are becoming increasingly skeptical of the media with the election of Rodrigo Duterte as the President of the country.

In studying the structure, organization, and ownership of ABS-CBN, the researcher made an interesting observation. While the mere presence of Lopez assets and investments in Mindanao does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that their financial investments in the region are the direct source of the conflict of interest manifesting in their reportage of conflicts in the area, it does raise a good question – how much does the fact that the Lopez family is invested

heavily in Mindanao affect the news making process? The question can go from specific to broad and can be applied to any study concerning the private ownership of the media.

Future researchers might want to follow the paper trail further down the line in order to discover more political economic facts which may not be in a network's annual reports.

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Appendix A

Articles on the perspective of the MILF/BIFF in the Mamasapano Clash

Marwan still alive: MNLF

MANILA - A Malaysian bomb maker who was the target of a botched police operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao is still alive, a spokesman of the Moro National Liberation Front said Wednesday.

Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman, a Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-making expert, were subjects of the bloody police operation in in Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano.

But in an interview with radio DZMM, MNLF spokesman Emmanuel Fontanilla said Marwan wasn't even in Mamasapano.

"Masakit po yung nangyari, mga kapatid din natin yung namatay. Ang pagkakaalam namin yung kanilang subject ay wala po dun. Wala po dun. Nasa Lanao po, nasa Lanao," he said.

"Mali yung intelligence nila. Mabuti pa nagtanong sila sa amin."

Fontanilla said government security forces did not ask the MNLF about the whereabouts of Marwan.

He pointed out that some elements of the MNLF, Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters are blood relatives.

"Mismong mga kamag-anak nila nagsasabi sa amin wala diyan."

Marwan and Usman are said to be top members of international terror group Jemaah Islamiyah. Marwan is the country's most wanted Islamist militant and the United States has offered a \$5 million reward for him, while a \$1 million reward has been posted for Usman.

A total of 44 Philippine National Police Special Action Force commandos were killed while 12 others were wounded in a bloody firefight with Moro rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Sunday.

Police said eight Moro rebels were also killed in the clash, which shattered a ceasefire that held for three years.

Mohagher Iqbal, head of the rebel peace panel, said the police failed to coordinate their operations with the ceasefire committee.

"They entered our area and attacked us, what are we going to do?" he asked. "What happened was self-defense."

On Tuesday, Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas announced the administrative relief of PNP-SAF chief Getulio Napeñas pending the outcome of the investigation on the Maguindanao clash.

"He has been recalled back to Manila. He was given a chance yesterday to help retrieve the bodies of his men. If there were lapses and someone is responsible for it, then he will be made accountable."

Roxas on Monday described the incident as a "misencounter" but a former DILG chief said the killing was a massacre.

Former Interior and Local Government Secretary Rafael Alunan said a "misencounter" usually happens between two friendly forces after each side fails to identify each other.

"It happens when both sides fail to identify each other. Gunshots are fired but when one gets to identify a friendly, they stop. they order a ceasefire. In this particular case, the firing was fast, furious and continuous and massacred more than (40) people. It was an overkill and not a misencounter. It was a plain and simple massacre," he said.

He said the clash should have stopped immediately after the MILF recognized the PNP-SAF commandos as government forces.

"The firing took place over a period of one day or at least several hours and the commandos were dressed in proper uniforms. They are easily identifiable. It was not that the MILF did not know how SAF commandos are dressed. The SAF commandos are all over the place and they have been dealing with them in the past so they know what SAF commandos look like in the field," he said.

"For them to say they were surprised by the SAF and acted in self-defense is a lot of BS." With Reuters

MILF chief: We remain committed to peace process

MANILA - Moro Islamic Liberation Front Chairman (MILF) Al Haj Murad Ebrahim reiterated his group's full commitment to the peace process amid the carnage that has befallen more than 40 of the country's elite cops in an area the group allegedly holds.

In an official statement, Ebrahim said the MILF is convening a Special Investigative Commission (SIC) composed of members of the MILF Central Committee and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) General Staff to resolve issues surrounding the Sunday bloodbath that may affect the peace process.

“We hereby reiterate the MILF’s full commitment to the peace process with the Philippine Government. An enduring peace and justice remain to be our primary objective. In this regard, all actions and pronouncements of our political and military units of the MILF should advance and adhere to this primary objective as much as possible and with due regard to the safety and security of our people and communities,” he said.

He said the committee will gather all information and testimonies on the ground. The report will be submitted “as soon as possible.”

“The MILF have been in negotiations with the Philippine Government for some time now. During this time, both parties have established protocols, ways of proceedings and mechanisms, which support and keep the peace,” he said.

He said adhering to the mechanisms has helped in bringing down the number of hostilities.

“It is unfortunate but not entirely surprising that when parties do not follow established protocols, lives are placed in harm’s way. We therefore recommit ourselves to follow these processes and protocols,” he said.

He said the MILF sends its deepest sympathies to the families of the fallen.

“The emotions of loss and pain are not alien to us Bangsamoro and Mujahideen. Nevertheless, respect and solidarity are due to all, irrespective of which side they belong,” he stressed.

MILF to investigate Mamasapano clash

MANILA - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is forming a special investigative commission to look into the Maguindanao clash that killed 44 police commandos.

MILF Chairman Murad Ebrahim also extended his deepest condolences to the families of the slain police commandos in the encounter in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

The MILF chief said the Moro group is no stranger to the pain of losing loved ones during conflict.

However, he said the MILF did not start the firefight and only acted in self-defense after Special Action Forces commandos started firing in their area.

The MILF chief appealed for sobriety and urged the public to look at both sides of the issue. He said that even before the fighting, Moro fighters had heard explosions in a nearby village.

"Until what happened is established with credibility and integrity, the said incident will weigh down our current efforts to bring peace to our homeland," he said in a statement.

Nearly 400 counter-terrorist policemen were dispatched to a remote farm on Mindanao on Sunday to capture or kill Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, one of the 2002 Bali bombers who has a \$5 million price on his head.

After killing a person they thought to be Zulkifli, the police withdrew but were ambushed by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a militant splinter group that rejects the peace deal and last year pledged allegiance to Islamic State fighters in Syria and Iraq.

The officers escaped but strayed into territory controlled by the 10,000-member Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the main rebel group, which signed the pact 10 months ago.

The police suffered 44 dead and 12 wounded.

BANGSAMORO BASIC LAW IN JEOPARDY

Analysts and legislators warned the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law -- aimed at ending decades of Muslim rebellion in Mindanao which killed tens of thousands - - could be in trouble after the deadly clash.

Senate President Franklin Drilon said backing for the measure was seriously eroded when two Aquino allies withdrew support in protest at the killings.

Public hearings on the bill were also suspended as other senators demanded an explanation for the bloodshed.

"My worry is that the Bangsamoro basic law will not be passed because the incident has stoked emotions," Drilon said.

Ramon Casiple, executive director of the think-tank Institute for Political Reforms, said the autonomy bill now has 11 supporters in the Senate, less than half the membership.

The bill needs majority support in both the Senate and the House of Representatives to become law. Parliament had been aiming to pass it by March

OUT FOR BLOOD

Casiple said the MILF was unlikely to surrender the fighters who clashed with police.

He also said the apparent desecration of the corpses -- with pictures of some of the dead showing missing weapons and clothing -- could spark a desire for revenge among military or police units in the area.

One police survivor said some wounded or captured colleagues had been finished off with shots to the head.

"The military, police, senators are all out for blood. The only thing that will satisfy them is for the perpetrators to be tried in court," Casiple said.

Alumni of the Philippine National Police Academy said they would wear black armbands over 40 days as a sign of mourning.

Julkipli Wadi, dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies at the University of the Philippines, said he expects Aquino to call for calm and try to rally support for the autonomy bill.

"It (the violence) poses a big challenge to the peace process but I think it's not enough reason to stop the peace talks," he told AFP.

"The most serious challenge... is the public anger and I think (the government) is really pressured in terms of how it can call the people to remain calm while

asking them to continue to support the peace process." With Agence France
Presse

MNLF calls for tolerance amid recent clash

COTABATO CITY -- Moro National Liberation Front Chairman Muslimin Sema shared his views on the recent clash between members of the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Barangay Tukanalipao in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

According to Sema, the clash should not have happened had there been proper coordination before the operation.

"Sa aking simpleng pananaw, this all boils down to lack of proper coordination, proper planning even maybe full intelligence dahil kung nagkaroon ng proper coordination, maaaring 'di ganon. Magkaroon nga ng engkwentro pero damage could have been lesser," Sema said.

Sema also believes that both the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) should adhere to the provisions of the agreement to prevent a similar incident in the future.

Sema, a former revolutionary leader, said he supports the President's position to continue the negotiations with the MILF despite recent developments.

He also called on government officials, the MILF and other stakeholders to be calm and to support the peace process.

Both sides should also have to exercise maximum tolerance, understanding and sincerity to solve the problem.

MILF names their dead in Mamasapano clash

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia - Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chief peace negotiator Mohagher Iqbal has released the names of 18 fighters killed and 14 others wounded in the January 25 "misencounter" between the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) and the 105th Base Command of the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

The dead MILF members are:

Mahmod Saga Monib,

Salahudin Salindato,

Esmail Abid,

Abdorahim Abdila,

Daglala Kamed,

Ali Esmail,

Musib Hasim,

Omar Dagadas,

Rasul Zukarnin,

Mamarisa Omar,

Batrudin Langalen,

Gibinun Angkay,

Suweb Kemod,

Nasrudin Saptulla,

Salahudin Salindatu,

Mahmod Salah,

Kaharudin Baluno, and

Abdulrahim Abdullah.

The wounded MILF are:

Ali Surab,

Zainudin Lampak,

Salahudin Kunakon,

Zumaidi Untong,

Jomar Zailon,

Abdulgani Ramos,

Hamza Lampak,

Joel Guiman,

Abdulmaguid Pindi,

Norhak Sekak,

Saad Saya,

Ketay Muhammad,

Mustapa Pindi, and

Mahmod Lumbatan.

Iqbal released the names in a joint press conference of the MILF and Philippine government at the Palace of the Golden Horses in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia following the signing of the protocol for the terms of reference of the independent decommissioning body -- the rules governing the decommissioning of the MILF.

Iqbal expressed his condolences to the families of all those fallen in Mamasapano.

He also maintained their full commitment and determination to the facilitator for the successful conclusion of the peace process with the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

"Rest assured that no amount of obstacles along the way can stop us from pursuing the path of peace in Mindanao," he said.

Iqbal appealed to the media not to fan the emotions of hatred.

"Bangsamoro have also suffered a lot as a result of several massacres. The encounter in Mamasapano wasn't intended by either side -- from side of government and MILF. It was a pure and simple misencounter," he said.

He said the operation was intended for the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which, he insisted, was the one coddling wanted suspected terrorists Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Basit Usman.

'UGLY TURN'

Government chief peace negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer described the January 25 incident as an ugly turn of events, grieving as well for the nameless civilians who were also killed.

Nevertheless, Ferrer urged everyone to press on with the peace process despite questions on the sincerity of both sides.

To address the issues of confidence building, she said the independent decommissioning body, coordinating committee for the cessation of hostilities, joint normalization committee, and joint peace and security teams will prepare for the turnover of the first batch of MILF weapons under Phase 1.

She reported that last January 22, MILF chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim personally handed over the list of 75 weapons, including the make and serial number, to the IDB head ambassador Haydar Berk.

Ferrer also reported an initial batch of 145 MILF combatants will be decommissioned, the list of which will be handed to IDB this week.

In exchange, the combatants will be given a socio-economic package in March.

The actual ceremony will be in March.

Aside from the first batch to be decommissioned, both panels also agreed to a joint security assessment of the situation to address criminality and terrorism in MILF areas.

Ferrer maintained there are standing protocols. They will have a joint security assessment workshop with high-ranking officials of both sides.

Ferrer also announced that investigations into the Mamasapano incident will continue, with members of the international monitoring team on a field verification mission in the areas concerned.

"We managed to come up with concrete solutions soberly. The results will not become immediately evident. We will remain under scrutiny. We will have to regain the people's trust. Let our actions then speak louder than our words in due time," she said.

Iqbal stressed that the decommissioning is a sacrifice on the part of the MILF.

Ferrer, meanwhile, maintained confidence that lawmakers who are now having second thoughts about passing the BBL will come around.

"When the emotions go down and we go back to concrete task that will provide answer to complex situation, they certainly would respond to challenge."

Iqbal is hoping the MILF will be vindicated.

IDB Chief Ambassador Haydar Berk, one of three foreigners sitting with four local experts in the IDB, appealed for more trust in the process.

"I believe the important message is to keep peace process on track. It goes on track on basis of mutual trust. It will continue on basis of trust from both sides," Berk said.

Don't call Mamasapano carnage a massacre: MNLF

MANILA - Don't call the Mamasapano carnage a "massacre."

Abul Khayr Alonto, chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), said the killing of 44 Philippine National Police Special Action Force commandos and 17 mujahedin fighters last January 25, was the result of a "misencounter" between men of valor who are on opposing sides of a war.

"As a veteran of the Mindanao war, I wish to express our indignation in the use of the word massacre in describing the incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Those 44 police SAF commandos who were part of 392 fully geared combatants that entered the MILF base command alongside their bounty hunter informants and civilian military guides, 17 mujaheeden were killed," he said in a Senate hearing on the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law.

Alonto said the Mamasapano incident was not a simple police matter nor an issue of insurgency.

"What we have is a war. A real war that necessitated the assistance of the international community for us to reach this point," he said.

The MNLF chairman said there have been several massacres perpetrated against unarmed members of the Bangsamoro people.

What happened in Tukanalipao village in the wee hours of January 25 was a "misencounter" between armed combatants who perished in the line of duty, he said.

"The MILF defended their community and the PNP SAF commandos were under orders from their superior and both sides fought valiantly to their last breath believing that they were doing this for their country. Saying it was a massacre is a great disservice to the name of those men of valor," he said.

A total of 44 police commandos were killed in Mamasapano, Maguindanao in an operation that targeted terror suspects Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Abdul Basit Usman.

The MILF leadership said its troops acted in self-defense after the police commandos started the firefight.

During the hearing, Alonto criticized those who are calling on the government to abandon the peace negotiations and to restart military operations against the MILF.

He pointed out that at least 200,000 people have died in the decades-long conflict in Mindanao, with 2 million rendered homeless and 3 million scattered as refugees.

"Those who call for war and the suspension of the peace process are people who even in their nightmares would never know the horrors and cruelties of war that the people in Mindanao, Muslims and Christians, have been subjected to in all those decades, neither do they know the pain of losing loved ones to war," he said.

Alonto said the Mamasapano tragic incident must not stop the BBL. He urged Congress to pass a law that "grants full mechanism of autonomy so that the failure of the past will not be repeated.

Checks and balances in place in Bangsamoro - MILF

Bangsamoro police should not be separate from PNP, says former Justice Adolf Azcuna

MANILA - Amid fresh fears that the Bangsamoro government may use its power to go beyond Constitutional parameters, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) assured that checks and balances are in place to ensure that its role is within the jurisdiction of the national government.

In a Senate hearing, MILF chief peace negotiator Mohagher Iqbal stressed the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which will govern the autonomous unit, was “drafted in consonance with the Constitution and universally accepted principles of human rights, liberty, justice, democracy, and international law.”

The supposed “misencounter” between police commandos and forces of the MILF has supposedly eroded the trust of many in the ongoing peace talks, which is now at the most difficult level of negotiations – the decommissioning or surrendering of arms to an independent body.

Iqbal stressed there are at least 20 key provisions that will make sure that the Bangsamoro “will not go beyond the parameters of its agreed walls and policies.”

These include the creation of a Bangsamoro police that is not separate from the Philippine National Police, he said.

“The Bangsamoro police is part of the PNP, and the Bangsamoro Police Board is part of the National Police Commission, under section 2 and 5, Article 11 [of the draft law],” he added.

He also assured that the other constitutional bodies will have power over the different bodies that will take over the different functions in the Bangsamoro, such as the Commission on Audit, Commission on Human Rights, Ombudsman, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, etc.

'SEPARATE FORCES, UNITS NOT ALLOWED'

Former Justice Adolf Azcuna, one of the framers of the 1987 Constitution, said the creation of the Bangsamoro police force is one of the objectionable provisions vis-a-vis the Constitution.

“I pointed this out and they [negotiation panels] assured me it should be observed. It is now up to Congress to align it with the Constitution. A separate COA, Civil Service Commission, police, must not be allowed,” he said.

Otherwise, there is no need to amend the Constitution to provide for an autonomous unit “precisely because the Constitution has already mandated it,” he said.

The proposed law does not provide for the total independence of the Bangsamoro people, he said.

What the law provides is for a separate territory for the Bangsamoro people, but which does not automatically delineate it as a state, he added.

“The essential requisites of a sovereign state are territory, people, government, sovereignty or independence. It is not enough to have a definite territory and become a separate state. You must have independence. And independence is not granted to the autonomous region in the proposed set-up,” he said.

Azcuna noted that the parliamentary form of government that the Bangsamoro is envisioned to have does not go against the Constitution.

“To start with, the present Constitution of the Philippines is not strictly presidential in form. There are many features of parliament, including the question hour, party-list representation, etc.,” he added.

BEYOND CONGRESS

Former University of the Philippines College of Law Dean Merlin Magallona believes otherwise.

“The Bangsamoro Basic Law does not, in any way, indicate that it intends to evade Constitutional change. On the whole, it appears to be a deliberate departure from the Constitution,” he said.

He cited the new political system of the Bangsamoro that does away with the powers of Congress.

“Under the concept of reserved, exclusive, and concurrent powers, the BBL is engaged in determining powers, functions, jurisdiction, and hierarchies of government,” he said.

He said these powers go beyond the “constitutional competence” of Congress.

Marwan killed in Mamasapano, says MILF

MANILA, Philippines - Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, had indeed been killed in a police operation that led to deadly clashes between police commandos and Muslim rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Jan. 25, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) said yesterday.

“Our intelligence community has confirmed that he is dead,” Mohagher Iqbal, chief negotiator of the MILF, said in an interview at the Senate yesterday. Iqbal’s claim cannot be immediately verified as Marwan’s corpse went missing after the clash that left scores dead, including 44 members of the Philippine National Police Special Action Force (SAF).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is matching DNA samples taken from Marwan’s severed right index finger with those of his brother who is detained at the Guantanamo prison.

