

**COOPERATION WITH US, JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA IN THE FIGHT
AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM:
A PHILIPPINE PERSPECTIVE**

By Edd Santos

I. Background

A. The Threat of International Terrorism

The September 11 2001 attacks in the US signaled a new trend in global terrorism. The magnitude of the attacks brought into sharp focus the changing nature of the threat, which has become more transnational in scope and amorphous in character. The attacks reconfirmed what has long been understood about terrorism - that it is an effective strategy when there is a massive disparity of conventional military and economic power. State, or even non-state groups, which have no hope of successfully engaging another much powerful state in open combat can nevertheless strike effective blows by resorting to unconventional, irregular or terrorist tactics or that can be collectively termed as asymmetric threats¹.

Alarmingly, there is a growing and legitimate concern that terrorists may turn to the use of WMD in their struggle. The use of WMD against civilian populations is routinely deplored, but are seen by some as the “poor man’s nuke” and the only way to counter a nuclear-armed power like the US.

B. Regional Terrorist Threat

The 11 Sept attacks against the US unraveled the ASEAN terrorist network with links to BIN LADEN and his Al-Qaeda network. This network operates like an umbrella group supporting a host of autonomous cells in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and possibly, Thailand. These cells include Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Al-Qaeda’s most active cell that is operating in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore; the Philippines’ Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG); Malaysia’s Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM); and, Indonesia’s Laskar Jihad. These groups are bound together by their objective of establishing a pan-Islamic state comprised of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Southern Philippines.

C. Terrorist Threat in the Philippines

In the current security milieu, Islamic-inspired militancy and terrorism evolved as major security problems for the Philippines mainly because of the apparently growing alliance between Al-Qaeda and the JI and their local counterparts, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf. These groups have been clearly emboldened by the financial and other means of support they have been receiving from Al-Qaeda and other Islamic militant organizations.

¹ Selected papers on international terrorism, Naval Intelligence Division, Philippine Navy

1. Terrorist Groups in the Philippines

Three (3) major domestic terrorist groups are active in the Philippines: the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM) and the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (NPA). The ASG operates primarily in Mindanao where most of the country's Muslim minority live, while the RSM is composed of converts and is based in Northern Luzon. The Communist New People's Army engages in terrorism in furtherance of its revolutionary cause.

a. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Among the local terror groups, the ASG is the most serious threat because of its proven capability to conduct bombings and other terrorist acts and its determination to further intensify its terror campaign. The last two (2) years saw the ASG putting more impetus on bombings and terrorist training to shed off its international notoriety as a bandit group and to regain the support of Al-Qaeda and its allied groups. The ASG has particularly developed the capability to conduct bombings through the use of Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs). The use of IEDs directly linked the ASG to at least five (5) of the eight (8) bombing incidents that occurred in the country last year. The ASG has likewise demonstrated its capability to conduct maritime attacks with the bombings of the MV Doulos at the port of Zamboanga City in August 1991, of the MV Superferry 14 off Manila in February 2004, and of the MV Dona Ramona in Lamitan, Basilan on 28 Aug 2005. The two (2) latter incidents were both triggered by bombs planted aboard said ships. Reports further indicate that the group has been training on scuba diving and underwater demolition in preparation for its planned seaborne attacks both inside and outside the country.

The improvement of its training camps in Mindanao will be the priority mission of the ASG this year. This is in preparation for the arrival of foreign instructors from the Middle East. The ASG has began the training program for fifty (50) of its new recruits at a training camp in Pualas, Lanao del Sur last 20 Jan 06. Some of the ASG recruits are active MILF members, whose involvement in this activity showed that some rogue elements within the group continue to maintain alliance with the ASG and possibly other terrorist groups notably the JI.

b. Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM)

The ASG and foreign, largely Indonesian, jihadist Islamists are working with a small circle of militant converts who form the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM), dedicated to the "re-Islamisation" of the northern Philippines by revolutionary means. These militants are the radical fringe of Balik-Islam (literally "return to Islam"), a movement whose members are converts to Islam. Despite the arrest of RSM founder Ahmed Santos on 26 October 2005, the emergence of a militant wing within Balik-Islam is particularly worrying. It has at least three (3) distinctions among local terrorist groups which are as follows:

- ❖ It is known to be the only group which continues to receive funds and other logistical support from Al-Qaeda and other international Islamic Non-government organizations (NGOs) suspected to be front for terrorist activities.

