

INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICTS AND THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Filipina adalah sebuah negara yang selalu mengalami kebangkitan massa yang diketuai oleh pergerakan sosial bersenjata pada waktu yang kritikal dalam sejarahnya. Kumpulan-kumpulan bersenjata terus-menerus mencabar keesahan negara-bangsa Filipina walaupun terdapat pertukaran rejim yang telah melihat sistem Filipina bertukar daripada liberal-demokrasi kepada otoritarian dan kembali kepada demokrasi. Kumpulan-kumpulan bersenjata ini, yang menggunakan ketidakpuasan hati rakyat berkenaan isu-isu politik, sosial dan ekonomi, boleh dibahagikan kepada kumpulan-kumpulan komunis, pemisah Muslim, dan pemberontak militari. Pentadbiran Filipina dari dulu hingga sekarang sedar bahawa tindakan militari yang berpanjangan terhadap kumpulan-kumpulan ini akan mengakibatkan kos sosial dan ekonomi yang tinggi. Mereka seterusnya telah berusaha untuk memulakan perundingan untuk mencari penyelesaian bagi konflik-konflik tersebut. Rencana ini melihat apakah langkah-langkah perdamaian yang telah diambil di bawah pemerintahan pentadbiran Marcos, Aquino, Ramos, dan Estrada.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has historically experienced mass uprisings led by armed social movements at critical conjunctures. Despite major regime changes from western-style liberal democracy in 1946, to authoritarianism in 1972, and redemocratization in 1986, internal armed groups continue to challenge the legitimacy of the Philippine nation-state. Drawing from various political, social and economic discontents, these armed groups have ranged from communist insurgents, to Muslim separatists, and military rebels.

Recognizing the grave social and economic costs of waging long-drawn-out military offensives against these groups, various administrations have initiated efforts at finding a negotiated solution to these internal armed conflicts. This paper is an exposition of the peace process under the Marcos, Aquino, Ramos and Estrada administrations. It will illustrate the internal dynamics of the armed social movements in response to international and domestic political transformations.

PEACE FACTORS

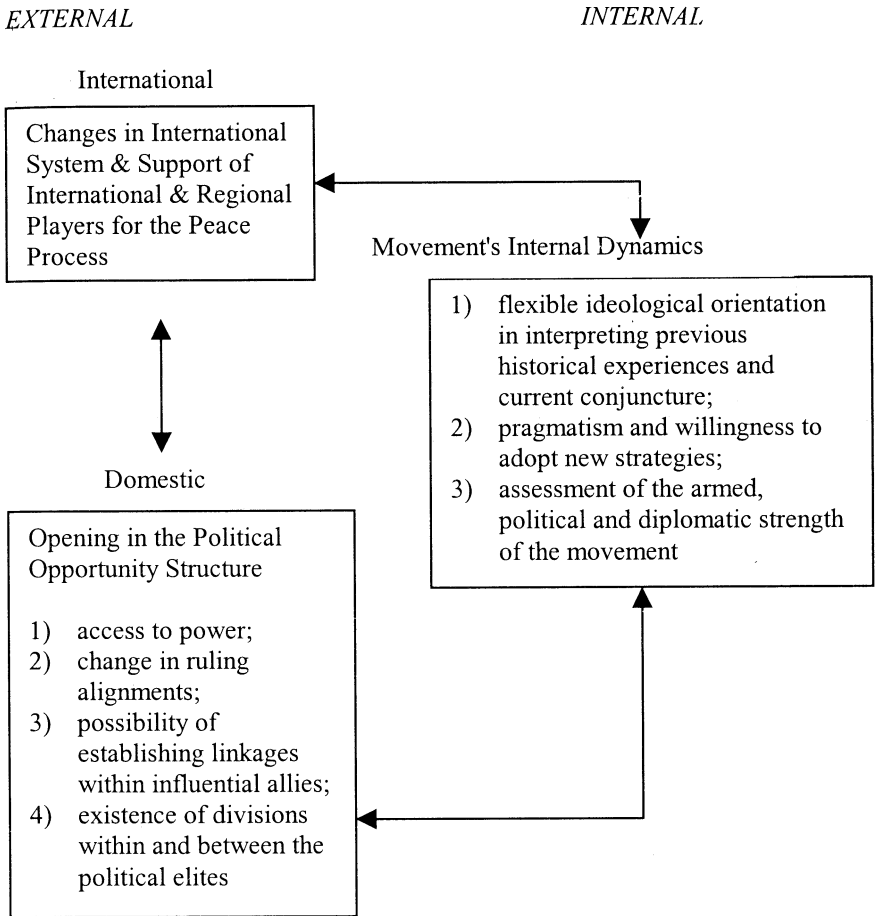
A variety of authoritative and autonomous forces serve as powerful mechanisms for associative behavior in society. Social forces may encompass informal and formal organizations, as well as social movements that are bound to a strong common set of ideas. Various social forces vie for supremacy through struggles and accommodations, clashes and coalitions as they engage one another over material and symbolic issues in multiple social arenas.¹ Social forces do not operate in a vacuum. They usually have to contend with the State in pursuing society-wide support for their causes. The dynamics between state and social forces are spread through society's multiple arenas that result in various responses and outcomes (Migdal, 1994).