In a statement, the FBI said it has received DNA samples taken from Marwan and that testing procedures would take time.

SAF commandos who killed Marwan cut off Marwan’s index finger and took photos of his corpse as they were unable to take his body when the rebels were alerted by the shooting.

The other target of the operation, Filipino terrorist Basit Usman, reportedly managed to escape.

Aiding the MILF in the battle were fighters of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

Iqbal debunked the claims of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) spokesman Emmanuel Fontanilla that Marwan, an explosives expert, was still alive.

“That’s an MNLF spokesman under Nur Misuari. He is not in anyway related or connected with MILF. I cannot comment on his remarks,” the MILF leader said.

Fontanilla had challenged the government to get a DNA report from an independent body to prove that the SAF operation had killed Marwan.

Iqbal declined to comment on reports that the United States had provided the Philippines with intelligence information on the whereabouts of the fugitive terrorist.

Meanwhile, Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas II assured SAF troopers last Sunday that the man their comrades had killed in Mamasapano was Marwan.

“The SAF commandos accomplished their mission,” he said.

A police general who declined to be named said the US hopes to finish its testing on Marwan’s DNA sample in two weeks.

Police officials are also denying rumors that a “fabricated” DNA testing result is being readied to mislead the public that Marwan had really died in Mamasapano.

MILF commander: My men stayed put during Mamasapano clash

A top commander of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has denied involvement in the bloody clash between the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (SAF) Commandos and 105th Base Command of the MILF forces in Mamasapano town.

MILF 118th Base Commander Ustadz Abdulwahid, known as Wahid Tundok, told ABS-CBN News that he and his men were not involved in the clash in Mamasapano last January 25.

Former SAF chief Leocadio Santiago earlier told ANC Commander Wahid Tundok joined the 105th Base Command in the Mamasapano clash.

Tundok, however, said he directed his men to stay put and not move from their positions.

"Tanong nila sa akin, 'Ustadz? Ano ba yung mga putok na naririnig natin?' Sabi ko sa kanila, 'Walang aalis o gagalaw. Mag-ipon lang tayo. Walang mag-move para hindi tayo madamay o masali diyan.' Sabi ko, 'Maghintay tayo ng mga confirmation o balita,'" Tundok said.

Tundok said his only involvement was when he was tapped by the Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT) to help them stop the fighting.

He also feels for the families of those who lost their loved ones in the bloody clash.

Tundok still believes in the peace process and the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) amid the carnage in Mamasapano.

He also showed to ABS-CBN News his release order from the court just to prove that his records are clean after his arrest last year by the Criminal and Investigation and Detection Group.

Tundok, a known MILF commander, is focused on mediating conflicting MILF forces and exposing the children in their community to the right teachings of Islam.

MILF insists on coordination

MANILA - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is ready to cooperate with the government in tracking down terrorists as long as agreements signed by the peace panels are complied with.

Reacting to President Aquino's second address on the Mamasapano clash, MILF chief negotiator Mohaquer Iqbal said prior coordination is necessary before security forces operate in their area.

"We are cooperating fully with the government," Iqbal said in an interview with ABS-CBN News.

Iqbal was asked to react to the President's demand for the MILF to help capture wanted terrorist Basit Usman, who escaped during the Special Action Force's (SAF) operation in Mamasapano on Jan. 25.

He said the operation on Jan. 25 failed because there was no coordination, stressing that his group does not coddle terrorists.

"If there is such occurrence, it does not have the blessing of the MILF. And if such situation arises again, the mechanisms of Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) will operate," he said.

The AHJAG is a mechanism created from the peace talks to isolate and interdict lawless groups and terrorists.

Iqbal described the President's address as "very fair and objective."

MILF's sincerity in talking peace with the government has been questioned after wanted terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, was killed in an area inhabited by its members.

Marwan was killed shortly before 44 members of the SAF died in an encounter with MILF forces in Barangay Tukanalipao in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Asked why the MILF was not aware of the presence of Marwan and Usman in Mamasapano, Iqbal said the area is a community composed of different groups.

He said the MILF would not gain anything from protecting terrorists.

"These people are being hunted not just by the Philippine government or the international community but also by the MILF. We do not want what they are doing and we won't gain anything from them," Iqbal said, adding that the terrorists are moving from one place to another.

The military had admitted that its trust in the MILF was tainted because of the presence of Marwan in its bailiwick.

Armed Forces spokesman Col. Restituto Padilla said the MILF could regain the trust of the government by assisting in its efforts to get the terrorists.

Iqbal, however, said statements reflecting distrust towards the MILF does not bode well for the peace process.

MILF to return guns of killed SAF men

MANILA - The Philippines' largest Muslim rebel group has promised to return weapons seized from police commandos killed in a deadly clash, the chief negotiator for the guerrillas said on Tuesday, in a bid to save a peace process with the government.

President Benigno Aquino faces his biggest political crisis over a botched operation to capture a wanted militant, amid revelations that a suspended police general who is a close friend played a central role in the raid.

The risky mission to arrest Zulkifli bin Hir, an al Qaeda-linked bombmaker with a \$5-million U.S. bounty on his head, went wrong when commandos from the Philippine police's Special Action Force (SAF) were ambushed and 44 were killed.

A public outcry has heaped pressure on Aquino to abandon the peace deal signed in March with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest Muslim rebel group in the mainly Catholic country, and seek retribution for the troopers' deaths.

"The MILF has decided to return the firearms and any retrievable personal effects of the fallen SAF in deference to the peace process," the negotiator, Mohagher Iqbal, said in a letter to Senator Grace Poe, who is holding a public inquiry on the raid.

The MILF was still accounting for all the weapons "to pave the way for their return," Iqbal said. The rebels also promised to appear at the hearing to show their sincerity over the peace process.

Lawmakers had been deliberating a measure to set up a new autonomous government for Muslims in the south, known as the Bangsamoro, a key component of the peace deal. They had earlier promised to enact the law in March and hold a referendum in May.

But the law would not pass if a vote were held now, said one lawmaker, senator Francis Escudero, as emotions are running high after the raid.

Support for the measure has waned, said Rufus Rodriguez, head of a special panel in the House of Representatives that is considering the law.

"I have to admit that there is an erosion of support within the ad hoc committee and members of Congress," he added.

SAF commander General Getulio Napeñas told Poe's inquiry he took full responsibility for the raid. Four civilians and 18 rebels were also among those who died in the raid.

He said he had not informed the interior minister and acting police chief of the secret mission, during which he sought the help of United States troops to evacuate wounded commandos at the height of the firefight. (Reporting by Manuel Mogato; Editing by Clarence Fernandez)

MILF: We didn't know Marwan, Usman were there

MANILA, Philippines - The officer-in-charge of the Philippine National Police on Tuesday said he has no doubt that Moro rebels have been coddling Malaysian bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan.

Speaking before the Senate inquiry, PNP OIC Leonardo Espina rejected the claim of a representative of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that the rebels are not coddling Marwan.

He said the PNP has information that Marwan had been in Maguindanao since 2002.

He also pointed out that the place where Marwas was found was just a few kilometers away from MILF territory.

"Granting that he is within the [Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters] area, you can see that the area where the SAF operated is just a few kilometers away," he said.

Espina said it is highly possible that Marwan was training both the MILF and BIFF.

Rasid Ladianan, chair of the MILF coordinating committee on the cessation of hostilities, earlier denied that the MILF was coddling both Marwan and terror suspect Basit Usman.

"Hindi po totoo yung sinasabi niyo po na kinukupkop po namin si Marwan o Basit Usman," he said.

He noted that the suspects were never stationary but always moving.

Asked if the MILF knew that the terror suspects were in Mamasapano, he said: "Hindi po namin alam na nandun si Marwan at Usman."

MILF agrees to return SAF weapons

Drilon cites need to rebuild trust, confidence in peace process

MANILA (2nd UPDATE) - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has committed to return the firearms and personal effects of PNP Special Action Forces (PNP SAF) killed in the Mamasapano incident last January 25.

The commitment was in a letter of MILF chief peace negotiator Mohager Iqbal to Senator Grace Poe, chair of the Senate committee on public order which had invited Iqbal to its ongoing Senate investigation.

The Fallen 44 were supposedly looted of their personal effects after they were killed.

The letter was read by Rasid Ladiasan, chairman of the MILF ceasefire panel, who represented the MILF in day 2 of the Senate hearing.

Iqbal, in his letter, said he couldn't come to the hearing till the MILF investigation on the Mamasapano incident is done because that will be the basis of the statements of Iqbal.

Iqbal also maintained that the MILF is committed to the peace process. However, he also said that the MILF remains a revolutionary organization till the peace agreement it signed with government is fully implemented.

Iqbal also said the MILF requests that his appearance be in executive session, and that the MILF has decided to return firearms and any retrievable

personal effects of the fallen PNP SAF in deference to peace process and in recognition that the MILF never wanted that incident to happen.

In a couple of days, the MILF will finish its internal process that will pave the way for the return of the items.

MILF, A REVOLUTIONARY ORG

Parts of the letter is as follows:

"Please bear with us as we engage the institution of the Philippine Senate officially for the first time. The MILF is a revolutionary organization. While we may have signed a peace agreement with the Philippine Government after 18 years of intermittent war and negotiations, that peace agreement has yet to be implemented. Until the peace agreement is fully implemented, we will remain to be a revolutionary organization.

"Accordingly, the Central Committee of the MILF has accepted your Committee's invitation and has designated me to appear in its behalf. However, the decision has stressed that that appearance will take place after the MILF Special Investigation Commission (SIC) comes out with its Findings which will be the basis of my statements to the relevant Committees of the Senate. Further, the MILF also requests that my appearance should be in an executive session.

"I take this opportunity to inform your Honor that the MILF has decided to return the firearms and any retrievable personal effects of the fallen SAF-PNP in deference to the peace process and the recognition of the MILF that it never wanted that unfortunate incident on January 25 in Mamasapano, Maguindanao to

happen. This was the first time since 2011 that fighting erupted between government and MILF forces.

"Perhaps, in a couple of days, the MILF will be able to finish the internal process of accounting of the materials to pave the way for their return."

'STILL AT WAR?'

Iqbal's letter drew a reaction from Senator Bongbong Marcos who feels there exists a state of war with the MILF.

"We're still at war with the MILF or the MILF continues to be rerevolutionary organization, they're still fomenting revolution till the peace agreements are completed, is that correct?" he asked.

Poe, however, told Ladiasan that the Senate only wishes an initial assessment since other agencies have also been required to present their initial reports.

Poe didn't compel Ladiasan to answer Marcos' questions since he may not be authorized to answer a delicate issue.

Poe reminded the MILF that while they can entertain the idea of an executive session for Iqbal, they can always divulge what's discussed there publicly if they feel it doesn't jeopardize national security.

Marcos feels Iqbal's letter contravenes previous testimony during the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) deliberations where both sides were said to be pursuing the peace agreement.

NOT AT WAR, BUT CEASEFIRE BROKEN

Government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel Ferrer told the panel that the government is not at war with the MILF but the ceasefire was broken last January 25.

Poe didn't seem placated and insisted that Iqbal's presence will demonstrate good faith and honor the Senate.

Ladiasan, meantime, didn't make any commitments to surrender Basit Usman, which was the subject of an appeal by President Aquino to the MILF last Feb. 6.

"I cannot answer that question. We will raise this with the leadership of the MILF," Ladiasan said.

REBUILDING TRUST

Senate President Franklin Drilon emphasized that this is crucial to rebuilding trust.

"We in Congress already have difficulty passing the BBL. We must go back and build confidence. Among those that will be critical is the matter of the surrender of Usman, the return of equipment. I hope you can deliver to the MILF hierarchy the need to rebuild trust between the two parties. We cannot do this alone, you must cooperate, you can surrender Usman," Drilon said.

Ladiasan also informed the lawmakers that they are looking into reports that some of the seized firearms are now on sale.

Ladiasan denied the MILF is coddling Usman. He maintained that the suspected terrorists are not stationary but the MILF always coordinates with government.

Ladiasan also maintained that the MILF is not a terrorist group, and that the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters or BIFF is already separated from their group.

Senator Alan Peter Cayetano dared the MILF to do to the BIFF what was done to the PNP, noting that MILF and BIFF areas are just next to each other.

MILF denies 250 fighters killed in Mamasapano

CAMP DARAPANAN, Maguindanao - The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) denied reports that came out during Monday's Senate hearing that around 250 MILF combatants were killed in the Mamasapano clash.

Von Al-Haq, spokesperson of the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), told ABS-CBN News it is not true that they lost more than 200 combatants.

He said if this was true, it would have been impossible for them to extricate all those killed.

"Hindi natin kayang i-retrieve yan," Al-Haq said.

Al-Haq said only 18 combatants were killed from their side, as per official record of MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal.

Sacked Special Action Forces (SAF) Chief Getulio Napeñas claimed on Monday that his men must have killed over 200 MILF fighters.

The SAF lost 44 elite commandos, the largest casualty of government security forces in recent memory.

Meanwhile, Al-Haq said they have not yet finished the investigation into the January 25 encounter.

The MILF created a Special Investigative Commission last January 26 after the bloody encounter with the PNP-Special Action Force (SAF) troopers.

Al-Haq says this is composed of the central committee and the general staff of the BIAF.

The investigation, according to Al-Haq, is already about 50 percent completed. "[Pero] hindi pa pwedeng i-reveal ito kasi may mga maselang bagay sa investigation."

He said it will be the central committee's decision if it will have some information published to the media, or whether it will grant the request of the Senate for the initial report of the MILF's investigation.

The MILF's military wing also stressed that if their troops violated rules in the ceasefire agreement, they will be given appropriate sanctions.

Al-Haq, meanwhile, advised the MILF armed forces to stay calm, hold their position and just be in a defensive stance.

Al-Haq also renewed the MILF's vow to support and uphold the peace process.

We are not terrorists, says MILF official

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is not a terrorist group, the chair of its coordinating committee on the cessation of hostilities stressed before the Senate on Tuesday.

"Hindi po kami terrorist, ang MILF. We have been fighting terrorism in all forms through the peace process," Rasid Ladiasan said at the continuation of the Senate inquiry.

Ladiasan issued the statement following Senator Alan Peter Cayetano's criticisms of the MILF.

Cayetano had said the reason why the country is now mourning the death of 44 police Special Action Force (SAF) troopers is "because of the MILF and how they coddle terrorists."

The elite police commandos were killed in a clash with Muslim rebels, including members of the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on January 25 while they were on a mission to take down terror suspects Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Basit Usman.

The MILF has repeatedly said that the SAF troopers did not cooperate with them regarding the operation, resulting in the "misencounter."

The group has also denied coddling terrorists in their area.

Ladianan stressed that the MILF does not have any connection with the BIFF, which, MILF chief peace negotiator Mohagher Iqbal earlier alleged, was the one coddling Marwan.

"Wala na po kaming kaugnayan sa BIFF. Separate na po sila. Hindi po sila naniniwala sa peace process, at kami po ay committed po sa peace process," he said.

He said the MILF will not risk losing its opportunity for peace after years of negotiating with the government.

"We will not sacrifice the more than 17 years. Naghirap po ang tao namin... Ayoko pong mawala itong opportunity. Hindi po tama na ngayong time na ito pa mawala yung opportunity ng peace," he said.

Ladianan then thanked Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles and government peace panel chair Miriam Coronel Ferrer "for keeping the faith in the peace process."

Fund drive launched for slain MILF fighters

MARAWI CITY- At first, the money came in trickles. Coins, P20 bills, then P50 bills.

Then as suddenly as it started, everyone was throwing bills of P100, P500 and even P1,000 into the striped blue, green and white tarpaulin laid on the ground of Plaza Cabili in Banggolo in the heart of downtown Marawi.

As a group of women counted the money, cries of “Allahu Akbar” rang throughout the park from hundreds of boys, girls and residents who trooped to the plaza to participate in the Bangsamoro National Day of Mourning rally on Tuesday.

The women started counting the bills, making sure that there is proper accounting for donations to the 18 fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and four civilians killed in the January 15 Mamasapano clash in Maguindanao province.

“They are our 'shaheed' (martyrs). They died for us and the Bangsamoro,” rally organizer Achmad Lao said.

At total of 44 Philippine National Police Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) troopers also died in the clash triggered by a law enforcement operation to get Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli Abdir alias Marwan.

Lao said they collected P50,00 and several thousand pesos more in pledges during the 3-hour rally.

He said a similar fund drive was simultaneously launched in the nearby town of Baloi, Lanao del Norte.

“Kahit piso-piso lang we can gather enough money to the families of the slain fighters and civilians who died in the Mamasapano clash,” Lao said, pointing to a group of children giving their “baon” to the cause.

“We can not afford the millions that is given to the SAF 44 but we want to tell the families of our martyrs they are not forgotten,” he said.

MILF: Mamasapano clash video not conclusive

MAGUINDANAO - Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) First Vice Chairman Ghadzali Jaafar admitted he has seen the first part of the 6-minute video of the Mamasapano clash showing a man shooting twice at close range a Special Action Force (SAF) commando who was still moving.

Jaafar stressed the video is not conclusive as it does not show if it was indeed a member of the MILF who was involved in the brutal killing of the SAF trooper.

"I have seen the video pero hindi lahat. Di tayo pwedeng mag-conclude. Baka hindi yun MILF kasi di naman pinakita ang mukha, kamay lang at yung caliber .45 pistol," Jaafar said.

He said all these things are the subject of their investigation to really put clarity on what transpired in Mamasapano last January 25.

He stressed that acts such as excessive use of force is prohibited by the MILF.

He said they strictly implement the rules of engagement in battle, in accordance with the International Human Rights Law.

Meanwhile, Jaafar said the reason why they have not yet appeared on Senate hearings is because they are still waiting for the result of the investigation conducted by the Special Investigation Committee.

As to the firearms taken from the SAF commandos, the investigation committee is also tasked to do the accounting.

Jaafar said they do not yet have figures nor the names of the combatants who took the elite cops' firearms.

He said they have also heard about the alleged selling of the guns, but this is a report that still needs to be validated.

Jaafar said they are willing to comply with whatever provisions they have agreed with the government.

Jaafar also again vehemently denied that they coddled Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli Abdhir alias Marwan. PNP SAF commandos killed Marwan during the Mamasapano operation last January 25.