- ❖ It is the only local group that continues to have a direct link or conduit with Al-Qaeda.
- ❖ It is the most active local group in propagating Islamic extremism in non-Muslim areas of the country through various Islamic institutions like madaris, mosques and charity organizations.

Both the JI and the ASG have been mobilizing the group for its bombing plans in Metro Manila and adjacent provinces.

c. New People's Army (NPA)

The NPA is the military wing of the Communist People's Party of the Philippines (CPP). As part of its revolutionary activities, it engages in extortion, political abductions and killings, sabotage against uncooperative business entities and other violent activities. The US and the European Union (EU) both categorized the CPP/NPA as a terrorist group because of its continuing use of terrorist tactics in pursuing its so-called "protracted peoples' war" against the government. The drastic reduction in their foreign financial support particularly from former Communist countries in Europe has forced the movement to engage in extortion activities to support its expansion and revolutionary efforts.

The communist movement can be expected to further intensify its bombing and arson activities against uncooperative business entities which refuse to pay revolutionary taxes. While it generally employs guerilla tactics in its ambushes, assassination and other form of attacks against the AFP/PNP, it resorts to purely terrorist tactics when it conducts bombings and arson against government infrastructures and private and commercial facilities being targeted for extortion.

2. Philippine Government Response to Terrorism

a. Political

The Philippines under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration, formulated a national policy to combat terrorism. Accordingly, the Philippine government adheres to international covenants on terrorism. As an active member of the United Nations, it reaffirms its commitment to prevent, suppress and counter all forms of terrorist acts in accordance with the UN charter, resolutions or declarations, and other relevant international laws. It shall endeavor to work closely with the regional and international community, particularly with the ASEAN, the United States and other allies, in order to strengthen the global cooperation to combat international terrorism².

As an immediate response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Philippine government adopted a two-pronged approach in addressing terrorism and its consequences. The first approach is crisis management that pertains to activities occurring while a terrorist incident is taking place, while the second approach is

² Manalo, Eusaquito P., **The Philippine Response To Terrorism: The Abu Sayyaf Group** December 2004

consequence management that refers to managing the event after a terrorist attack has occurred.

The Philippine government created a multi-agency counterterrorism task force chaired by the National Security Advisor and consisting of officials from 34 Philippine Government agencies representing the security, economic, and social components essential for an effective counterterrorism strategy³. Moreover, the Philippine government national policy is articulated through the “Fourteen Pillars of Policy and Action Against Terrorism,”⁴ to wit:

1. Supervision and implementation of policies and actions of the government against terrorism.
2. Intelligence coordination
3. Internal focus against terrorism
4. Accountability of public and private corporations and personalities
5. Synchronizing internal efforts with global outlook.
6. Legal measures
7. Promotion of Christian and Muslim solidarity
8. Vigilance against the movement of terrorists and their supporters, equipment, weapons and funds.
9. Contingency plans
10. Comprehensive security plans for critical infrastructure.
11. Support of overseas Filipino workers.
12. Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police.
13. Media support
14. Political, social and economic measures

From 25 Mar to 31 Dec 2005, the Presidential Anti-Terrorism Task Force (PAATF) arrested and convicted 27 terrorists, all of whom have been sentenced to death. Significantly, while Indonesia has a higher convictions with 33 for the 2002 Bali bombing, only five (5) were meted the death sentence, while Spain meted no death penalties to its conviction of 18 terrorists charged with the 2004 Madrid bombing.

b. Socio-cultural

The government initiated more measures to plug the loopholes in its law enforcement and immigration mechanisms; strengthen its immigration and law enforcement policies; and intensified its intelligence build-up. To prevent terrorist infiltration, the AFP, PNP and the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (BID) pooled their resources to prevent the entry into the country of international terrorists particularly those belonging to Al-Qaeda and its various cells in Southeast Asia.

³ **Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003 Report**, US Department of State, April 2004

⁴ **“Fourteen (14) Pillars of Policy and Action Against Terrorism”** as enumerated in Memorandum Order No. 31 dated October 12, 2001 by the Office of the President, in National Plan to Address Terrorism and Its Consequences, Annex K to the Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP) (2002).

To manifest the country's commitment to work with the international community to build a strong and formidable bulwark against terrorism in accordance with the UN Charter and UN Security Council Resolution No. 1368, the country joined the US-led International Counter-Terrorist Coalition (ICTC).

In line with the government's Fourteen Pillars of Policy and Action Against Terrorism, the Philippines is continuously promoting inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogues to enhance Christian and Muslim solidarity. Accordingly, the government conducted inter-faith solidarity conferences in key cities in Mindanao to address not only the growing concern over the perceived anti-Islam undertones of the war against terrorism, but also to foster mutual respect among various ethnic and religious groups in the country.

Meanwhile, to address the issue of terrorist groups exploiting the legitimate struggle of some supposedly marginalized sectors of Philippine society, the government is also pursuing peace negotiations to address this concern. At the same time, the government has given more impetus to the rehabilitation and economic development of areas dominated by these rebel groups. The government is on the verge of forging a formal peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that could at least minimize the long-standing dispute and conflict engulfing Mindanao.

c. Military

In the Philippines, the government was able to chalk significant successes in its counter-terrorism efforts. Sustained government counter-terrorism efforts decimated the ranks of the ASG from a peak of 1,000 fighters in the mid-1990s to 508 as of June 2005. Moreover, the ASG is now on the run and largely disorganized. Government operations in 2005 led to the neutralization of 194 terrorist personalities composed of four (4) Al-Qaeda operatives; twelve (12) JI terrorists; 131 ASG members; twenty-nine (29) members of the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM); five (5) members of the Pentagon kidnap-for-ransom group; three (3) MILF Lost Command elements; two (2) members of the Abu Sufia kidnap group; and eight (8) other terrorists belonging to still unidentified groups. AFP troops also dismantled four (4) rebel camps, three (3) of which belongs to the ASG and one to the Misuari Breakaway Group (MBG).⁵

The AFP and PNP are sustaining their respective modernization programs in line with current and exigent needs to enable them to respond effectively in containing the global terrorist threat. The AFP remains committed to its modernization program, which is complemented with increased foreign training and bilateral military exercises.

To enhance the AFP modernization program, the Philippines is actively pursuing its defense cooperation agreements/arrangements with Washington, the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty and the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), and at the same time bolstering its campaign against terrorism. The RP-US Balikatan exercises and the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercises are conducted under the auspices of these agreements. On the part of the PNP, it has also launched several counter-terrorism training that include the one-month Counter Terrorist Training Course

⁵ **2005 Yearend Report**, Intelligence Division, Philippine Navy

and similar training arrangements with the US' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Israeli Police, the Scotland Yard, the Australian Federal Police and the French Police.

The Philippines established a cooperation mechanism with its nearest neighbors, Indonesia and Malaysia, with regional terrorism as the main focus. The Trilateral Agreement on Information and Establishment of Communication Procedures strengthens border controls and allows these countries to help check Muslim extremists linked to Al-Qaeda. The treaty called for joint training exercises, the establishment of hotlines, standard procedures for search and rescue, sharing of intelligence and sharing of airline passenger lists.

Similarly, the Philippines has a Border Crossing Agreement with Indonesia, which calls for the monitoring of movement of people in its common borders. The Agreement also provides for the conduct of joint naval patrol to deter the infiltration of terrorist elements in their borders and prevent transnational criminal activities. The Philippines also conducts joint naval exercises with its ASEAN navy counterparts particularly the MALPHILAUT naval exercises with the Royal Malaysian Navy; Exercise SEAGULL with the Royal Brunei Navy; and the CORPATPHILINDO with the Indonesian Navy⁶.