MILF belies arms build-up

MANILA – Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal on Thursday belied allegations that the group continues to build up arms and recruit forces despite the ongoing peace talks.

Responding to an inquiry by Senator Joseph Victor Ejercito, Iqbal said the MILF is now focused on the decommissioning of arms as part of the normalization process under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro.

"Noon po aaminin namin dahil sinasabi namin talagang nagpo-produce kami ng armas, pero ngayon dahil ang pinag-uusapan kapayapaan at pinag-uusapan ay decommissioning siguro, wala ng saysay ang pag-uusap na nagdagdag ba ng armas ang MILF o nagte-training," Iqbal said.

The government and MILF peace panels earlier signed the implementing guidelines in Kuala Lumpur.

The decommissioning process is the surrendering of arms to the International Decommissioning Body, which will assist in the “transformation” of the rebels to becoming “productive” civilians.

These arms should not be used again, even by forces on the government side.

"Although the decommissioning will take place alone, it has to be linked with other processes in the normalization program for the Bangsamoro," Iqbal said.

Iqbal, meanwhile, said he is not aware of Senator Alan Peter Cayetano's report that the MILF maintains a "Bangsamoro Military Industries" which manufactures arms.

"I am member of the MILF's highest political organ, but I am not aware," he said.

According to a report cited by Cayetano, the arms manufacturer is located in Sitio Katol, General. S.K. Pendatun, Maguindanao.

MILF academy?

In the wake of the Mamasapano clash, which left 44 Special Action Force (SAF) troopers dead, Iqbal also admitted that the MILF has no full control over its forces "in the same way the government has no absolute control over its forces."

Iqbal, however, said that since 2011, there has been no fighting between government and MILF forces.

"This would show that the MILF has command and control, and unfortunate lang na nangyari ang January 25 nang magkaroon ng sagupaan ang PNP-SAF at MILF forces sa Mamasapano," Iqbal said.

Iqbal added the MILF remains committed to the peace process, dismissing allegations that the group is taking advantage of the ceasefire to strengthen its force.

"Siguro hindi ko gagamitin ang 'deny' kasi when you use the word deny, that is a negative affirmation. Ang importante kami ay tapat sa pinirmahan namin

at we are consistent that whatever engagement with the Philippine government is covered by a mechanism," he said.

Responding to an inquiry by Cayetano, Iqbal denied that the MILF maintains a military academy in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

"Before, there was in Camp Abubakar, but now no more," Iqbal said.

'Eh di talo'

Earlier in the hearing, Iqbal said the MILF will become a social movement and shed its revolutionary nature once it converts itself into a political party, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party.

Iqbal said the MILF can only transition into a legitimate political party once the BBL gets passed in Congress and ratified in a plebiscite.

He said the MILF, through its political party, will still have to vie for seats in the proposed Bangsamoro Parliament, a set-up that some legal experts say runs counter to the Constitution.

Asked by Cayetano whether the MILF will embrace arms once again in case the MILF fails to dominate the polls, Iqbal said the MILF will accept the results of the election.

"Eh 'di talo," Iqbal said.

Iqbal believes that the BBL addresses the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people. He said its passage will render the cause of MILF's renegade group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) even more illegitimate.

"Nakita naman natin na ang BBL na-address ang legitimate grievances ng Bangsamoro People. So kapag naipasa iyan, wala nang pwedeng lumaban sa gobyerno ng Pilipinas na may legitimate cause."

Appendix B

Articles which featured the PNP SAF44

43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces

Board of inquiry created to probe deadly operation

MANILA - The "misencounter" between policemen and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Sunday, which resulted in 43 elite cops killed, is the worst for government security forces in recent memory.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas described the incident, which happened in the town of Mamasapano, Maguindanao, as "single largest loss of lives in recent memory involving our security forces."

Roxas said the operation was against Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, and another terrorist, Basit Usman.

Marwan was "highly likely" killed in the operation, while Usman may have escaped, he said.

Roxas said, "there are pieces of evidence, pictures of a person that appears to be Marwan. This will be part of the post-action debriefing so that there will be corroborative information from several operatives."

Philippine National Police officer-in-charge (OIC) Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina said the Philippine National Police Special Action Forces (PNP SAF)

were already withdrawing from Marwan's bailiwick when members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) attacked.

The PNP SAF members then "inadvertently" entered an MILF area, Roxas said.

"We are fully committed to the peace process. It's a law enforcement operation. Hindi ito sabotaje sa peace talks," he stressed.

Roxas believes the attractiveness of the US\$5 million bounty offered for the head of Marwan is only an incidental issue, following reports the cops allegedly did not coordinate their actions in a bid to get the bounty.

"I won't discount it, that is why there is the board of inquiry... but it's just an incidental issue, as far as I am concerned," he said.

'BOARD OF INQUIRY'

Espina said he wants a full accounting of all the 392 members of an elite force deployed to run after the terrorists.

Asked about the pursuit operations against those responsible for the incident, Espina said: "I want a full accounting [of my men], ilan ang nasugatan, ilan ang buhay... First things first."

He said he will not leave Cotabato until all his men have been accounted for. He said they will be given all the benefits and honors they deserve.

He added he will create a board of inquiry to complete the whole story, including allegations that the operation was not coordinated with the MILF.

“We are forming a board of inquiry because we’d like to get to the bottom of this.

Our fallen heroes sacrificed their lives for the attainment of peace,”

Celebration turns to mourning for SAF men

MANILA, Philippines - A ceremony to congratulate and commend for a job well done the policemen who secured Pope Francis during his recent visit was overshadowed by grief and mourning after 49 members of the elite Special Action Force (SAF) were killed in Maguindanao last Sunday.

Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas II said he had bittersweet feelings as he led the commendation ceremony for policemen involved in the papal visit, while the Philippine National Police (PNP) mourned the death of SAF men killed in the line of duty while in pursuit of a high value target.

“So it is a bittersweet moment for me to be addressing you this morning. Sweet because of the PNP Foundation Day and the PNP has much to be proud of. But bitter and sad because some of our policemen are still out there fighting,” said Roxas in his speech during the 24th founding anniversary of the PNP yesterday morning at Camp Crame in Quezon City.

Roxas said they still have sketchy reports on the killing of more than 40 SAF members after the encounter with suspected members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in Barangay Tukanalipao in the Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

“Right after these ceremonies, (PNP officer-in-charge) Deputy Director General Espina and I will fly to Cotabato to find out exactly what happened, and what is the situation on the ground and to assure our troops of all-out support of the government,”

added Roxas, who was teary eyed as he acknowledged the sacrifices of the police officers.

Roxas led the symbolic pinning of medals and recognition for the outstanding work of the PNP together with other government agencies that resulted in the successful visit of the pope and the safety of the crowds last Jan. 15 to 19.

He said 25,000 PNP men and women participated in and ensured the success of the papal visit and they would receive a similar citation, which will be put in their records.

“Apart from it being part of your recognition of your sacrifice and your efforts, it is also symbolic of the principle of the whole PNP, whole of PNP approach,” Roxas said.

He also acknowledged the support of the Armed Forces, Coast Guard, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, other government agencies and local and barangay officials.

Espina also extended his deepest sympathy to the families of the slain SAF men. “They died a meaningful death on the side of justice and righteousness. They did not die in vain,” Espina said.

Despite the momentary setback of law enforcement operations against lawless elements in Mindanao, Espina expressed confidence that justice and peace will prevail and justice will be served.

DEATH BENEFITS

The PNP said the relatives of the slain policemen would each receive death benefits ranging from P1.5 million to P2 million.

Death benefits for policemen killed in line of duty include P250,000 from the President's Social Fund; between P141,000 up to P181,000 as Special Financial Assistance from the PNP; burial benefits worth P50,000; and P200,000 gratuity from the National Police Commission.

Policemen belonging to the Public Safety Mutual Benefit Fund are also entitled to death insurance ranging from P225,000 to P417,000 depending on rank. – With Evelyn Macairan, Alexis Romero, John Unson

Killing of SAF men ignites online firestorm

MANILA, Philippines - Some lawmakers took to social media to weigh in on the deadly Maguindanao clash that left 44 PNP-SAF commandos dead.

Senator JV Ejercito tweeted: "The government chief negotiator says the PNP Special Action Force did not inform the Moro Islamic Liberation Front of its operation in Maguindanao. There seems to be something wrong here."

Senator Pia Cayetano questioned the peace agreement and Senate hearings on the Bangsamoro Basic Law following the Maguindanao clash.

She also expressed frustration, saying the recent events kill the spirit in pursuing the peace process.

Ifugao Rep. Teddy Baguilat said his cousin survived the deadly clash but 11 from Cordillera were killed, three of them from his province.

He said the ceasefire mechanism has to be reexamined while the MILF and the Philippine government panels should meet again to reestablish confidence in the peace talks.

Meanwhile, Secretary Francis Pangilinan mourned the lives of so many policemen in Maguindanao.

"We grieve for our policemen and our nation."

Members of the international community also express sympathies to the PNP and the families of those killed in the clash.

Amid all the passionate reactions to the issue, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno is calling for sobriety pending the results of the investigation into the clash.

She said: "A call for war and retribution should never be made lightly and should remain always a final option."

The chief justice also expressed sympathies to the loved ones of injured and fallen policemen.

Pagbuburulan ng mga nasawing SAF, inihahanda na

MANILA – Inihahanda na ang mga lugar kung saan ibuburol ang mga namatay na miyembro ng Philippine National Police-Special Armed Forces (PNP-SAF) sa Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Markado na sa Camp Bagong Diwa sa Taguig ang paglalagyan ng 42 kabaong na darating ngayong araw mula sa Maguindanao.

Dalawang araw na gaganapin dito ang burol.

Unti-unti naman nang napupuno ng mga bulaklak ang isang gilid ng Gate 1 ng PNP Headquarters sa Camp Crame.

Marami dito ang galing sa kapwa pulis ng mga nasawi at marami rin galing sa ordinaryong tao.

Ayon sa PNP, kulang pa ang mga parangal na ito para suklian ang mga sakripisyo ng mga nalagas nilang kasamahan.

Gagawaran ng full military honors ang mga nasawing SAF paglapag ng mga labi nila sa Villamor Air Base ngayong umaga kung saan naman sila sasalubungin ng mga opisyal ng pamahalaan.

Man salutes fallen commando, then weeps

MANILA - A relative of one of the 42 slain Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos broke down crying but not before giving a salute to his fallen relative.

Video footage showed the man giving a salute before breaking down.

Other relatives also wept as they were allowed to go near the flag-draped coffins of the fallen troops.

A total of 44 PNP-SAF men were killed in an anti-terror raid in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Sunday.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas earlier described the incident as a misencounter, saying the operation was not coordinated with the PNP top brass or the MILF.

Palace seeks donations for kin of fallen SAF men

MANILA - Malacanang is seeking donations for the families of the more than 40 elite cops killed in combat at the Mamasapano, Maguindanao clash.

The Palace, through the Department of Social Welfare and Development, established an account specifically for the purpose.

Donations may be coursed through: Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) Account Name: "DSWD- Armed Conflict Mamasapano, Maguindanao";

LBP Current Account Number (CA) No. 3122-1026-28

In a televised speech on Wednesday night, President Aquino said the whole nation sympathizes with the families of the fallen men.

"I know that this grief may be accompanied by worries about your future, especially if your loved ones who sacrificed their lives were also your breadwinners. I guarantee: The state will give the maximum assistance it can, within the limits of the laws and rules," he said.

"On this occasion, I also take the opportunity to appeal to the public: If possible let us extend our utmost support to the bereaved, and maximize the help we can give to the families of those who fell, in recognition of the valor of these heroes who gave their lives for the realization of the peace we have long desired," he added.

He declared Friday as the national day of mourning.

What many SAF commandos were looking at before they died

Dying cops were looking at photos of wife, children, family on their cellphones, says survivor

MANILA - A survivor of the deadly clash between members of the Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Barangay Tukanalipao in Mamasapano, Maguindanao recounted what happened during the clash last Sunday.

Hailing from the province of Ifugao, "Robert" is one of the commandos of PNP-SAF that clashed with members of the 105th base command of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

He admitted that it was his first time to go to Maguindanao.

On Sunday, they went to Barangay Tukanalipao in Mamasapano to serve arrest warrants for Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman.

Robert believes that he survived the firefight so he can tell the story of his fallen companions.

"Siguro, God's purpose na ako ay mabuhay...personally may makausap 'yung mga mahal nila sa buhay na ganito 'yung nakita ko sa kanila, bago sila [namatay]," he said.

He narrated that he saw one of his companions looking at his cellphone moments before he was able to escape.

"Yung isa nga tumitingin sa cellphone eh, nakatingin sa [picture ng] anak niya siguro, habang gumagapang ako nakikita ko 'yung reaksiyon [nila]," Robert added.

He also saw some of his companions dead, while others who were injured were lying on the ground.

"Yung iba, patay na talaga. 'Yung iba, nawalan ng bala, na-injured, nakahiga na lang. Mukha pa lang nila...kung mabuhay man ako, ipaalam ko sa...katulad ng nakita ko, nakatingin sa cellphone."

Robert said he would visit his companions' family as soon as he can to tell them what he saw.

"Pag-uwi ko talaga, sasabihin ko sa asawa niya na ikaw 'yung tinitingnan that time."

SAVING ROBERT

He also narrated how one of his classmates sacrificed his life to help him escape.

"Yung classmate ko, n'ung nakita niya na ini-snipe na ako sa pinagagapangan ko, tumayo siya. Sabi niya, 'Classmate, sige lang, abante ka.' Tumayo talaga siya para ma-divert 'yung sniping sa kanya imbes na sa akin mapunta," Robert said.

His classmate eventually died while diverting the opponents' attention from him. One of their officers also hugged Robert, asking him not to leave them.

"Yumakap sa akin, sabi niya, 'huwag mo akong iwanan.' Sabi ko, 'Pareho lang mangyayari sa atin dito. Mag-attempt lang ako na tumakas'."

According to Robert, he tried his best to escape so as not to die in the hands of the rebels.

"Ayoko kasi na sila ang tatapos sa buhay ko...watching videos ng ginagawa nila kapag may nahuhuli sila, parang ayaw mo mamatay sa ganung paraan. Very animalistic ang ginagawa nila."

Robert started his escape early Sunday morning. He was finally able to leave the area by Monday afternoon.

STILL A COP

Despite his experience, Robert said he will not quit his job as a policeman. He only hopes the PNP gets what it deserves.

"Hindi ako magresign, tatanggapin ko na lang kung anong ibibigay sa akin ni Lord," he said.

"Sana po kung ano po 'yung dapat para sa PNP, sana po 'yun 'yung...kung kailangan i-reform ang PNP, i-reform," he added.

Meanwhile, Robert's family in Ifugao is eager to see him.

They were able to talk to him on Sunday, before the operation in Mamasapano.

According to his father, Robert asked them to pray the rosary for them, since they will be sent on a mission.

Robert is the second of 13 children. He originally wanted to become a priest, but opted to become a policeman instead.

His mother said that if it was up to her, she would not allow her son to continue his duties as a policeman.

The family refused to comment on issues surrounding the encounter. They are hoping that they will be allowed to talk to their son. -- reports from Harris Julio, ABS-CBN News Cagayan Valley and Lerio Bompat, ABS-CBN News Central Mindanao

SAF trooper's widow begs PNoy: Please help us

MANILA - The wife of a slain Special Action Force commando broke down in tears Friday as she begged President Aquino to pursue justice for her husband and other SAF troopers killed in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Speaking before the necrological service for the 44 slain SAF commandos, Erica Pabalinas, wife of slain Senior Inspector Ryan Pabalinas, said she was unsure if she should feel sad for losing a husband or happy that he died a hero and fought to his last breath to claim peace.

She said that before the incident, she tried to ask her husband not to go to the Mamasano operation.

"Naglalambing ako sa kanya. Sabi ko: 'Daddy, wag ka na lang po sumama kasi di ka pa ok.' And then, he replied: 'Mommy, ayan ka na naman. Hindi mo na naman naiintindihan.'"

"And then our little girl said to him: 'Daddy, wag ka na lang umalis kasi gabi na. Baka kunin ka lang po ng bad guys.'"

"Despite that, Ryan left. It is a clear manifestation that my husband put duty first before family and I understand."

Pabalinas said she has come to slowly accept that her husband cannot be with them anymore. She also told the wives of the other slain troopers to be strong and not think that all they wanted was the reward money for the capture of Marwan.

"For the grieving wives just like me, let us be strong for our children because behind every brave SAF trooper is a strong wife. Behind every SAF trooper is a strong wife," she said.

She then told the President: "To our President, we seek for your help to attain justice. Please, sir president. Please help us."

The 44 SAF commandos were killed by Moro rebels during an operation to hunt down terror suspects Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Basit Usman.

The incident has threatened to derail peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

A day of sorrow for fallen commandos

MANILA - The entire country was in mourning on Friday for the 44 police commandos who died in a bloody mission in Maguindanao.

In Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig, the mood was somber as families and comrades were united in grief for the fallen.

A day after being criticized for his absence during the arrival honors in Villamor, President Aquino, wearing a black armband, led the necrological rites in Camp Bagong Diwa with members of his official Cabinet and the Aquino family.

The President personally paid his respects to the slain PNP-SAF members one after the other then offered his condolences and handed out medals of honor to the bereaved families.

The President also had a private meeting with the families, away from the media. During the necrological ceremony, police officials paid their final respects while urging the public to remember the heroism of the 44 brave men.

In his eulogy, the acting head of the Special Action Force turned emotional as he narrated how the operation in Mamasapano was successful at first but took a turn for the worse when their men were suddenly surrounded by enemy forces.

Chief Supt. Noli Talino said the death of the 44 was a huge loss to the police force but nonetheless a worthy sacrifice.

"Sila ay napakalaking kawalan sa hanay ng pulisya...Is it worth it, one international terrorist equivalent to 44 SAF troopers? If you ask them, it is worth it dahil mas maraming buhay ang maisasalba, maililigtas nung nawala si Marwan," he said.

The families, who have lost their breadwinners, could not hide their grief.

They recounted the moment of parting and pleaded for justice.

In his response, the President groped for answers as he paid tribute to the sacrifices of the fallen.

He also vowed to get to the bottom of the Maguindanao encounter.

"Bayani ang asawa, kapatid o anak ninyong dinadakila natin sa araw na ito. Malaki ang utang na loob ng sambayanan sa kanila. Binuwis nila ang kanilang buhay para mabigyan ng kaayusan at katahimikan ang buhay ng mas nakakarami," he said.

Killers came from 3 directions

MAMASAPANO, Maguindanao, Philippines – Death came from three directions for a band of Special Action Force (SAF) commandos as they struggled to slip out of a remote village here after killing a man believed to be Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, last Sunday.

A SAF member who survived the battle against hundreds of fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) said they were attacked from three directions in an open field near the hideout of Marwan and another terrorist in Barangay Tukanalipao.

The policeman, who asked not to be named, said some of his wounded companions who ran out of ammunition crawled near an irrigation dike, but rebels finished them off with rifle shots to the head.

“We ran out of ammunition so there was no way we could stop them from coming close,” the policeman.

At least two SAF teams were attacked from behind while guarding their designated alternate withdrawal route.

“There was heavy volume of fire from different directions. We were not subdued, we maneuvered for cover but the area was a plain and there was no good spot where we could position ourselves safely,” said the policeman, who asked not to be identified.

The survivor said their defense weakened when they started running out of ammunition.

“I made the sign of the cross and I asked God to forgive me for all my sins. I was ready to die then,” he said.

He said many of his companions were felled by heavy gunfire from as close as six to seven meters.

“It was very dark. The flash of gunfire from the barrels of our guns and their guns can be seen clearly because we were close to each other,” he said.

He said he crawled to a nearby swamp as firing waned and walked away at daybreak until he reached a road where policemen and soldiers helped him.

He said he noticed foreign ceasefire monitors in the scene, helping disengage rebels from Barangay Tukanalipao

Based on accounts from villagers, community leaders may have innocently alerted the MILF’s 105th Base Command to the presence of the policemen.

A barangay official in Mamasapano had told a local television outfit that he called officials of the MILF unit and told them of the presence of armed men that he thought were rebels.

He was told that the MILF had no tactical maneuver in the area.

Some community elders said they, too, had frantically alerted local Moro commanders of the activities of men in combat uniforms.

“It was dark and we can’t see the patches on their uniform from a distance. We were also scared to go out and check,” one of the village elders said.

The ensuing fighting left 44 SAF commandos killed and a dozen others injured. The MILF said it also lost 11 guerrillas in the “misencounter.”

Villagers also told stories of how BIFF fighters finished off with shots to the head no fewer than 10 wounded policemen.

“Two of the wounded policemen who were executed even managed to strap tourniquets on their legs which were hit by bullets in the initial encounter,” a villager said.

A peasant named Badrudin Nanganlan, 21, and five-year-old Sarah Sampulna Panangulon, were killed in the crossfire.

Nanganlan’s 19-year-old widow, Sarah, told reporters her husband was immediately buried in keeping with Islamic tradition.

The gunfight that lasted for more than 10 hours also left a villager, Said Pasawilan, wounded.

“Villagers were running everywhere. We heard loud automatic gunshots and explosions,” said Ahmida Muda, whose family was forced to evacuate to a safer area.

Saida Esmael, also a resident of Barangay Tukanalipao, said they tried to leave and head to the town proper as the firefight erupted, but were prevented from doing so when exchanges of gunfire intensified.

Esmael Hashim, chairman of Barangay Tukanalipao, said he noticed the arrival of the SAF men and was surprised that none of them came to see him to coordinate.

He said previous police and military operations in their barangay were properly coordinated with community leaders and the local government unit of Mamasapano.

“It was about 4:00 a.m. (Jan. 25) when we heard gunshots near the barangay Islamic center and that was the start of a long encounter,” Hashim said in Filipino.

MILF leader Al-Haj Murad and chief peace negotiator Muhaquer Iqbal said the encounter could have been avoided had the Philippine National Police coordinated its operation with the joint ceasefire committee.

DSWD to provide counselling to kin of slain elite cops

MANILA – The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will provide psychological counseling to the families of the 44 Special Action Force (SAF) commandos who were killed in a fierce gun battle in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

DSWD Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman said they already have the addresses of all the families of the slain elite cops.

Through the counselling sessions, the DSWD will also learn about the other needs of the families.

Other than the counselling, the government will also support the education of the commandos' children and the livelihood of their families.

Malacanang, through the DSWD, has opened a bank count for donations for the families of the slain SAF commandos.

Donations may be coursed through:

Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) Account Name: "DSWD- Armed Conflict Mamasapano, Maguindanao"

LBP Current Account Number (CA) No. 3122-1026-28

Likewise, the DSWD has distributed food packs to the 600 families who fled during the Mamasapano clash.

The families of the four civilians who were also killed in the clash have also received a P25,000 assistance from the department.

The four civilians who were wounded, meanwhile, also received P10,000.

The DSWD has no statement yet on the SAF commandos who were wounded in the Mamasapano clash.

SAF survivor urged: Go back, tell the real story

MANILA - Knowing their team was running out of bullets, one of the elite cops who died in the clash in Maguindanao "forced" his buddy to leave him "so someone could go back safely and tell their real story."

This was how one of the survivors recounted the Jan. 25 battle to military retiree Boy Agabon, father of Police Officer 2 Chum Agabon, one of 44 slain members of Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) who fought the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other rebels in Mamasapano town.

Agabon declined to identify the survivor but said the latter cried while recounting what happened. Agabon also clarified that although the survivor talked about the clash, he was not Chum's buddy in the field.

"The survivor also told me that he was crying while he was crawling away from the area. For him to escape, his buddy was firing so that the enemies would lose their focus on the survivor," Agabon said in Filipino.

The survivor's buddy was wounded and could no longer walk at the time. They were also "running out of bullets while waiting for the reinforcement that never came."

The STAR tried to talk to the survivors, but they declined because they were "disallowed" to speak to the press.

Agabon used to be deployed in Mindanao during his active service in the army. He knew that only prepared soldiers could enter the battlefield where his son died.

So when Chum's friend called him at 9 a.m. to inform him that his son was running out of bullets while fighting the Moro rebels, Agabon prayed that his 31-year-old son could return home safely.

"When I was informed that he was dead, I could not believe it because he was trained to fight. So from Manila, I went to Zamboanga to verify his death," Agabon said.

When Agabon got there, he asked for the list of survivors.

"When my son's name was not in the list, I felt very sad. All I was able to do was ask, where are the reinforcements? Was there a situation planning?" he said in Filipino.

According to the survivor, the SAF immediately pulled out after killing wanted terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan. But while leaving the site, members of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters attacked them. This prevented the SAF troopers from successfully withdrawing.

One of the 44 heroic men of the SAF prayed the rosary with his mother through his mobile phone as the fallen troops waited for reinforcements.

Other SAF members also made frantic phone calls to their families, asking relatives to relay their distress messages to comrades and officials in the PNP as they lay helpless in the battlefield.

AFP chief becomes emotional for Fallen 44

MANILA, Philippines - The chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines became emotional as he talked about the deaths of the 44 police commandos who were killed in a botched anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

AFP chief of staff Gregorio Catapang said it is unfair that the military is being blamed for failing to send reinforcements for Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos who were being attacked by armed elements in Tukanalipao village. He said that while he was informed about a possible operation by the PNP-SAF, there was no coordination on the exact time and location of the operation until it was already underway.

At one point during the interview, the AFP chief became emotional as he pointed out that the Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police were once part of the military.

"Hindi naman po maganda yung hindi kami nag reinforce kasi una sa lahat, nandyan po kami. Kasama po namin yan. Mga bago po kami nag hiwa hiwalay - PNP PC INP yan e. Kasama po sa AFP yan e kaya hindi po namin gusto yung nagyari," he said.

"Talaga naman pong hindi naging maganda yung haka-haka na hindi kami nag reinforce. Nandun po kami when they needed us. Ang problema nga, too little too late yung coordination," he added.

He said the AFP was not given grid coordinates on the exact location of the PNP-SAF and the enemy troops when the fighting started.

Military troops were blind as to where to send reinforcements or where they could fire their cannons.

"Kung kelan na po nagbabakbakan saka hiniling yung reinforcement. E hindi naman ka ora-orada magagawa yan dahil pag napaputok kami ng kanyon baka tamaan po yung SAF."

"Ang sabi nga nung huli nung magpapaputok na kami white phosphorus too close po yung bomba na ibabagsak niyo kasi magkalapitan na lang po e."

"E kung tatamaan na po yung SAF magiging friendly fire. Yun po ang iniwasan natin kaya very important po yung coordination."

AFP chief on Fallen 44: Sayang po yung buhay

MANILA, Philippines - Armed Forces chief of staff Gregorio Pio Catapang fought back tears on Wednesday as he mourned the deaths of 44 police commandos in the botched anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Catapang said it is unfair that the military is being blamed for failing to send reinforcements for Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos who were being attacked by armed elements in Tukanalipao village.

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CATAPANG INFORMED ABOUT RAID SINCE NOV

A total of 44 PNP-SAF commandos were killed in the anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last January 25.

President Aquino earlier said he knew about the PNP-SAF operation to take out Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, and Basit Usman.

However, he blamed PNP SAF head police director Getulio Napeñas Jr. for failing to coordinate the mission with the military.

In his interview, Catapang said he was informed by President Aquino about a PNP-SAF operation to take out Marwan and Usman as early as November 18, 2014.

He said the President reminded him to coordinate with the PNP-SAF on December 18, 2014.

The AFP chief said he called up AFP Western Mindanao Command chief Lt. Gen. Rustico Guerrero to coordinate with the PNP SAF about the operation.

Catapang said Guerrero met with Napeñas and Major General Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of the Maguindanao-based 6th Infantry Division, on January 23, 2015 about the operation to take out the two terror suspects.

However, the two military generals were not given any information about when and where the operation would take place.

"Wala naman napag-usapan kasi hindi naman dala ni General Napenas yung intelligence chief niya. Nasayang yung meeting na yun. And then all of a sudden on the fateful day in the morning of January 25, ni-launch yung operation without us being informed," Catapang said.

THINGS GO AWRY

Based on the timeline provided by the AFP, more than 70 SAF commandos were dropped off in Shariff Aguak at around 2 a.m. of January 25. The team then trekked through 12 kilometers of marshlands to reach Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano, Maguindanao where Marwan lived.

According to the PNP, the SAF commandos were successful in killing Marwan and were about to leave the area when they were attacked by joint forces of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Moro National Liberation Front, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and even private armed groups.

There are at least 1,000 armed MILF fighters in the area, according to the military.

Catapang said General Pangilinan was informed as early as 5 a.m. of January 25 that the PNP-SAF forces were being attacked by enemy fire.

Pangilinan then informed Col. Melquiades Feliciano, commander of the Army's 601st Brigade, and the commander of the 4th Infantry Division about the firefight.

"They were able to come because there is a checkpoint there. They had 6 armored assets near the entrance of Mamasapano at 7 a.m January 25 to control this area," Catapang said.

The military, however, could not reach the area where the PNP-SAF commandos were trapped since there was already heavy fighting.

Catapang said there was a lot of confusion because nobody knew the exact coordinates of the PNP-SAF.

"Yun po ang tinatanong namin. Where are you? Saan kami magre-reinforce? And then of course hindi po maibigay yung grid coordinates. Even if it was given, the firefight was going on - we cannot just come in. Also we do not know where we will be coming from - baka may ambush," he said.

"Sabay kasi napabakbak dahil sa PNP side yung 55th Special Action Force which is the secondary effort that is supposed to reinforce the 84th SAC if there is a firefight. Nung napabakbak na itong dalawa wala nang tumulong sa kanila. They are both being beleaguered by forces coming from this area."

"There is a lot of confusion. Walang coordination paano tayo magtatawagan. Panay text and calls lang po ang nangyari. It really took a while," he added.

An ABS-CBN report also said more than 300 SAF commandos were on standby along the highway, within hearing distance of the firefight.

The 3rd Special Action Battalion and the 4th Special Action Battalion were only 3 kilometers away from the clash site.

But soldiers said when they asked the SAF to guide them to where their comrades were, no one agreed to join them.

Of the 392 elite commandos who arrived in Mamasapano, only 78 entered the combat zone. Forty-four of them never came out alive.

At 11 p.m. on Sunday, 19 hours after the start of the operation, the Philippine Army located the survivors of the assault force.

They were still holding on to the DNA sample of Marwan, but could no longer carry their weapons out of exhaustion and fear.

NO CALL TO STAND DOWN

In the interview, Catapang emphasized several times the importance of lateral coordination between the police and military for major operations.

"Hindi naman parang party ito na 'O magkita tayo. Magdala ka ng isang red wine.' Coordination is about life and death," he said.

He said that if the operation had been properly coordinated, he would have recommended a night attack using the military's night capable helicopters.

"They hit the position of Marwan and Usman. After hitting, then we pick them up by helicopter and fly them out. Yun ang pinakamadaling operation. When you go in, you unnecessarily provoke the MILF, MNLF, BIFF and [private armed groups]."

The AFP chief denied reports that he was ordered to stand down during the fighting in order not to jeopardize the government's peace negotiations with the MILF.

"Wala pong ganun. It will be a constitutional offense kasi ang mandate namin whether or not kung sino ang presidente is to be the protector of the people and the state. The state forces were being besieged therefore we have to support what was happening on the ground," he said.

Catapang said the PNP and AFP have been conducting joint operations to try to take out Marwan as early as 2005.

The AFP chief said he still does not know why Napenas decided to withhold information about the Mamasapano operation until it had already started.

"Yun ang big question mark because all the while we have been doing this together for the longest time. We have been coordinating with the previous SAF commanders. I don't know the reason why they did not tell us," he said.

He then turned emotional and said: "Sayang po yung buhay. Kung nagkamali ka sa negosyo, pera lang yan. Pero ito buhay, hindi mo na maibabalik ito."

Catapang gave credit to Napenas for taking the responsibility for the Mamasapano tragedy. "To me that is the highest thing that a commander who failed in an operation can do, to admit that he was at fault," he said.

He also likened the Mamasapano operation to the situation of Filipino peacekeepers in Golan Heights who escaped Syrian rebels in the area.

He said that when he told Filipino troops not to surrender their weapons, he knew the risk if the soldiers were killed in the line of duty.

"Kung naging bulilyaso po yun, I would have to resign," he said.

5 members of Fallen 44 laid to rest in Cordillera

Five police Special Action Force (SAF) commandos from Cordillera who were among those killed in the Mamasapano clash have been laid to rest.

PO2 Walner Danao was given a 21-gun salute before he was buried at the Loakan Cemetery in Baguio.

The same honor was given to Angel Kodiamat in Mankayan, Benguet.

The remains of PO2 Peterson Carap were given a hero's welcome in nearby Kabayan, where the feast for the dead ritual was conducted for the hero policeman.

PO3 Noel Golocan was buried at the Sagada Calvary Cemetery, attended by fellow SAF commandos who had shaved their heads in protest.

In Banaue, Ifguao, a ritual war dance was offered to its fallen son, PO3 Robert Allaga.

Congressmen pass the hat for Fallen 44

MANILA - Members of the House of Representatives have each started to contribute at least P10,000 of their monthly salaries for the benefit of the bereaved of the 44 slain police commandos, Speaker Sonny Belmonte said Wednesday.

Belmonte said the Lower House has passed a resolution commending the 44 Special Action Force commandos who were killed in an anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

"We have a resolution asking individual members to contribute a minimum of P10,000. Some have given P150,000, galing sa sariling bulsa dahil [galing] sa sweldo ito. I'm very happy, just before I entered [the] Mass [for the 44], out of 290 members, remember, quorum lang namin kahapon, 150 have signed full authorization," he said.

"We have this whole day. Till tonight, I expect even more [contributions]. 150 have signed up for the call for us to make contributions from our own pocket. Di galing sa pocket ng iba. The real medal is the medal the military will give to them," he added.

A congressman's monthly salary is reportedly between P90,000 to P100,000.

Belmonte led the House of Representatives in offering a Holy Mass at the Batasan Pambansa for the Fallen 44.

SAF sniper's body mutilated, widow says

MANILA -- The widow of a Philippine National Police - Special Action Force (SAF) trooper slain in Mamasapano, Maguindanao believes her husband's body was mutilated.

PO2 Chum Agabon's wife has just arrived in the country from Libya, where she is an overseas worker.

After looking at her husband's body, she and other members of her husband's family are planning to have Agabon's body undergo another autopsy.

This, after they found that Agabon's cheeks were slashed from ear-to-ear, his eyes gouged and his cheekbones crushed, even though he did not sustain any gunshot wounds in his face.

They also believe that Agabon was tortured for protecting some of his comrades, especially those who were carrying the finger of Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan.

Despite what happened, Agabon's father, Master Sergeant Perlito Agabon, is proud of his son.

From his conversation with "Robert," one of the few survivors in the deadly clash, he learned that his son saved his comrades so that at least one of them will survive.--
report from Roxanne Arevalo, ABS-CBN News Iligan

SAF commandos battle post-traumatic stress

MANILA - The Special Action Force (SAF) members involved in the Mamasapano clash received stress debriefing from their battle-hardened colleagues in the Marines.

“My unit has experienced bloody encounters in the past and this helped us connect with our comrades from the PNP [Philippine National Police]. They were able to unload most of the pain and this is important for people who are grieving,” Marine Battalion Landing Team-1 (MBLT-1) commander Lt. Col. Ronald Juan said.

Forty-two from the Police Regional Office-9, all comrades of the 44 commandos wiped out in the Mamasapano clash, talked about their experiences to reduce post-traumatic stress disorder.

Zamboanga City Mayor Bheng Climaco-Salazar, a qualified counselor, and Dr. Lolina Bajin also joined the stress debriefing.

Juan said “we could already feel the sadness” when the commandos entered the discussion groups.

“Based on the feedback of their battalion commander, the SAF troopers felt a sense of relief after the activity. We are very fortunate that our team was prepared and are capable to conduct the stress debriefing,” Juan said.

MBLT-1 is equipped with skills to facilitate stress debriefing after undergoing trainings and workshops under the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Capacities in Combat Operations.

MBLT-1 is also planning to facilitate psychosocial support for the families of the fallen commandos.

“We are just waiting for orders and also for a mutually applicable time to conduct the debriefing,” Jian said.

Kin of Fallen 44 won't get US reward: official

WASHINGTON DC - Who will get the US\$5 million reward for the death of Malaysian bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan?