II. Cooperative Endeavors With Specific Countries

To complement the Philippine's counter-terrorism efforts, the government feels the need to solicit cooperation with countries within and outside the region. The limitations on the country's security capabilities underscore the need for such cooperative endeavors. Currently, it maintains a significant level of collaboration with the US, Australia, Japan as well as its immediate neighbors in the ASEAN.

A. US

1. Nature of cooperation

Cooperation of the two countries range not only in the areas of defense but also in other aspects that calls for the strengthening of the country's socio-cultural and economic structures in order to meet the characteristic nature of terrorist threat confronting the environment in the country. This nature of cooperation indeed paid well for the country's comprehensive counter-terrorism campaign.

2. Extent of cooperation

RP-US counter-terrorism cooperation is quite robust, the country being a long-time and major non-NATO ally of the US. The US is very much active in helping the Philippine government in combating local and foreign terrorist threats. However, because foreign military presence in the Philippines is limited by the constitution, US contribution is only confined merely to training in counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism tactics, advising Filipino units, and participating in civil-military operations. The focus of civil-military operations is to limit the influence of insurgents

⁶ Selected papers on international terrorism, Naval Intelligence Division, Philippine Navy

with the local population, particularly in the southern region where most activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and other insurgent groups are largely focused.

The US has been conducting large joint training exercises with the Philippines since 1981 called the Balikatan exercises. However, in the aftermath of the September 11 event and in light of the unbridled terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), these exercises have evolved drastically. Significantly, the recent series of Balikatan exercises were heavily focused on the humanitarian aspect, with socio-economic development as the main thrust to win the hearts and minds of the target population, which similarly serves to be the mass base of the terrorists. Hence, a significant phase of the Balikatan exercises are geared towards the delivery of basic government services, rural reconstruction, public infrastructure development, and medical/dental missions to name a few.

Beginning in October 2001, the US sent groups of military observers to Mindanao to assess AFP operations against the ASG, render advice, and examine AFP equipment needs. President Bush extended \$93 million in military aid to the Philippines in 2001, and offered a direct US military role in combating the ASG⁷. In 2002, two Balikatan exercises were conducted.⁸ The first exercise, Balikatan 2002-1, involved around 1,650 US troops.⁹ This operation was conducted in Basilan and was intended to destroy the ASG as well as free a US missionary couple who were taken hostage in May 2001.¹⁰ These operations were conducted by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) with the US serving in a training and advisory role. Significantly, the exercises seriously degraded the ASG's capabilities, while the US military's massive civic-action projects considerably improved the lives of Basilan residents. The second exercise, Balikatan 2002-2, involving 2,665 US troops, was held in Luzon and focused on civil-military operations and a humanitarian assistance exercise.¹¹

The 2003 Balikatan exercise generated controversy when it was reported that US troops and their Filipino counterparts would "conduct or support combat patrols" against the ASG.¹² This proposed US participation in combat, allegedly sanctioned by both President Arroyo and the Bush administration, drew in significant domestic political

⁷ Feickert, Andrew, **U.S. Military Operations in the Global War on Terrorism: Afghanistan, Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia**, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, February 4, 2005

⁸ "Operation Enduring Freedom- Philippines Balikatan 2002-1," *GlobalSecurity.org*, March 16, 2004, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/balikatan_02-1.htm].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ On June 6, 2002 the Philippine military attempted to rescue the US hostages and US missionary Martin Burnham was killed in the attempt but his wife Gracia was wounded and later recovered.

¹¹ "Operation Enduring Freedom- Philippines Balikatan 2002-1," *GlobalSecurity.org*, March 16, 2004, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/balikatan_02-1.htm].