According to the police attache at the Philippine Embassy in Washington DC, only civilian informants are eligible for the bounty offered by the US government.

"It is not the [Special Action Force]. As a general rule, wala pong government employee katulad ng SAF or Philippine National Police or the Philippine Army or any member of Armed Forces of the Philippines...is eligible to receive any bounty because it's part of their job to arrest a wanted person," Senior Superintendent Jose Gentiles said.

"Ang binibigyan po ng bounty are those who gave the information. It's an incentive para po ma speed up yung paglocate ng isang wanted person."

Gentiles said the identity of the informant will remain confidential.

No bounty will be given to an ineligible informant if the person turns out to be a government employee or official, he said.

A total of 44 elite police commandos from the Philippine National Police Special Action Force were killed in the January 25 operation to take out Marwan in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. The operation also claimed the lives of more than a dozen MILF rebels and civilians.

SAF troopers who killed Marwan severed his right index finger and took photos of his body because they couldn't carry it amid heavy fighting.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation later said the DNA sample provided by Philippine authorities belongs to Marwan.

"Although the results of the DNA examinations do not provide absolute identification, the results do support that the biological sample provided by Philippine authorities came from Marwan. Further testing and analysis will be conducted by laboratory examiners in an effort to fully identify the subject of DNA provided to the FBI," said David Bowdich, assistant director in charge of the Los Angeles field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A source familiar with the testing process said there is believed to be a sibling connection between the sample and DNA from bin Hir's brother, Rahmat bin Hir, who is in US custody.

Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Cuisia Jr. said the sacrifice of the 44 police commandos was not in vain as he expressed his condolences to their family members.

The ambassador said he is also pleased that the FBI quickly confirmed the DNA samples provided by the PNP were that of the Malaysian terror suspect.

"We are thankful to the FBI that they have come back very quickly to us confirming that the DNA results show the person who was killed by the 44 by the Special Forces Commandos was Marwan himself. That should dispel any doubts that people have that it was Marwan of course we lost 44 heroes unfortunately but I think we are, of course gratified to know that this very dangerous, very much sought after terrorist has finally been eliminated

Gentiles said he coordinated the DNA testing of Marwan's sample at an FBI laboratory in Quantico, Virginia.

"So yung result nung preliminary testing indicate na yung tissues na sinubmit na kay Marwan matches yung tissues ng kapatid niya na nanduduon sa Guantanamo Cuba nakakulong. It appears that based dun sa findings nila that they are siblings, that they come from the same father. So yun po yung result na nung DNA analysis," he said.

He said the results are preliminary only and that further testing and analysis will be conducted to fully identify the subject of the DNA provided by the PNP.

Mamasapano survivor: We waited 16 hours for rescue

MANILA - It was the 16 longest hours in the life of Special Action Force (SAF) commando SPO4 Bill Fernando Jumalon, one of the few who survived the bloody encounter with Muslim rebels in Maguindanao last month.

Jumalon was part of the SAF team on a mission to capture one of the world's most wanted terrorists hiding in a remote village in Mamasapano.

The operation went haywire when they figured in separate clashes with the separatist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation (MILF) in the early hours of Jan. 25.

A total of 44 SAF police commandos were killed and several others wounded.

Several civilians and Muslim rebels were also killed in the firefight, including Malaysian bomber Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan. The other target of the mission, Basit Usman, escaped.

Although they have neutralized Marwan, the SAF policemen came under attack from different directions.

Jumalon was part of the SAF team composed of 41 commandos that assaulted Marwan and Usman's hideout in Barangay Pidsandawan.

Out of the 41, eight were killed and the rest wounded in the initial attack.

Jumalon and his surviving colleagues were pinned down by automatic gunfire from the rebels, unable to escape.

In nearby Barangay Tukanilipao, the rebels killed 35 out of 36 SAF commandos tasked as a blocking force to help the assault team.

Jumalon said they radioed for help and waited for rescue for several hours.

Jumalon gave his statement before the Cotabato Police on Jan. 27, two days after the carnage. He and his comrades were taken to the hospital for treatment and debriefing after the incident.

He recalled their group, stationed in their base in Sultan Kudarat, left for their mission at around 8 p.m. on Jan. 24.

When they reached their rendezvous area in Mamasapano, they divided themselves into four teams with Superintendent Raymund Train as the overall ground commander of the police operation.

“After a long walk and crossing the river we arrived at our target at around 4 a.m., two hours behind from the given time due to the terrain and high tide,” Jumalon said.

“We converged then to the objective rallying point before executing a final launch to our target.”

After a few minutes, Jumalon said they proceeded with the plan for him and two snipers with a M240 gunner.

He said two teams would do the actual assault while another team would attack the sentries.

Jumalon said gunfire started from the two teams attacking Marwan’s house while he and his colleagues helped in attacking the sentries.

A few minutes after the exchange of gunfire, Jumalon said they returned to the their designated converging area and waited for the assault team to catch up.

“There it was confirmed to us by Train that they have successfully neutralized our target (Marwan). I also noticed that one member of the Team 1, PO2 Lozano, was wounded,” he said.

Jumalon said the team decided to withdraw from the area.

He said they crossed the river in the area to link up with the 55th Special Action Company and the rest of the blocking force stationed in Barangay Tukanalipao.

According to Jumalon, Train made several calls for a support and reinforcements even before the attack came.

“While on our way withdrawing more or less one kilometer, we noticed a small number of houses. Upon checking, it appears to be a small camp/detachment of BIFF/Armed Group,” he recalled. “We then stopped to take cover for an hour and rest.”

But at 8 a.m., Jumalon said their team decided to change their original exit plan to evade the BIFF.

After two hours of walking, they rested. It was then that a young boy spotted them and alerted the BIFF rebels in the area.

“After a few seconds, firing commenced from the BIFF targeting us. Firefight lasted for almost two hours and after which one of our comrades was hit at the elbow,” Jumalon said, identifying the wounded as PO1 Yaumaldin Reneda.

Jumalon said Train again made a frantic call through a cellular phone to the command post for immediate reinforcement.

“We’re already surrounded by the enemies,” Jumalon said, quoting Train.

“Many times I heard our ground commander frantically called for support and reinforcement through his cellular phone, beginning from our extracting point and up to the time that we were surrounded and attacked by the enemy,” he said.

At noon, Jumalon said they decided to hold the line and remain in position since they were already tired from carrying their wounded and from the long walk.

SAF commandos recall 24-hour ordeal

MANILA - Two police commandos stood out in the daring covert operations that led to the killing of Malaysian terrorist Zulkilfi bin Hir in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last month.

The police operation, however, came at a steep price – the lives of 44 operatives of the elite Special Action Force (SAF).

The two brave and strong-willed policemen endured probably the worst 24 hours of their lives in the battlefield starting from 2:30 a.m. to past 5 p.m. when they were extricated by government forces.

Just like in the movies, Superintendent Raymond Train and PO2 Christopher Lalan, along with other survivors, narrated to their superiors the daylong gunfight with Muslim rebels.

They are ready to tell their stories before the Senate today.

Train and his men of the SAF's 84th Seaborne Company led the assault on the hideout of Zulkifli, also known as Marwan.

Train lost many of his men, including Senior Inspector Gednat Tabdi, who severed the index finger of Marwan for DNA analysis.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation confirmed in its initial analysis that the DNA sample taken from Marwan matched those of his elder brother Rahmat, a naturalized US citizen currently serving his sentence for conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists.

Meanwhile, Lalan was the lone survivor of the 55th SAF Company ambushed by Muslim rebels as they provided a blocking force for Train's group on the way back.

The 55th SAF Company led by Inspector Ryan Pabalinas were killed when they were attacked from all directions.

As Train's team moved out of the rebel's lair after neutralizing Marwan, they were met with heavy gunfire. For hours, the group took cover and crawled on the ground.

Initially, the police commandos did not want to engage the rebels but they were forced to return fire in self-defense after they were attacked with automatic gunfire and mortars.

Before noon, Train said his men were getting hit each minute while on the run. Three of the SAF policemen had to be dragged by their comrades from the scene. Train earlier ordered his men to hold the line and wait for nightfall before moving out. At past 1 p.m., some 24 police commandos were pinned down by enemy fire.

"We literally had to hug the ground to avoid getting hit," Train said.

There were three waves of mortar attacks with many seriously wounded, Train said.

"That was when my men started to die," Train told his superiors.

Behind enemy lines

Under the hail of bullets, Train called SAF commander Director Getulio Napeñas for reinforcements. Napeñas was then monitoring the operations from Shariff Aguak town.

Sources said Napeñas and his deputy, Chief Superintendent Noli Taliño, were monitoring the distress calls from their men in the field.

A text message and calls were also sent to suspended national police chief Director General Alan Purisima.

Napeñas claimed he tried to ask PNP headquarters for help and the military for reinforcement but his pleas apparently fell on deaf ears.

The rebels used mortars in pressing their attack on the beleaguered policemen in the area between 2 to 3 p.m.

Other SAF teams, including the 45th Company, were deployed to rescue the 55th company but they were repulsed by enemy fire.

Train said his team was pinned by sniper fire that prevented them from running to safer ground.

The artillery attack came at about 6 p.m., then deafening silence throughout the night.

Train said they waited to recover their strength to get out of the area again as nighttime approached.

At an abandoned nipa hut, Train and his men, with some severely wounded – waited and planned their tactical exit from the area. Then they decided to wait for rescue.

“We found them, they survived,” another source told The STAR, quoting a member of a special team formed to rescue Train and the rest of the SAF troopers which arrived at 11: 30 p.m. of Jan. 25.

The SAF survivors, all wounded, were airlifted at around 1:30 a.m. the next day.

The takedown

Awakened by the noise from the approaching SAF troopers, Marwan opened fire at the policemen.

“The target turned off the light inside his hut, so we took it as a sign that we got the right hut,” Train was quoted as telling his superiors in his debriefing.

Train said his men encircled the hut then fired back, fatally hitting the target in the chest.

Two other suspects were able to run away before Marwan opened fire. Marwan reportedly hit a coconut tree that fell on one of the raiding policemen.

Upon sensing no movement inside the target’s house, they went inside where Tabdi severed the index finger of the target for DNA analysis. The team also took pictures of the slain target.

In the debriefing, Train provided a timeline on how his team infiltrated their target before dawn as 36 commandos, one by one, crossed a muddy river in a bid to reach Marwan’s hideout.

About 400 meters away from the river, the first batch of 13 commandos located the suspect’s nipa hut, based on the description of the still unnamed informant.

They traversed an unfamiliar terrain, a muddy river, a vast cornfield in the territory shared by the separatist Bangsamoro Islamic Liberation Front (BIFF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

According to Train, the assault team jumped off for the mission at around 2:30 a.m. on Jan. 25. About 45 minutes later, only 13 troopers were able to cross the river using buoys and safety lines.

Due to the strong current, Train's team took longer to cross the river in going to Marwan's hideout.

Not wanting to lose time, Train said he and his team proceeded to walk about 400 meters towards the target house.

At around 4 a.m., Train and his men were able to positively identify Marwan's hut.

The firefight lasted about 15 minutes. Another target, Abdul Basit Usman, who was reportedly at another nipa hut about 70 to 100 meters away, managed to escape.

American involvement

Sources revealed the US military was involved in the operation in providing intelligence information to the SAF team.

A team of US military officers was with Napeñas, Taliño and the Army's 6th Infantry Division commander Major Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan.

SAF braved unfavorable terrain, armed groups for Marwan op'

MANILA - The head of the PNP Board of Inquiry has promised to give justice to the 44 Special Action Force troopers killed in the Mamasapano encounter.

Police director Benjamin Magalong made that promise after presenting to senators the initial facts of the BOI's probe into the bloody incident.

Magalong said the operation did not go as planned because of so many factors - from the terrain in Barangay Tukanalipao to the presence of armed groups in the area.

"The plan spelled out for the employment of 392 SAF troopers assigned to 12 different operating groups for the mission."

"One group was assigned as the main effort for a support effort, 2 groups as blocking forces and 2 groups for route security. An advance command post and a tactical command post were established for command and control. The area of operations was located in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. It is basically a marshland criss-crossed by rivers, with wide open cornfields and irrigation canals. This is a bird's eye view of the area shown to illustrate the unfavorable terrain that SAF operatives had to contend with."

"The 84th Special Action Company or well known as seaborne was designated as the main effort of the operation. It was tasked to enter Marwan's encampment and arrest Marwan and Usman. The plan called for the deployment of the 55th, 45th, 42nd, and 41st Special Action Companies as containment forces along the entry and exit routes of the seaborne."

"The exit plan called for the support containment forces to withdraw, provide cover and security for the seaborne troops as they withdrew along the plan route. As can be seen in the comparison maps, there is a gap between the plan and the actual. Except for the seaborne unit, the other units did not reach their designated positions. The movement of the seaborne took about 2 hours longer than planned. They were delayed by the difficult terrain and the strong river current near the target. The departure of the support groups accordingly were delayed because the plan called for synchronization of their movement with that of the seaborne. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the seaborne was still able to reach its objective and neutralize 'Marwan'."

"Seaborne made its exit from the target area under fire but still followed the planned route until waypoint 14. Seaborne troops were determined to reinforce 55th SAC. But because of the tremendous firepower and strength of the opposition, the TCP or the Tactical Command Post and 55th SAC advised them not to proceed with the linkup and instead move east. By this time, both seaborne and 55th SAC were under heavy rifle and mortar fire. While moving, the seaborne teams engaged various armed groups from all directions. For hours until late in the afternoon...they fought their way out, dragging their killed and wounded comrades."

"In honor of the 44 heroes and the 15 wounded, the Board of Inquiry is committed to complete its task of finding out what happened. We will give justice to our SAF heroes by seeking the truth."

Officer confirms man in video is SAF trooper

The commanding officer of the Special Action Force's (SAF) 5th Special Action Battalion confirmed during Wednesday's House inquiry that the man shown in a video clip being shot at close range was a trooper of the SAF.

Lawmakers were debating Wednesday whether they should air the video, which also showed unidentified men taking magazines and other ammunition from several fallen men in camouflage uniforms.

"I saw the video. I can also identify the person in that video. Yes, Sir, he is a SAF officer assigned in 55th Special Action Company," Supt. Rey Ariño said.

Meanwhile, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) director Benjamin Magalong, who heads the Board of Inquiry tasked to investigate the Mamasapano encounter, also confirmed that he has seen the video.

He, however, refused to give any comment, saying they have yet validate and authenticate the video clip.

SAF survivors open up to senators

MANILA, Philippines - Superintendent Raymond Train and PO2 Christopher Lalan, two of the Special Action Force (SAF) police commandos who survived the Mamasapano firefight, yesterday narrated the fierce battle they had to endure in a bid to escape the bloody encounter with Muslim rebels that left 44 of their comrades dead in Maguindanao last Jan. 25.

Train and Lalan gave their statements before the senators who went into executive session at around 4:30 p.m. after almost seven hours of open hearing that started at 10 a.m. at the plenary hall.

Senators were all ears as Train recalled events which started when he and his team of 36 operatives began their trek to the lair of terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, at 2:30 a.m. from their drop-off point near Maharlika Highway.

Train led the SAF's 84th Seaborne Company in the assault on Marwan's hut, located 250 meters from the drop-off point. Only 13 of the assault team were able to cross the river because of strong currents.

In a debriefing, Train said he and 12 of his men proceeded with the plan to get Marwan since the others were having difficulty crossing the river. He added some of his men almost drowned in trying to get across.

Train and his men reached the target at 4:15 p.m. Marwan opened fire at the SAF team after he was alerted by the presence of the lawmen surrounding his hut.

After the initial exchange of gunfire, SAF commandos attacked the hut and Marwan was shot in the chest. The team quickly took pictures of Marwan and severed his index finger, which was later turned over to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation for DNA test.

Train said they decided to immediately withdraw from the area, fearing the exchange of fire could have alerted villagers.

Another target, Basit Usman, was able to escape the assault. His hut was about 70 meters away from Marwan's.

Train also responded to queries of senators about how they managed to get out of the area up to the time they were rescued by a special team at 11:30 p.m. as validated by the Philippine National Police's Board of Inquiry.

Lalan, meanwhile, told the senators that he hid near a river dike as many of his 35 comrades crawled in the vast cornfields, then still awaiting rescue.

Appendix C

Articles focusing on the Mamasapano Clash Itself

Death toll in Mamasapano carnage now at 49 - ARMM police

MANILA – The death toll in Sunday's clash between policemen and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Force (MILF) is now at 49, a local police official said.

Senior Superintendent Noel Armilla, Philippine National Police officer-in-charge for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), said he still has no information how many among the 49 fatalities were policemen and MILF members.

Armilla said at least 11 were wounded.

He could also not confirm whether a civilian was killed in Sunday's bloodshed.

Earlier reports put the death toll among members of the PNP Special Action Force and MILF at 30 and 4, respectively.

The clash between the MILF members and the elite cops occurred as the latter were supposed to arrest Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman, a Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-making expert, in Tukanalipao village.

The MILF, however, said the bloody clash erupted due to the lack of coordination between the police and the proper governing bodies.

Speaking to dzMM, Iqbal said the police personnel should have first coordinated with the Ceasefire Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and the Ad Hoc

Joint Action Group (AHJAG) before conducting their operation in the MILF-controlled area.

According to Armilla, the PNP SAF informed the ARMM Police about the operation at around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, but he noted that the gun battle erupted at around 3 a.m. that day.

Police have already retrieved 29 of the bodies of the slain policemen.

Bangsamoro Basic Law

Sunday's clash threatens to stall the progress in the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, a product of the peace talks between the government and the MILF.

Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., chair of the Senate Committee on Local Government, earlier ordered the temporary suspension of all discussions and hearings related to the passage of the law following the Sunday clash.

Muntinlupa Rep. Rodolfo Biazon, chair of the defense committee at the lower house, has also asked the ad hoc committee on the Bangsamoro to suspend deliberations on the proposed law pending the submission of reports on the latest skirmishes in Mindanao.

Top officials from both the government and the MILF said the deadly clashes should not delay proceedings for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

“It is not logical for anybody to delay the process of making the BBL into law because it will be disadvantageous to all parties concerned,” MILF vice chairman for political Affairs Ghadzali Jaafar told reporters.

In a separate press release, government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer said the Philippines' resolve to push for the creation of a Bangsamoro political entity is further strengthened.

“This incident and other recent acts of violence by other armed groups manifest the diverse security challenges that confound the peace process. But our resolve to see through the process of legislating the Bangsamoro Basic Law and implementing the different Normalization programs, including the security components, is only further strengthened. With better cooperation we will be able to prevent these kinds of incidents,” she said. - with a report from Edwin Sevidal, dzMM

LGU, civilians also did not know of PNP-SAF operations

MANILA - Local government authorities and civilians were also not informed of the operations of the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday.

ABS-CBN News' Lore Mae Andong quoted Mamasapano Mayor Benzar Ampatuan as saying that operations against lawless elements are usually coordinated with the local government.

She added the civilians only learned of the operations when the clashes started.

Members of the elite PNP group were killed during a clash with Muslim rebels on Sunday. They were supposedly after Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir aka Marwan, but the alleged lack of coordination resulted in a clash with MILF forces.

There is still conflicting data on the number of casualties, but Ampatuan said 34 bodies have been recovered so far.

Authorities say there is already relative silence in the area, but the situation remains volatile.

Around 1,200 individuals left their homes when the incident happened. A few were seen returning to their homes as of Monday morning.

43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces

Board of inquiry created to probe deadly operation

MANILA - The "misencounter" between policemen and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Sunday, which resulted in 43 elite cops killed, is the worst for government security forces in recent memory.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas described the incident, which happened in the town of Mamasapano, Maguindanao, as "single largest loss of lives in recent memory involving our security forces."

Roxas said the operation was against Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, and another terrorist, Basit Usman.

Marwan was "highly likely" killed in the operation, while Usman may have escaped, he said.

Roxas said, "there are pieces of evidence, pictures of a person that appears to be Marwan. This will be part of the post-action debriefing so that there will be corroborative information from several operatives."

Philippine National Police officer-in-charge (OIC) Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina said the Philippine National Police Special Action Forces (PNP SAF) were already withdrawing from Marwan's bailiwick when members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) attacked.

The PNP SAF members then "inadvertently" entered an MILF area, Roxas said.

“We are fully committed to the peace process. It’s a law enforcement operation. Hindi ito sabotahe sa peace talks,” he stressed.

Roxas believes the attractiveness of the US\$5 million bounty offered for the head of Marwan is only an incidental issue, following reports the cops allegedly did not coordinate their actions in a bid to get the bounty.

“I won’t discount it, that is why there is the board of inquiry... but it’s just an incidental issue, as far as I am concerned,” he said.

'BOARD OF INQUIRY'

Espina said he wants a full accounting of all the 392 members of an elite force deployed to run after the terrorists.

Asked about the pursuit operations against those responsible for the incident, Espina said: “I want a full accounting [of my men], ilan ang nasugatan, ilan ang buhay... First things first.”

He said he will not leave Cotabato until all his men have been accounted for. He said they will be given all the benefits and honors they deserve.

He added he will create a board of inquiry to complete the whole story, including allegations that the operation was not coordinated with the MILF.

“We are forming a board of inquiry because we’d like to get to the bottom of this. Our fallen heroes sacrificed their lives for the attainment of peace,” Espina said.

DND assures no spillover of Mamasapano clash

MANILA - The Department of National Defense (DND) vowed to help in going after those responsible for the killings of more than 40 members of the Philippine National Police-Special Action Force (PNP-SAF) during a clash in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday.

Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin said the military is helping the police in the pursuit operations.

The military is also taking steps to make sure that there will be no spillover of the fighting, he added.

Gazmin assured that the terrorists, who were the subject of the SAF operations, would not be able to escape to other places.

Despite the high number of casualties, it cannot still be confirmed whether Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan was one of those who were killed Sunday.

The alleged lack of coordination with MILF forces allegedly led to the clash. The number of casualties has risen to 49 as of Monday afternoon, most of whom came from the SAF side.

Gazmin said the SAF had coordinated the operation, but only on the tactical level.

Why soldiers didn't help cops in Maguindanao

MANILA, Philippines - Army troops stationed in the area were aware of the encounter between guerrillas of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Special Action Force (SAF) troops in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday, but failed to send reinforcements because their hands were tied by the government's ceasefire agreement.

Sources said the police commandos, running low on ammunition, waited for military reinforcements that never came.

“When the heavy skirmishes started, our men fighting a lopsided battle requested for reinforcement from their Army counterparts but after hours of holding their ground nobody came,” a SAF officer said.

Several army units have forward bases at Datu Saudi Ampatuan and Datu Piang, two towns near the encounter site in Mamasapano.

Capt. Jo-Anne Petinglay, 6th Infantry Division spokesman based in Awang, Maguindanao, said Army troops did not get involved in the fighting in the absence of prior coordination from SAF about operations against Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan.

An official, who asked not be named, said no prior coordination was made on the SAF's anti-terror operation, but that troops on the ground knew where the SAF commandos were headed.

“Yes, we did not coordinate as we don't want any leak,” he said. “But was it correct to just let your brother-in-arms die in the hands of the enemy?”

A middle-grade Army officer said Army troops were ready to reinforce the police commandos, but that their hands were tied by the government's ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Force (MILF).

If Army troops had joined the fighting, it could have resulted in more casualties on the government side, he added.

The Army officer said police commandos could have mistook the Army troops as the enemy and vice versa.

Army troops could not also just enter the area as the prevailing situation on the ground was then very fluid and could have resulted in a "mis-encounter," he added.

Fighting stopped after the MILF panel initiated moves for a ceasefire to allow police reinforcements to collect and extricate the bodies of their fallen comrades with the help of US forces.

The official said US soldiers were seen on the ground helping retrieve the bodies of slain police commandos. The bodies were loaded onto US helicopters.

The MILF and BIFF used the ceasefire to retreat to their areas of control in barangay Pidsandawan, Mamasapano and barangays Linantangan and Lusay in Shariff Saydona.

MILF, BIFF TRAP SAF TROOPS

An MILF brigade joined the BIFF in firing mortars and rockets against two companies of outnumbered SAF troops caught in a pinch in Mamasapano town, according to the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

As of press time, MNLF field commanders reported heavy movement of MILF and BIFF guerrillas in the area, MNLF spokesman Absalom Cerveza told The STAR in a telephone interview.

“The situation is very fluid, anything can happen,” he said.

Cerveza said the MNLF field commander near the scene reported heavy fighting from 5 a.m. Sunday until noon.

The police commandos were pinned down with constant firing from some 300 BIFF snipers hidden among coconut trees and in tall grass, he added. – Jaime Laude, Perseus Echeminada

Mamasapano clash was overkill: ex-DILG chief

MANILA - Don't call it a "misencounter" but a massacre.

This is the opinion of former Interior and Local Government Secretary Rafael Alunan on the killing of 44 Philippine National-Special Action Forces commandos in an encounter with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday.

Alunan said a "misencounter" usually happens between two friendly forces after each side fails to identify each other.

"It happens when both sides fail to identify each other. Gunshots are fired but when one gets to identify a friendly, they stop. they order a ceasefire. In this particular case, the firing was fast, furious and continuous and massacred more than (40) people. It was an overkill and not a misencounter. It was a plain and simple massacre," he said in an ANC Dateline Philippines interview.

Forty-four PNP-SAF men were killed while 12 others were wounded in the encounter with MILF rebels in Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas earlier described the clash as a misencounter, saying the police commandos were hunting two "high-value" militants when they ran into a group of rebels who thought the police were mounting an attack.

Roxas said the PNP has formed a board of inquiry that will investigate possible operational lapses that led to the encounter with Moro rebels.

He said the inquiry will look into the culpability and liability of officers or men who led the SAF operation as well as the external liability of the attackers.

He noted that the operation was not coordinated with the command group of the PNP. "Malalaman na lang lahat yan sa board of inquiry," he said.

Mohagher Iqbal, head of the rebel peace panel, said the police failed to coordinate their operations with the ceasefire committee.

"They entered our area and attacked us, what are we going to do?" he asked.
"What happened was self-defense."

Iqbal said he was confident the peace deal would not be affected because both sides were committed to it.

CHAIN OF COMMAND MUST ANSWER

Alunan, however, said the clash should have stopped immediately after the MILF recognized the PNP-SAF commandos as government forces.

"The firing took place over a period of one day or at least several hours and the commandos were dressed in proper uniforms. They are easily identifiable. It was not that the MILF did not know how SAF commandos are dressed. The SAF commandos are all over the place and they have been dealing with them in the past so they know what SAF commandos look like in the field," he said.

"For them to say they were surprised by the SAF and acted in self-defense is a lot of BS."

Alunan said the protocol for special operations varies especially if there are serious doubts about the reliability or dependability of supposedly friendly forces.

The former DILG chief urged the government to investigate reports that members of the 105th and 106th brigades of the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a breakaway group led by Ameril Umbrakato, were cohabitating in the area where the SAF men were attacked.

He said he received reports the SAF group, numbering 392 police commandos, went straight to the BIFF encampment to get terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman, a Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-making expert, in Tukanalipao village and were attacked on their way out.

"If those facts were correct, it only proves that the MILF acted in bad faith. They were very treacherous and it only raises to the fore that they are not really a sincere partner in the peace process," he said.

Alunan said that even before the deadly clash, there were some people who have been disappointed with the ongoing peace negotiations between the MILF and the government after some sectors were excluded in the talks.

He said the clash "sort of validated their views that [the MILF] is not really a sincere partner for peace."

Alunan said the investigation should start from the top of the chain of command, noting that the SAF will not conduct an operation without orders.

He pointed out that after Islamic extremists raided Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur in 1995, then President Ramos ordered the immediate relief of three top police and military commanders to pave the way for an investigation.

"The SAF is an operating force. They were ordered to do something. Now there are people above them who are supposed to coordinate, who are supposed to thoroughly review and vet their operational plans. They are the ones who decided to give the green light. It is not just the Special Action Force but the entire chain of command [who should] answer for this," he said.

He added that Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr., who is in charge of the anti-terror council, should also shed light on the incident.

"Something as strategic as this operation, which calls for arresting an international fugitive with a price on his head must be, should have been and must have been vetted by the anti-terror council," he said.

He also urged the MILF to present the fighters responsible for the massacre of the PNP-SAF men.

"They are supposed to be friendly forces and they have no business killing our people. If the MILF is sincere about this - they should present all of those people responsible for the massacre," he said.

Tales of brutality in Mamasapano clash

MANILA - Villagers in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have come forward with stories on how Moro rebels brutally killed Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos during an encounter last Sunday.

Some villagers said some of the wounded policemen were mercilessly gunned down as they struggled to escape the rebels.

They said the rebels killed the wounded with gunshots to the head and collected their weapons and other equipment.

Another villager, who asked to be identified only as Hamim, said some rebels even stomped on the heads of the slain policemen before firing shots at them. Some of the locals said the SAF men battled some 300 MILF fighters.

The remains of the SAF members were brought to the mortuary of the Army's 6th Infantry Division in Camp Siongco in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Police forensic experts said many of the slain policemen had powder burns in the bullet entry points, indicating they had been shot at close range.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu, who was at the 6th ID's morgue yesterday, condoled with the families of the slain policemen and appealed for sobriety.

"I'm also appealing to people in other parts of the country to help us pray for a peaceful resolution of this incident. We don't want this to affect the ongoing peace efforts of the Aquino administration and the MILF. The peace process must continue," Mangudadatu said.

Mangudadatu said he has directed his chief budget staff, Lynette Estandarte, to extend assistance and food provisions to relatives of the slain policemen who are now at Camp Siongco, waiting for the release of their loved ones' remains.

Major Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of the 6th ID, said the incident – while tragic – should provide more “pressing reasons” for the government and the MILF to pursue peace.

Pangilinan said tension in Mamasapano has eased and Army units in the area are now helping government agencies in relief activities.

In a statement, Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) also said the carnage should not derail the peace initiatives by the government and the MILF.

“As always, it’s the civilians that suffer most from the brunt of armed conflicts,” said Hataman.

The MILF leadership yesterday stood pat on its assertion that the “misencounter” was triggered by the failure of the PNP to coordinate the activities of the SAF in the area with the joint ceasefire committee.

The committee is composed of representatives from the MILF, the PNP and the Armed Forces.

What CHR thinks of Mamasapano 'misencounter'

MANILA – The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) is welcoming the creation of a board of inquiry which will investigate Sunday's bloody clash in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, in which at least 44 elite cops and several Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) fighters died.

CHR chairperson Etta Rosales noted that while the director of PNP-SAF, Leo Napeñas, has been administratively relieved, "the PNP leadership has yet to identify who cleared the operation."

"The Board of Inquiry must proceed with its work and in due course help bring to light the operational parameters and failures that could constitute criminal negligence," Rosales said in a statement.

In a press conference on Tuesday, PNP officer-in-charge Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina said the PNP's top brass were not informed of the Mamasapano raid.

Interior Secretary Mar Roxas said the operation was meant to arrest a high-value target, Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan.

Rosales said the MILF must also assess the operational responsibility of its forces, in observance of human rights and international humanitarian law standards.

"From a human rights-based perspective, the principle of accountability must be emphasized," she said.

"The sacrifice of our special forces demand no less than an honest assessment of the individual accountability in accordance with the principle of command responsibility."

The MILF leadership is blaming the lack of coordination for the bloodshed. It said the MILF troops on the ground were not informed of the police operation.

But some observers are questioning the MILF's justification for Sunday's incident, especially after some SAF survivors claimed there was excessive use of force that led to the deaths of the 44 police commandos.

Rosales pointed out that certain mechanisms, such as the Committee for the Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and the International Monitoring Team (IMT), have been put up precisely to prevent such an incident from happening.

She noted that a similar incident in Al-Barka, Basilan, which resulted in the death of 19 Armed Forces of the Philippines soldiers. She said in the October 2011 incident, the soldiers were also supposed to serve warrants of arrests on high-value criminal suspects.

"Law enforcement and international security operations must be conducted with utmost professionalism, discipline and compliance with the approved rules," she said.

Rosales also warned those with ulterior motives from using the incident in pushing for their agenda.

"We urge those who are angling to scuttle the Mindanao peace process to desist from exploiting the noble sacrifice of our special forces to achieve their ulterior motives.

If at all, this incident has impressed upon all stakeholders the urgency of passing the Bangsamoro Basic Law," she said.

Senators seek probe into deadly Mamasapano clash

MANILA - Three separate resolutions have been filed at the Senate seeking to investigate the clash between the elite forces of the Philippine National Police and rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Senators TG Guingona, Grace Poe, and Jinggoy Estrada have all urged various committees in the Senate to look into the incident in aid of legislation.

In her resolution, Poe said the death of dozens of members of the PNP-Special Action force could indicate "possible lapses in tactics and training" and a lack in "operational doctrines, equipment and resources."

Poe said there is a need to map out the functions of the PNP and the AFP especially in operations against wanted criminals suspected to be holed out in areas controlled by rebel groups.

Guingona believes an inquiry into the incident will prevent "distractions from the peace process" and "indiscriminate and wholesale condemnation of the people of Mindanao."

From inside his detention center in Camp Crame, Estrada also filed a resolution calling on his colleagues in the Senate to look into the incident.

Estrada said protocol and conduct in police operations need to be reviewed to prevent unnecessary loss of life.

Estrada also wants to know if the PNP should solely handle arrests of international terrorists.

Meanwhile, Senate President Franklin Drilon is calling on the leadership of the MILF to surrender Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters commander Basit Usman and other rebels involved in the Mamapasano clash. Drilon said the move will show goodwill and demonstrate the MILF's commitment to peace talks.

The Mamapasano clash has cast a shadow of doubt on the MILF's sincerity amid negotiations for the Bangsamoro Basic law. Two Senators, Alan Peter Cayetano and JV Ejercito, have withdrawn co-authorship of the BBL after the clash.

Mamasapano mayor says clash area is MILF community

MANILA – The mayor of Mamasapano town in Maguindanao said the area where a bloody clash occurred between the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippine National Police and rebels is hard to enter.

In an interview over DZMM, Mayor Tahirodin Benzar Ampatuan said anyone intending to enter Barangay Tukanalipao must first coordinate with local commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

“Dahil po ito sa declared community sila ng MILF,” Ampatuan said.

“Para sa kaalaman ng lahat, kung saan po pumasok ang SAF is isolated na po siya eh. ‘Yong area po na yon is talagang napakahirap pasukin,” he added.

He also confirmed that the only way to reach the area is through a bridge over a certain river.

“Sa pagkakalam ko, ‘di po nalaman agad even po yung mga civilian natin, kasi ‘di po sila (SAF) dumaan mismo kumbaga sa mga karamihan ng mga residente. Parang meron po silang ibang dinaanan kaya pati po tayo nagtataka kung saan po sila dumaan papasok.”

“Kasi po minsan po ang mga SAF special training po sila, baka po dumaan sila sa may tubig o hindi pa po natin alam kung ano yong mga kanilang ginawa para po makapsok,” Ampatuan added.

Ampatuan said he only learned about the SAF operation on Sunday morning, when policemen from the provincial office and soldiers came to his house.

“Tinanaong po nila ako kung ano ang pwede nating maitulong, kaya tumawag po tayo agad-agad sa lokal na mga opisyal po.”

“Tinanong po natin kung anong status po sa loob, at saka tinanong po natin ‘yong kapitan na andoon po sa loob mismo. Sabi po, ang hirap na po nito hintuin dahil napakalakas na po ng putukan sa loob.”

Ampatuan also confirmed that a woman was tied up in the area where the clash occurred.

He said authorities are still investigating if the woman was affiliated with any group. She has been returned to her husband.

Ampatuan added that the situation is almost back to normal in Mamasapano. He also said that almost all evacuees have returned to their homes.

Mamasapano evacuees reluctant to return home

MAGUINDANAO, Philippines – A majority of the 1,324 families displaced in the firefight between Special Action Force police officers and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last Jan. 25 are reluctant to return to their homes, according to the Humanitarian Emergency Assistance and Response Team (HEART) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

HEART said most of the displaced residents prefer to stay with their relatives in nearby barangays or in makeshift evacuation sites for fear that the hostilities would escalate. The group distributed relief supplies to the displaced villagers on Wednesday.

HEART said the evacuees are from Barangays Tukanalipao and Mangapang, the site of the encounter.

At least two civilians were killed and another was wounded when they were caught in the crossfire during the encounter.

The fatalities were identified as Badrudin Nanganlan, 21, and Sarah Sampulna Panangulon, 5.