¹² "U.S. Troops Aid Riles Philippines," *CBSNEWS.com*, February 21, 2003 and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Combat Force of 1,700 is Headed to the Philippines," *New York Times*, February 22, 2003.

opposition. Balikatan 2003 was eventually modified to ensure that US forces would not participate in combat operations.

Balikatan 2004 involved about 2,500 US troops participating in a variety of exercises and training sessions with the AFP.¹³ The Balikatan 2005 involved over 300 US soldiers and 650 Filipino troops and focused on humanitarian operations in Quezon province, considered to be a hotbed of communist insurgency. US and Philippine marine troopers conducted small unit field training exercises designed to improve interoperability.¹⁴ In July 2005, US and Philippine troops launched a joint operation in Mindanao in pursuit of ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani. The current Balikatan 2006 exercises involved some 5,000 US personnel and are being conducted in Sulu where the ASG and bandit groups are active. The exercises would focus on humanitarian projects and it is hoped that the success of the Balikatan 2002 in Basilan would be replicated in the current exercises. In order not to arouse deep-seated anti-US sentiments among the residents, there would be no live-fire exercises to be conducted. Significantly, Australian troops will observe the current exercises in light of the RP-US Mutual Defense Board's agreement to evolve the Balikatan exercise into a multinational event, beginning this year. Meanwhile, a phase of the exercises will be conducted in Northern Luzon and will tackle the emergent threat of urban terrorism¹⁵ as exemplified by the RSM.

Some of the other significant RP-US counter-terror cooperative efforts are:

- The conduct on a regular basis low-level training exercises with specialized Philippine counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency forces.¹⁶
- US installation of the Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP) in the Philippines.
- Plans to launch under the US State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program an intensive program to assist the Philippine police with a sustainable counter-terrorism capacity.
- The Philippine and the US militaries planned the conduct of the joint Security Assistance Training Module (SATM) program to form and train 16 "light infantry companies".

¹³ "Balikatan 2004-Improving Combat Readiness Between Philippine and U.S. Forces," Asia Pacific Defense Forum, Spring 2004.

¹⁴ Jaime Laude, "U.S Soldiers Due for War Exercises," *Philippine Star*, Jun 26, 2005.

¹⁵ "RP – US war games focus on urban terrorism. *Philippine Star*, March 1, 2006

¹⁶ Information in this paragraph is from C.H. Briscoe, "Balikatan Exercise Spearheaded ARSOF Operations in the Philippines," *Special Warfare, The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, September 2004, pp. 16-25.

On socio-economic assistance, the BUSH administration agreed to work with the US Congress to provide the Philippines over \$1 billion in benefits. Areas of cooperation would be on poverty alleviation, agricultural development, reintegration of former rebels, improvement of public services, educational and cultural grants, increase investments, infrastructure development, and rural reconstruction. In particular, the Mindanao assistance package aimed to provide direct support for the peace process by integrating the ex-combatants and their communities into the peacetime economy; creating an environment in Mindanao that is attractive for investment, job creation and economic progress; and providing improved public services in Mindanao, especially in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao,

3. Accomplishments

The Balikatan series of exercises mostly benefited the operational capabilities of the AFP. The 2002 Balikatan exercises were credited with the severe disruption and significant reduction of the ASG. US cooperative efforts with the Philippines likewise helped in neutralizing notorious ASG leader and spokesman Aldam Tilao @Abu Sabaya in Sibuco, Zamboanga del Norte on 21 Jun 2002. Furthermore, the US bounty offered for several top ASG terror personalities, to include its nominal head, Khadaffy Janjalani, has generated tip-offs provided by civilians that led to several neutralizations effected by the AFP. The humanitarian aspect of the Balikatan exercises, meanwhile, significantly helped in the development of target areas, thereby improving the quality of lives of the target population and eliminate the root cause of insurgency and, consequently, terrorism. Significantly, the overall US-RP counter-terrorism helped infuse much-needed new equipment to the AFP that, in effect, fast-tracked its modernization.

B. Australia

Australia is following the steps of the US in rendering more effort to help the country in enhancing counter-terrorism effort.