Saat Manadal, 16, suffered a gunshot wound in the chest and is fighting for his life at the Cotabato Regional Medical Center.

The firefight, which lasted for 10 hours, killed 44 SAF men.

Rashid Ladiasan, chairman of the MILF's coordinating committee on the cessation of hostilities, said the encounter also left 14 MILF rebels dead.

Palace denies US involvement in Mamasapano ops

MANILA - Malacanang said the United States did not have a role in the Mamasapano operation against two bomb makers connected to the Al Qaeda network.

Communications Secretary Herminio Coloma, Jr. told radio dzMM: "Ito po ay operasyon ng Republika ng Pilipinas at ng mga law enforcement at armed forces po natin."

The US also denied the allegations.

"The FBI was not involved in the planning or execution of the operation. We do express our deepest condolences to the brave officers of the Philippine National Police who lost their lives in the line of duty," FBI spokesman Josh Campbell said, in a report from Reuters.

Militants, however, believe otherwise.

Bagong Alyansang Makabayan secretary general Renato Reyes Jr. said the "actionable intelligence" against Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan and Basit Usman came from the US.

"Aquino is trying to appease public outrage by ordering the filing of charges against some MILF and BIFF commanders. This however does little to uncover the truth behind the Mamasapano operation. The public is demanding accountability from the highest official of the land for authorizing a covert operation, under the direction of a foreign government, undermining the peace process and sacrificing the lives of the SAF and local residents," he said.

Mamasapano carnage scaring away investors - business group

Members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and civilians pay tribute to the 44 fallen Special Action Forces (SAF) officers during the necrological rites at Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig Friday. Photo by Gigie Cruz for ABS-CBNnews.com

COTABATO - A bloodbath in the southern Philippines has placed at risk billions of pesos in potential investment, a business leader in the region said Monday.

At least three foreign firms looking to partner with local businessmen have put investments on hold after a deadly clash between Philippine forces and Muslim rebels, Mohamad Omar Pasigan, president of the Bangsamoro Business Club, told AFP.

The botched anti-terror operation on January 25 left 44 police commandos dead in the southern island of Mindanao, along with at least 11 rebels.

"Security is everything for businessmen out to make a profit... They know when to take a risk and when to pull out," Pasigan said.

"They are willing to come here and invest, but then this fighting happened."

The value of investments on hold due to the fighting, in the real estate and agriculture sectors, is estimated at "billions" of pesos, he said.

Malaysian businessmen due to arrive on Monday to inspect sites in Cotabato city have cancelled their trip, Pasigan said. The group was looking to build small hotels and department stores.

Jordanian businessmen looking to invest in up to 50 hectares (123 acres) of banana farms left abruptly on Sunday without finalising a deal, he added, while

Singaporean and Malaysian partners seeking to replicate their mini shopping mall business in Johor Baru said they were postponing their investment.

Pasigan declined to name the businessmen since their plans were not finalised. He said his group was helping foreigners find local partners.

Philippine laws prohibit foreign nationals from owning a majority of local businesses.

The firefight between police commandos and Muslim rebels on January 25 broke a long-standing ceasefire and endangered a peace treaty signed in March 2013.

Economic planning secretary Arsenio Balisacan acknowledged that the government must quickly bring calm to the region.

"The perception of risk is bad for business... At this point, (the fighting) doesn't have any significant impact but again it's closure we need," he told reporters recently.

Balisacan said the south, wracked by decades of conflict that has left tens of thousands dead, had the potential to be a growth driver, given its fertile land for agriculture and rich mineral deposits.

"It's a missed opportunity if we don't resolve this problem at the soonest time possible," he said.

Miriam: Commander liable for Mamasapano carnage

MANILA - Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago said the military commander and other superior officials may be liable for the Mamasapano carnage.

In a statement, Santiago said the death of 44 elite cops constitutes an atrocity, which means punitive laws against war crimes should apply.

Santiago called the Mamasapano incident a massacre, but can be properly categorized as a “non-international armed conflict.”

She said the “massacre” of the 44 elite cops meets the highest threshold and level of intensity of a non-international armed conflict.

In this case, the military commander or person has committed a crime under the International Criminal Court Rome Charter, she said.

Two factors should be present, she said.

“First, the commander either knew or should have known that his forces were about to commit such crimes. Second, the military commander or person failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures to suppress the commission of the crime,” she added.

The President is the commander-in-chief.

President Aquino said the operation against Marwan and another terrorist, Basit Usman, was an “actionable intelligence” signifying that security authorities needed to act immediately. He said there was no need to inform him of an actionable operation, but insisted there should be coordination with other forces.

SAF chief Police Director Getulio Napeñas Jr. was relieved of his post last Tuesday.

Santiago also raised the question as to whether or not the Mamasapano incident was an “internationalized conflict,” or if there was another state that was party to the conflict.

She said foreign help from the likes of the CIA, which could be part of the worldwide campaign against counter-terrorism, would complicate matters.

“If the Philippine government received help from the CIA, then the rebels under international law would argue that they have a right of counter-intervention from their own friendly state,” she said.

She added internationalized armed conflicts are also subject to international laws.

She said the military commander and other superior officers found guilty should be punished according to “rules derived from established customs, from the principles of humanity, and from the dictates of public conscience, also known as the Marten’s Clause.”

Santiago, an international law expert, was earlier elected judge of the International Criminal Court but had to decline due to cancer.

Mamasapano is PNoy's 'Bay of Pigs': Saguisag

MANILA - Former Senator Rene Saguisag on Tuesday compared the Mamasapano mission to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion during the term of US President John F. Kennedy, saying that any military operation in enemy territory faces the possibility of failure.

Speaking to Mornings@ANC, Saguisag said he expects President Aquino to face intense criticism for the failed operation, which saw 44 police commandos killed by Moro rebels.

"[US President Bill] Clinton failed during the Black Hawk Down [battle of Mogadishu]. Si Kennedy, nagkamali sa Bay of Pigs. What do we do with these people? Do we line them up against the wall and shoot them?" he asked.

"In life, you deal with the cards that you are dealt. You succeed, you fail....Kung ano-anong mura nakuha ni Clinton dun sa Black Hawk Down sa Africa. In the Bay of Pigs, many died. If you enter enemy lair, you have to be ready to kill and be killed."

The Bay of Pigs, authorized by President John F. Kennedy, was a botched invasion against Cuba's Fidel Castro after he came to power in 1959. Cuban exiles were trained for the invasion which sought to overthrow Castro.

The invasion on April 17, 1961 was crushed by Castro's forces, with more than 100 Cuban exiles killed. Over 1,200 members of the CIA-trained invasion force surrendered and were imprisoned.

According to the JFK Presidential Library and Museum, "The disaster at the Bay of Pigs had a lasting impact on the Kennedy administration."

'NO TO TRUTH COMMISSION'

Saguisag also called for sobriety and said established institutions should be allowed to do their jobs, instead of creating a new Truth Commission to investigate the incident.

He also rejected the conduct of separate investigations on the Mamasapano, Maguindanao operation, saying the different probes may further complicate the issue and delay justice.

"Parang circular firing squad ata yan. Baka kontra kontra opinyon," he said.

"What do we do with the established institutions like the Ombudsman, [sa] AFP mismo? Kaya hinay-hinayan natin yang Truth Commission...A separate body requiring new personnel, a new building or location and requiring hundreds of millions of pesos can be a cure worse than the disease."

The Senate, House of Representatives, Department of Justice, Philippine National Police and even Moro Islamic Liberation Front are set to investigate the January 25 Mamasapano operation that saw 44 police commandos killed by Moro rebels.

The MILF earlier said its troops fought with elements of the PNP-Special Action Force in self-defense after the police commandos entered its territory in Mamasapano.

President Aquino earlier confirmed he had knowledge of the Mamasapano operation, which targeted Malaysian bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, and Basit Usman.

He said he had talked to SAF chief Getulio Napeñas before the launch of Oplan Wolverine but noted the SAF chief did not follow his orders to coordinate with the military.

'No US soldier killed in Mamasapano'

MANILA - No American soldier was killed in the Mamasapano clash in Maguindanao that claimed the lives of 44 Philippine National Police Special Action Force (PNP SAF) commandos, the US embassy said Tuesday.

"There were no US service member casualties," US Embassy spokesman Kurt Hoyer said in a text message.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued a similar statement.

"I think there's no truth to that, although we don't have a report, but I can't imagine that something like that can happen," DFA spokesman Charles Jose said in a press briefing.

"Consistent with our arrangement, the US forces under the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) responded to the request of the AFP to provide casualty evacuation of the PNP-SAF personnel to Mamapasano, Maguindanao," he added.

An unnamed farmer in Brgy. Tukanalipao, Mamasapano allegedly told a spokesperson of human rights group Suara Bangsamoro that he saw a body of a "blue-eyed" Caucasian soldier after the bloody clash.

The US embassy, however, said the Armed Forces of the Philippines only asked for help in evacuating casualties and the wounded.

Hoyer said the embassy responded by sending US service members belonging to the JSOTF-P in evacuating the dead and wounded.

Appendix D

Articles with highest amount of perceived bias

43 cops killed: Worst single loss of PH security forces

Board of inquiry created to probe deadly operation

MANILA - The "misencounter" between policemen and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on Sunday, which resulted in 43 elite cops killed, is the worst for government security forces in recent memory.

Interior and Local Government Secretary Mar Roxas described the incident, which happened in the town of Mamasapano, Maguindanao, as "single largest loss of lives in recent memory involving our security forces."

Roxas said the operation was against Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan, and another terrorist, Basit Usman.

Marwan was "highly likely" killed in the operation, while Usman may have escaped, he said.

Roxas said, "there are pieces of evidence, pictures of a person that appears to be Marwan. This will be part of the post-action debriefing so that there will be corroborative information from several operatives."

Philippine National Police officer-in-charge (OIC) Deputy Director General Leonardo Espina said the Philippine National Police Special Action Forces (PNP SAF)

were already withdrawing from Marwan's bailiwick when members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) attacked.

The PNP SAF members then "inadvertently" entered an MILF area, Roxas said.

"We are fully committed to the peace process. It's a law enforcement operation. Hindi ito sabotaje sa peace talks," he stressed.

Roxas believes the attractiveness of the US\$5 million bounty offered for the head of Marwan is only an incidental issue, following reports the cops allegedly did not coordinate their actions in a bid to get the bounty.

"I won't discount it, that is why there is the board of inquiry... but it's just an incidental issue, as far as I am concerned," he said.

'BOARD OF INQUIRY'

Espina said he wants a full accounting of all the 392 members of an elite force deployed to run after the terrorists.

Asked about the pursuit operations against those responsible for the incident, Espina said: "I want a full accounting [of my men], ilan ang nasugatan, ilan ang buhay... First things first."

He said he will not leave Cotabato until all his men have been accounted for. He said they will be given all the benefits and honors they deserve.

He added he will create a board of inquiry to complete the whole story, including allegations that the operation was not coordinated with the MILF.

“We are forming a board of inquiry because we’d like to get to the bottom of this. Our fallen heroes sacrificed their lives for the attainment of peace,” Espina said.

Killers came from 3 directions

MAMASAPANO, Maguindanao, Philippines – Death came from three directions for a band of Special Action Force (SAF) commandos as they struggled to slip out of a remote village here after killing a man believed to be Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, last Sunday.

A SAF member who survived the battle against hundreds of fighters of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) said they were attacked from three directions in an open field near the hideout of Marwan and another terrorist in Barangay Tukanalipao.

The policeman, who asked not to be named, said some of his wounded companions who ran out of ammunition crawled near an irrigation dike, but rebels finished them off with rifle shots to the head.

“We ran out of ammunition so there was no way we could stop them from coming close,” the policeman.

At least two SAF teams were attacked from behind while guarding their designated alternate withdrawal route.

“There was heavy volume of fire from different directions. We were not subdued, we maneuvered for cover but the area was a plain and there was no good spot where we could position ourselves safely,” said the policeman, who asked not to be identified.

The survivor said their defense weakened when they started running out of ammunition.

“I made the sign of the cross and I asked God to forgive me for all my sins. I was ready to die then,” he said.

He said many of his companions were felled by heavy gunfire from as close as six to seven meters.

“It was very dark. The flash of gunfire from the barrels of our guns and their guns can be seen clearly because we were close to each other,” he said.

He said he crawled to a nearby swamp as firing waned and walked away at daybreak until he reached a road where policemen and soldiers helped him.

He said he noticed foreign ceasefire monitors in the scene, helping disengage rebels from Barangay Tukanalipao

Based on accounts from villagers, community leaders may have innocently alerted the MILF’s 105th Base Command to the presence of the policemen.

A barangay official in Mamasapano had told a local television outfit that he called officials of the MILF unit and told them of the presence of armed men that he thought were rebels.

He was told that the MILF had no tactical maneuver in the area.

Some community elders said they, too, had frantically alerted local Moro commanders of the activities of men in combat uniforms.

“It was dark and we can’t see the patches on their uniform from a distance. We were also scared to go out and check,” one of the village elders said.

The ensuing fighting left 44 SAF commandos killed and a dozen others injured. The MILF said it also lost 11 guerrillas in the “misencounter.”

Villagers also told stories of how BIFF fighters finished off with shots to the head no fewer than 10 wounded policemen.

“Two of the wounded policemen who were executed even managed to strap tourniquets on their legs which were hit by bullets in the initial encounter,” a villager said.

A peasant named Badrudin Nanganlan, 21, and five-year-old Sarah Sampulna Panangulon, were killed in the crossfire.

Nanganlan’s 19-year-old widow, Sarah, told reporters her husband was immediately buried in keeping with Islamic tradition.

The gunfight that lasted for more than 10 hours also left a villager, Said Pasawilan, wounded.

“Villagers were running everywhere. We heard loud automatic gunshots and explosions,” said Ahmida Muda, whose family was forced to evacuate to a safer area.

Saida Esmael, also a resident of Barangay Tukanalipao, said they tried to leave and head to the town proper as the firefight erupted, but were prevented from doing so when exchanges of gunfire intensified.

Esmael Hashim, chairman of Barangay Tukanalipao, said he noticed the arrival of the SAF men and was surprised that none of them came to see him to coordinate.

He said previous police and military operations in their barangay were properly coordinated with community leaders and the local government unit of Mamasapano.

“It was about 4:00 a.m. (Jan. 25) when we heard gunshots near the barangay Islamic center and that was the start of a long encounter,” Hashim said in Filipino.

MILF leader Al-Haj Murad and chief peace negotiator Muhaquer Iqbal said the encounter could have been avoided had the Philippine National Police coordinated its operation with the joint ceasefire committee.

AFP chief on Fallen 44: Sayang po yung buhay

MANILA, Philippines - Armed Forces chief of staff Gregorio Pio Catapang fought back tears on Wednesday as he mourned the deaths of 44 police commandos in the botched anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Catapang said it is unfair that the military is being blamed for failing to send reinforcements for Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos who were being attacked by armed elements in Tukanalipao village.

He said that while he was informed about a possible operation by the PNP-SAF, there was no lateral coordination on the exact time and location of the operation until it was already underway.

At one point during the interview, the AFP chief became emotional as he pointed out that the Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police was once part of the military.

"Hindi naman po maganda yung hindi kami nag reinforce kasi una sa lahat, nandiyan po kami. Kasama po namin yan. Mga bago po kami naghiwa-hiwalay - PNP PC INP yan e. Kasama po sa AFP yan e kaya hindi po namin gusto yung nagyari," he said.

"Talaga naman pong hindi naging maganda yung haka-haka na hindi kami nag reinforce. Nandun po kami when they needed us. Ang problema nga, too little too late yung coordination," he added.

He said the AFP was not given grid coordinates on the exact location of the PNP-SAF and the enemy troops when the fighting started.

Military troops were blind as to where to send reinforcements or where they could fire their cannons.

"Kung kelan na po nagbabakbakan saka hiniling yung reinforcement.E hindi naman ka ora-orada magagawa yan dahil pag napaputok kami ng kanyon baka tamaan po yung SAF."

"Ang sabi nga nung huli nung magpapaputok na kami white phosphorus too close po yung bomba na ibabagsak niyo kasi magkalapitan na lang po e."

"E kung tatamaan na po yung SAF magiging friendly fire.Yun po ang iniiwasan natin kaya very important po yung coordination."

CATAPANG INFORMED ABOUT RAID SINCE NOV

A total of 44 PNP-SAF commandos were killed in the anti-terror operation in Mamasapano, Maguindanao last January 25.

President Aquino earlier said he knew about the PNP-SAF operation to take out Zulkfili bin Hir, alias Marwan, and Basit Usman.

However, he blamed PNP SAF head police director Getulio Napeñas Jr. for failing to coordinate the mission with the military.

In his interview, Catapang said he was informed by President Aquino about a PNP-SAF operation to take out Marwan and Usman as early as November 18, 2014.

He said the President reminded him to coordinate with the PNP-SAF on December 18, 2014.

The AFP chief said he called up AFP Western Mindanao Command chief Lt. Gen. Rustico Guerrero to coordinate with the PNP SAF about the operation.

Catapang said Guerrero met with Napeñas and Major General Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of the Maguindanao-based 6th Infantry Division, on January 23, 2015 about the operation to take out the two terror suspects.

However, the two military generals were not given any information about when and where the operation would take place.

"Wala naman napag-usapan kasi hindi naman dala ni General Napenas yung intelligence chief niya. Nasayang yung meeting na yun. And then all of a sudden on the fateful day in the morning of January 25, ni-launch yung operation without us being informed," Catapang said.

THINGS GO AWRY

Based on the timeline provided by the AFP, more than 70 SAF commandos were dropped off in Shariff Aguak at around 2 a.m. of January 25. The team then trekked through 12 kilometers of marshlands to reach Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano, Maguindanao where Marwan lived.

According to the PNP, the SAF commandos were successful in killing Marwan and were about to leave the area when they were attacked by joint forces of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Moro National Liberation Front, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and even private armed groups.

There are at least 1,000 armed MILF fighters in the area, according to the military.

Catapang said General Pangilinan was informed as early as 5 a.m. of January 25 that the PNP-SAF forces were being attacked by enemy fire.

Pangilinan then informed Col. Melquiades Feliciano, commander of the Army's 601st Brigade, and the commander of the 4th Infantry Division about the firefight.

"They were able to come because there is a checkpoint there. They had 6 armored assets near the entrance of Mamasapano at 7 a.m January 25 to control this area," Catapang said.

The military, however, could not reach the area where the PNP-SAF commandos were trapped since there was already heavy fighting.

Catapang said there was a lot of confusion because nobody knew the exact coordinates of the PNP-SAF.

"Yun po ang tinatanong namin. Where are you? Saan kami magre-reinforce? And then of course hindi po maibigay yung grid coordinates. Even if it was given, the firefight was going on - we cannot just come in. Also we do not know where we will be coming from - baka may ambush," he said.

"Sabay kasi napabakbak dahil sa PNP side yung 55th Special Action Force which is the secondary effort that is supposed to reinforce the 84th SAC if there is a firefight. Nung napabakbak na itong dalawa wala nang tumulong sa kanila. They are both being beleaguered by forces coming from this area."

"There is a lot of confusion. Walang coordination paano tayo magtatawagan. Panay text and calls lang po ang nangyari. It really took a while," he added.

An ABS-CBN report also said more than 300 SAF commandos were on standby along the highway, within hearing distance of the firefight.

The 3rd Special Action Battalion and the 4th Special Action Battalion were only 3 kilometers away from the clash site.

But soldiers said when they asked the SAF to guide them to where their comrades were, no one agreed to join them.

Of the 392 elite commandos who arrived in Mamasapano, only 78 entered the combat zone. Forty-four of them never came out alive.

At 11 p.m. on Sunday, 19 hours after the start of the operation, the Philippine Army located the survivors of the assault force.

They were still holding on to the DNA sample of Marwan, but could no longer carry their weapons out of exhaustion and fear.

NO CALL TO STAND DOWN

In the interview, Catapang emphasized several times the importance of lateral coordination between the police and military for major operations.

"Hindi naman parang party ito na 'O magkita tayo. Magdala ka ng isang red wine.' Coordination is about life and death," he said.

He said that if the operation had been properly coordinated, he would have recommended a night attack using the military's night capable helicopters.

"They hit the position of Marwan and Usman. After hitting, then we pick them up by helicopter and fly them out. Yun ang pinakamadaling operation. When you go in, you unnecessarily provoke the MILF, MNLF, BIFF and [private armed groups]."

The AFP chief denied reports that he was ordered to stand down during the fighting in order not to jeopardize the government's peace negotiations with the MILF.

"Wala pong ganun. It will be a constitutional offense kasi ang mandate namin whether or not kung sino ang presidente is to be the protector of the people and the state. The state forces were being besieged therefore we have to support what was happening on the ground," he said.

Catapang said the PNP and AFP have been conducting joint operations to try to take out Marwan as early as 2005.

The AFP chief said he still does not know why Napenas decided to withhold information about the Mamasapano operation until it had already started.

"Yun ang big question mark because all the while we have been doing this together for the longest time. We have been coordinating with the previous SAF commanders. I don't know the reason why they did not tell us," he said.

He then turned emotional and said: "Sayang po yung buhay. Kung nagkamali ka sa negosyo, pera lang yan. Pero ito buhay, hindi mo na maibabalik ito."

Catapang gave credit to Napenas for taking the responsibility for the Mamasapano tragedy. "To me that is the highest thing that a commander who failed in an operation can do, to admit that he was at fault," he said.

He also likened the Mamasapano operation to the situation of Filipino peacekeepers in Golan Heights who escaped Syrian rebels in the area.

He said that when he told Filipino troops not to surrender their weapons, he knew the risk if the soldiers were killed in the line of duty.

"Kung naging bulilyaso po yun, I would have to resign," he said.

Death toll in Mamasapano carnage now at 49 - ARMM police

MANILA – The death toll in Sunday's clash between policemen and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Force (MILF) is now at 49, a local police official said.

Senior Superintendent Noel Armilla, Philippine National Police officer-in-charge for the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), said he still has no information how many among the 49 fatalities were policemen and MILF members.

Armilla said at least 11 were wounded.

He could also not confirm whether a civilian was killed in Sunday's bloodshed.

Earlier reports put the death toll among members of the PNP Special Action Force and MILF at 30 and 4, respectively.

The clash between the MILF members and the elite cops occurred as the latter were supposed to arrest Malaysian bomb maker Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman, a Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-making expert, in Tukanalipao village.

The MILF, however, said the bloody clash erupted due to the lack of coordination between the police and the proper governing bodies.

Speaking to dzMM, Iqbal said the police personnel should have first coordinated with the Ceasefire Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) and the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) before conducting their operation in the MILF-controlled area.

According to Armilla, the PNP SAF informed the ARMM Police about the operation at around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, but he noted that the gun battle erupted at around 3 a.m. that day.

Police have already retrieved 29 of the bodies of the slain policemen.

Bangsamoro Basic Law

Sunday's clash threatens to stall the progress in the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, a product of the peace talks between the government and the MILF.

Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., chair of the Senate Committee on Local Government, earlier ordered the temporary suspension of all discussions and hearings related to the passage of the law following the Sunday clash.

Muntinlupa Rep. Rodolfo Biazon, chair of the defense committee at the lower house, has also asked the ad hoc committee on the Bangsamoro to suspend deliberations on the proposed law pending the submission of reports on the latest skirmishes in Mindanao.

Top officials from both the government and the MILF said the deadly clashes should not delay proceedings for the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

“It is not logical for anybody to delay the process of making the BBL into law because it will be disadvantageous to all parties concerned,” MILF vice chairman for political Affairs Ghadzali Jaafar told reporters.

In a separate press release, government chief negotiator Miriam Coronel-Ferrer said the Philippines' resolve to push for the creation of a Bangsamoro political entity is further strengthened.

“This incident and other recent acts of violence by other armed groups manifest the diverse security challenges that confound the peace process. But our resolve to see through the process of legislating the Bangsamoro Basic Law and implementing the different Normalization programs, including the security components, is only further strengthened. With better cooperation we will be able to prevent these kinds of incidents,” she said. - with a report from Edwin Sevidal, dzMM

Mamasapano clash was overkill: ex-DILG chief

MANILA - Don't call it a "misencounter" but a massacre.

This is the opinion of former Interior and Local Government Secretary Rafael Alunan on the killing of 44 Philippine National-Special Action Forces commandos in an encounter with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday.

Alunan said a "misencounter" usually happens between two friendly forces after each side fails to identify each other.

"It happens when both sides fail to identify each other. Gunshots are fired but when one gets to identify a friendly, they stop. they order a ceasefire. In this particular case, the firing was fast, furious and continuous and massacred more than (40) people. It was an overkill and not a misencounter. It was a plain and simple massacre," he said in an ANC Dateline Philippines interview.

Forty-four PNP-SAF men were killed while 12 others were wounded in the encounter with MILF rebels in Tukanalipao village in Mamasapano, Maguindanao.

Interior Secretary Manuel Roxas earlier described the clash as a misencounter, saying the police commandos were hunting two "high-value" militants when they ran into a group of rebels who thought the police were mounting an attack.

Roxas said the PNP has formed a board of inquiry that will investigate possible operational lapses that led to the encounter with Moro rebels.

He said the inquiry will look into the culpability and liability of officers or men who led the SAF operation as well as the external liability of the attackers.

He noted that the operation was not coordinated with the command group of the PNP. "Malalaman na lang lahat yan sa board of inquiry," he said.

Mohagher Iqbal, head of the rebel peace panel, said the police failed to coordinate their operations with the ceasefire committee.

"They entered our area and attacked us, what are we going to do?" he asked.

"What happened was self-defense."

Iqbal said he was confident the peace deal would not be affected because both sides were committed to it.

CHAIN OF COMMAND MUST ANSWER

Alunan, however, said the clash should have stopped immediately after the MILF recognized the PNP-SAF commandos as government forces.

"The firing took place over a period of one day or at least several hours and the commandos were dressed in proper uniforms. They are easily identifiable. It was not that the MILF did not know how SAF commandos are dressed. The SAF commandos are all over the place and they have been dealing with them in the past so they know what SAF commandos look like in the field," he said.

"For them to say they were surprised by the SAF and acted in self-defense is a lot of BS."

Alunan said the protocol for special operations varies especially if there are serious doubts about the reliability or dependability of supposedly friendly forces.

The former DILG chief urged the government to investigate reports that members of the 105th and 106th brigades of the MILF and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a breakaway group led by Ameril Umbrakato, were cohabitating in the area where the SAF men were attacked.

He said he received reports the SAF group, numbering 392 police commandos, went straight to the BIFF encampment to get terrorist Zulkifli bin Hir alias "Marwan" and Basit Usman, a Jemaah Islamiyah bomb-making expert, in Tukanalipao village and were attacked on their way out.

"If those facts were correct, it only proves that the MILF acted in bad faith. They were very treacherous and it only raises to the fore that they are not really a sincere partner in the peace process," he said.

Alunan said that even before the deadly clash, there were some people who have been disappointed with the ongoing peace negotiations between the MILF and the government after some sectors were excluded in the talks.

He said the clash "sort of validated their views that [the MILF] is not really a sincere partner for peace."

Alunan said the investigation should start from the top of the chain of command, noting that the SAF will not conduct an operation without orders.

He pointed out that after Islamic extremists raided Ipil, Zamboanga del Sur in 1995, then President Ramos ordered the immediate relief of three top police and military commanders to pave the way for an investigation.

"The SAF is an operating force. They were ordered to do something. Now there are people above them who are supposed to coordinate, who are supposed to thoroughly review and vet their operational plans. They are the ones who decided to give the green light. It is not just the Special Action Force but the entire chain of command [who should] answer for this," he said.

He added that Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa Jr., who is in charge of the anti-terror council, should also shed light on the incident.

"Something as strategic as this operation, which calls for arresting an international fugitive with a price on his head must be, should have been and must have been vetted by the anti-terror council," he said.

He also urged the MILF to present the fighters responsible for the massacre of the PNP-SAF men.

"They are supposed to be friendly forces and they have no business killing our people. If the MILF is sincere about this - they should present all of those people responsible for the massacre," he said.

Tales of brutality in Mamasapano clash

MANILA - Villagers in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have come forward with stories on how Moro rebels brutally killed Philippine National Police-Special Action Force commandos during an encounter last Sunday.

Some villagers said some of the wounded policemen were mercilessly gunned down as they struggled to escape the rebels.

They said the rebels killed the wounded with gunshots to the head and collected their weapons and other equipment.

Another villager, who asked to be identified only as Hamim, said some rebels even stomped on the heads of the slain policemen before firing shots at them. Some of the locals said the SAF men battled some 300 MILF fighters.

The remains of the SAF members were brought to the mortuary of the Army's 6th Infantry Division in Camp Siongco in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Police forensic experts said many of the slain policemen had powder burns in the bullet entry points, indicating they had been shot at close range.

Maguindanao Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu, who was at the 6th ID's morgue yesterday, condoled with the families of the slain policemen and appealed for sobriety.

"I'm also appealing to people in other parts of the country to help us pray for a peaceful resolution of this incident. We don't want this to affect the ongoing peace efforts of the Aquino administration and the MILF. The peace process must continue," Mangudadatu said.

Mangudadatu said he has directed his chief budget staff, Lynette Estandarte, to extend assistance and food provisions to relatives of the slain policemen who are now at Camp Siongco, waiting for the release of their loved ones' remains.

Major Gen. Edmundo Pangilinan, commander of the 6th ID, said the incident – while tragic – should provide more “pressing reasons” for the government and the MILF to pursue peace.

Pangilinan said tension in Mamasapano has eased and Army units in the area are now helping government agencies in relief activities.

In a statement, Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) also said the carnage should not derail the peace initiatives by the government and the MILF.

“As always, it’s the civilians that suffer most from the brunt of armed conflicts,” said Hataman.

The MILF leadership yesterday stood pat on its assertion that the “misencounter” was triggered by the failure of the PNP to coordinate the activities of the SAF in the area with the joint ceasefire committee.

The committee is composed of representatives from the MILF, the PNP and the Armed Forces.

Mamasapano carnage scaring away investors - business group

Members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and civilians pay tribute to the 44 fallen Special Action Forces (SAF) officers during the necrological rites at Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig Friday. Photo by Gigie Cruz for ABS-CBNnews.com

COTABATO - A bloodbath in the southern Philippines has placed at risk billions of pesos in potential investment, a business leader in the region said Monday.

At least three foreign firms looking to partner with local businessmen have put investments on hold after a deadly clash between Philippine forces and Muslim rebels, Mohamad Omar Pasigan, president of the Bangsamoro Business Club, told AFP.

The botched anti-terror operation on January 25 left 44 police commandos dead in the southern island of Mindanao, along with at least 11 rebels.

"Security is everything for businessmen out to make a profit... They know when to take a risk and when to pull out," Pasigan said.

"They are willing to come here and invest, but then this fighting happened."

The value of investments on hold due to the fighting, in the real estate and agriculture sectors, is estimated at "billions" of pesos, he said.

Malaysian businessmen due to arrive on Monday to inspect sites in Cotabato city have cancelled their trip, Pasigan said. The group was looking to build small hotels and department stores.

Jordanian businessmen looking to invest in up to 50 hectares (123 acres) of banana farms left abruptly on Sunday without finalising a deal, he added, while

Singaporean and Malaysian partners seeking to replicate their mini shopping mall business in Johor Baru said they were postponing their investment.

Pasigan declined to name the businessmen since their plans were not finalised. He said his group was helping foreigners find local partners.

Philippine laws prohibit foreign nationals from owning a majority of local businesses.

The firefight between police commandos and Muslim rebels on January 25 broke a long-standing ceasefire and endangered a peace treaty signed in March 2013.

Economic planning secretary Arsenio Balisacan acknowledged that the government must quickly bring calm to the region.

"The perception of risk is bad for business... At this point, (the fighting) doesn't have any significant impact but again it's closure we need," he told reporters recently.

Balisacan said the south, wracked by decades of conflict that has left tens of thousands dead, had the potential to be a growth driver, given its fertile land for agriculture and rich mineral deposits.

"It's a missed opportunity if we don't resolve this problem at the soonest time possible," he said.

Miriam: Commander liable for Mamasapano carnage

MANILA - Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago said the military commander and other superior officials may be liable for the Mamasapano carnage.

In a statement, Santiago said the death of 44 elite cops constitutes an atrocity, which means punitive laws against war crimes should apply.

Santiago called the Mamasapano incident a massacre, but can be properly categorized as a “non-international armed conflict.”

She said the “massacre” of the 44 elite cops meets the highest threshold and level of intensity of a non-international armed conflict.

In this case, the military commander or person has committed a crime under the International Criminal Court Rome Charter, she said.

Two factors should be present, she said.

“First, the commander either knew or should have known that his forces were about to commit such crimes. Second, the military commander or person failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures to suppress the commission of the crime,” she added.

The President is the commander-in-chief.

President Aquino said the operation against Marwan and another terrorist, Basit Usman, was an “actionable intelligence” signifying that security authorities needed to act immediately. He said there was no need to inform him of an actionable operation, but insisted there should be coordination with other forces.

SAF chief Police Director Getulio Napeñas Jr. was relieved of his post last Tuesday.

Santiago also raised the question as to whether or not the Mamasapano incident was an “internationalized conflict,” or if there was another state that was party to the conflict.

She said foreign help from the likes of the CIA, which could be part of the worldwide campaign against counter-terrorism, would complicate matters.

“If the Philippine government received help from the CIA, then the rebels under international law would argue that they have a right of counter-intervention from their own friendly state,” she said.

She added internationalized armed conflicts are also subject to international laws.

She said the military commander and other superior officers found guilty should be punished according to “rules derived from established customs, from the principles of humanity, and from the dictates of public conscience, also known as the Marten’s Clause.”

Santiago, an international law expert, was earlier elected judge of the International Criminal Court but had to decline due to cancer.

Mamasapano is PNoy's 'Bay of Pigs': Saguisag

MANILA - Former Senator Rene Saguisag on Tuesday compared the Mamasapano mission to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion during the term of US President John F. Kennedy, saying that any military operation in enemy territory faces the possibility of failure.

Speaking to Mornings@ANC, Saguisag said he expects President Aquino to face intense criticism for the failed operation, which saw 44 police commandos killed by Moro rebels.

"[US President Bill] Clinton failed during the Black Hawk Down [battle of Mogadishu]. Si Kennedy, nagkamali sa Bay of Pigs. What do we do with these people? Do we line them up against the wall and shoot them?" he asked.

"In life, you deal with the cards that you are dealt. You succeed, you fail....Kung ano-anong mura nakuha ni Clinton dun sa Black Hawk Down sa Africa. In the Bay of Pigs, many died. If you enter enemy lair, you have to be ready to kill and be killed."

The Bay of Pigs, authorized by President John F. Kennedy, was a botched invasion against Cuba's Fidel Castro after he came to power in 1959. Cuban exiles were trained for the invasion which sought to overthrow Castro.

The invasion on April 17, 1961 was crushed by Castro's forces, with more than 100 Cuban exiles killed. Over 1,200 members of the CIA-trained invasion force surrendered and were imprisoned.

According to the JFK Presidential Library and Museum, "The disaster at the Bay of Pigs had a lasting impact on the Kennedy administration."

'NO TO TRUTH COMMISSION'

Saguisag also called for sobriety and said established institutions should be allowed to do their jobs, instead of creating a new Truth Commission to investigate the incident.

He also rejected the conduct of separate investigations on the Mamasapano, Maguindanao operation, saying the different probes may further complicate the issue and delay justice.

"Parang circular firing squad ata yan. Baka kontra kontra opinyon," he said.

"What do we do with the established institutions like the Ombudsman, [sa] AFP mismo? Kaya hinay-hinayan natin yang Truth Commission...A separate body requiring new personnel, a new building or location and requiring hundreds of millions of pesos can be a cure worse than the disease."

The Senate, House of Representatives, Department of Justice, Philippine National Police and even Moro Islamic Liberation Front are set to investigate the January 25 Mamasapano operation that saw 44 police commandos killed by Moro rebels.

The MILF earlier said its troops fought with elements of the PNP-Special Action Force in self-defense after the police commandos entered its territory in Mamasapano.

President Aquino earlier confirmed he had knowledge of the Mamasapano operation, which targeted Malaysian bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, and Basit Usman.

He said he had talked to SAF chief Getulio Napeñas before the launch of Oplan Wolverine but noted the SAF chief did not follow his orders to coordinate with the military.