1. Nature of cooperation

Australia's cooperation with RP is constantly expanding. Like the cooperation with the US, it also aims to enhance a comprehensive aspect of RP's defense and structural framework in order to have an in-depth approach in addressing terrorism. More importantly, it places greater importance to building the capacity and capability of law enforcement agencies and improvements in the legal framework to meet the nature of threat. Meanwhile, Australia has identified socio-economic marginalization as a leading cause for the growth of insurgency and terrorism in Southern Philippines and has initiated massive development cooperation with the Philippines to address the problem.

2. Extent of cooperation

The Philippines and Australia signed in 2003 the *MOU on Cooperation To Combat International Terrorism*", that provides for greater sharing of intelligence;

conduct of symposiums, workshops and conferences on terrorism; joint military and training exercises; increased cooperation between law enforcement and other related agencies, particularly in the prevention and investigation of terrorist activities and other transnational crimes, and in addressing money laundering and terrorist financing; the development of appropriate and effective counter-terror legal regulatory and administrative regimes, as well as education and technical assistance programs.¹⁷

The two (2) countries likewise signed in 2004 a A\$3.65M protocol agreement known as “*Philippines Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Project*” designed to build the capacity of Philippine law enforcement agencies in intelligence-sharing, bomb investigation techniques, forensics and other counter-terrorism areas at both strategic and operational levels.

Other significant RP-Australia cooperative endeavors include the following:

- The A\$1.3M, 18-month “*Philippines-Australia Port Security Capacity Building Project*” to assist the Philippines in strengthening port security and developing and implementing port security plans.
- A memorandum of agreement to improve operational cooperation in migration and border management between the two countries.
- Possible cooperation on strategic maritime security issues, which entails a joint surveillance command and a combination of coast watch through customs and the military.
- The two (2) sides began negotiations on a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which would allow the stationing of Australian troops in the country for training purposes.

On socio-economic development, Australian aid flows to the Philippines totalled over A\$300M in the last five years. Significant contributions to Philippine development efforts were in the areas of education and training, human resource development, health, rural development, community development, governance, assistance to vulnerable groups, infrastructures, and support to the Mindanao peace and development process.

3. Accomplishments

The expanded RP – Australia counter-terror cooperative endeavor has substantially improved the Philippine’s law enforcement capabilities. Philippine agencies benefit enormously in cross training exercises, information exchange and technical and technological assistance rendered by the Australian government. Moreover, the focus on maritime security, particularly on port security, will aid the country in achieving compliance of international protocols, particularly the ISPS.

¹⁷ “*Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of Australia on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism*,” March 2004. {<http://www.aseansec.org/16206.htm>}

c. Japan

A traditional regional economic partner, Japan is moving in establishing a mark in dealing with terrorism in the region including the Philippines. Opportunities for specific aspects are being provided right now for greater cooperation in the future.

1. Nature of cooperation

The financial aspect of terrorism and maritime security cooperation continue to be the main focus of Japan's cooperative thrust in the region. For the Philippines, the cooperative endeavor remains centered on developing the human resources, infrastructures and information sharing essential for implementing maritime security procedures.

2. Extent of cooperation

Japan has been cooperating with its neighbors in the ASEAN region in cutting off funding for terror groups and strengthening immigration controls to stop militants from crossing border.¹⁸ In an anti-terror plan adopted at the ASEAN summit in Vientiane, Laos in Nov 2004, Japan and ASEAN agreed to bolster measures to counter and prevent the financing of terrorists and terror organizations, and the use of alternative means of remittance such as illegal money transfer. They also agreed to implement appropriate measures so that terrorists will not use charitable organizations and groups to cover their activities, as well as enhance aviation and shipping security to avert attacks.¹⁹

On maritime security, Japan has taken some initiatives in securing the vital but piracy-prone Malacca Strait²⁰. In April 2000, Japan hosted an international piracy conference that drew maritime security officials from 15 Asian nations, including the Philippines, who discussed information-sharing to expedite action against unlawful transnational acts committed at sea as well as search-and-rescue activities.²¹ Japan was also a signatory the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships In Asia (RECAAP) that also include the ASEAN countries China, South Korea, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. A key pillar of the RECAAP agreement is the Information Sharing Center (ISC), which will facilitate communication and information exchanges between the member-countries, as well as improve the quality of statistics and reports on piracy and armed robbery against ships in the region.

Bilaterally, Japan and the Philippines held on 09 Feb 2005 the first RP-Japan Political Security Dialogue in Manila where both countries agreed to prioritize addressing the threat of terrorism, piracy, human and drug trafficking, maritime and

¹⁸ "Japan, ASEAN Deepen Anti-Terror Cooperation," [www.channelnewsasia.com](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/southeastasia/119825/1/.html), 30 Nov 2004. [http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/southeastasia/119825/1/.html]

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lt John F. Bradford, "The Growing Prospects for Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," Institute Defense and Strategic Studies, Singapore, May 2005.

²¹ Ibid.

aviation security, as well as other transnational crimes.²² Relatedly, a Maritime Law Enforcement (MARLEN) exercise was jointly conducted on 23 Feb 06 off Manila Bay by Philippine and Japanese Coast Guard units. The exercise was the culmination of the month-long seminar sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under its five-year human resource development project. Also participating in the anti-terrorism exercise were delegates from four (4) Asian countries and Philippine Law enforcement agencies. This is the third time the Philippines, in partnership with Japan, has hosted an anti-terrorism exercise at sea that is designed to enhance operational skills. Meanwhile, Japan has now replicated the Philippine Coast Guard's scheme of the deployment of sea marshals on board vessels as first line of defense against terrorists.

3. Accomplishments

Japan's thrust on counter-terrorism cooperation is primarily on maritime security. It is in this nature that the Philippines gains considerable inputs from maritime exercises between the two countries' maritime law enforcement agencies. Primarily, the Philippine coast guard relies heavily in the continuing training exercises provided by Japan for port and harbor security, patrols and in technical cooperation.

III. Assessment

The cooperative endeavors with several countries indeed paid immeasurable dividends to the country, in terms of not only negating the growth and spread of several threats, but likewise in the improvement of capacity and capability building, for which our several enforcement and security agencies are well up to. In due time, we look forward to attaining a sizeable form that could formidably deal with real threats. For the time being, the real need for the country remains to be in furthering other aspects of cooperation that can build-up to attain a real comprehensive approach to deal with the threat.

Still back-pedaling the Philippine efforts is the severe lack of technical and technological infrastructures that can deal with future threats notably in the aspect of dealing with evolving forms of terrorism.

As an archipelagic country, the Philippines bears the brunt of maritime terrorism. Its porous borders, vast maritime areas, a major offshore project, and elongated coastlines render the Philippines all the more vulnerable to terrorist threat to its maritime environment and infiltration from unwanted elements. The lack of adequate assets for our maritime law enforcement agencies primarily hinders our efforts in this regard.

IV. Conclusion

The cooperative endeavors with the US, Australia and Japan substantially aided the Philippines' capabilities standing in dealing with the real and actual threat of terrorism in our midst. It is for a fact that because of these undertakings, some depressed and severely affected areas in the country have been liberated from potential and actual hotbeds of terrorism. The province of Basilan, a previous hotbed of ASG activities is a showcase of terrorism eradicated with painstaking efforts. As we approach

²² "Proceedings of the First Philippines-Japan Political Dialogue, 09 February 2005," STL from DAFAHO Japan.

for more positive undertakings, like taking a step in the furtherance of multilateral cooperation, we expect that more of this kind in the country will evolve to the betterment of communities and security in the Philippines.

Undoubtedly, socio-economic development remains to be a major pillar in the Philippines' counter-terrorism strategy, and the extensive contributions of these countries to the Philippines' overall counter-terrorism strategy cannot be overemphasized. Hence, a multi-faceted cooperation remains to be the most viable approach to eliminating this modern scourge of human society.