Negotiating a peaceful settlement of internal armed conflict is a complex political process. Possible outcomes of the peace process are contingent on the delicate interplay of international, regional and domestic political transformations and the internal dynamics within the social movements. Caouette (1996: 69) noted "the outcome of the peace negotiations depended upon the degree of domestic political opening, the support and impact of international actors, and the ideological flexibility, pragmatism and confidence of the revolutionary movement's leadership that the movement had sufficient strength to make significant political gains from the peace process"² (See Figure 1).

1 Numerous struggles in society may result in: *integrated domination* - the state as a whole (or possibly even other social forces) establishes broad power and in which it acts in a coherent fashion; or, *dispersed domination* - neither the state (nor any other social force) manages to achieve countrywide domination and in which parts of the state may be pulled in very different directions (Migdal, 1994: 9)

2 In investigating the peace process in El Salvador and Guatemala, Caouette utilized Sidney Tarrow's concept of "political opportunity structure" (POS) in social movement theory. POS is defined as "consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent or national signals to a social and political actor which either discourage or encourage it to use its internal resources to engage in collective action." Rivera (1997) also utilized the concept in discussing the peace process, between the Philippine government and the armed movements, under the Ramos administration.

Figure 1: Political Opportunity Structure



Source: Adapted from Caouette (1996:70).

Possible outcomes of the peace process may be extrapolated by combining the external and internal variables. The permutations can also be utilized to explain the success, failure, or stalemate in the peace negotiations (See Figure 2). Any peace negotiation may result in the successful resolution of conflict (situation I) or the continuation of armed hostilities (situation IV). However, it may also end in stalemate due to a lack of commitment from the armed movement (situation III) or civil government (situation II) (Caouette, 1996: 71-72).

Figure 2 :Possible Outcomes of Peace Process

		<i>External Processes</i>	
		Pressure from International & Regional Players & Opening of the POS	
		+	-
<i>Internal Processes</i>	+	(I) Peace Accord and Political Incorporation	(II) Deadlocked Negotiations (due to lack of commitment from the civil government)
	-	Pragmatism Negotiations (due to a lack and Guerrilla of committment from movement) (III)	Deadlocked No Negotiations Warfare versus Counterinsurgency (IV)

Source: Caouette (1996:71).

INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICTS

The Philippine experience is instructive on the nature of state-society struggles, as the Philippine State at several historical junctures has attempted to impart its dominance over the entire society. The results have been varied as different social forces have at times facilitated its dominance; while in most instances the state is thwarted by these social forces. This pattern has been most evident in the various efforts of the Philippine State to resolve social and political conflicts.

Communist Insurgency

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was re-established in 1968 as a breakaway faction of the original *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) founded in 1930. The CPP has since waged a protracted people's war through its armed component – the New People's Army (NPA). Established in 1969, the NPA incorporated guerrilla leaders of the PKP's armed wing, the *Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan* (HMB). The CPP has also formed the National Democratic Front (NDF) in 1973 as an umbrella organization of its mass-based front organizations (Rocamora, 1994).

The CPP is guided by the ideology of "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought." The party views Philippine society as being semi-feudal and semi-colonial. It characterizes its struggle as a national democratic revolution geared towards anti-imperialism and the establishment of social justice through agrarian revolution.³ The CPP achieved headway at the height of the Marcos dictatorship in the 70s, expanding its membership nationwide. The worldwide waning of the communist ideology, on top internal conflicts and purges, have contributed to a general decline of the CPP's base in the 90s (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997). To compound matters, the CPP has split into five distinct factions.⁴

3 Despite its articulation of the ideological line of "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought" under the leadership of the vanguard party of the proletariat, the communist movement in the Philippines is rooted in the country's long history of agrarian unrest. The CPP proclaimed the peasantry as the "main force" in the revolutionary struggle, albeit in an instrumentalist manner, see Putzel (1996).

4 Doctrinal disputes and leadership struggle have resulted in the splintering of the Philippine communist movement into the "Reaffirmists" (RAs) and the "Rejectionists" (RJs). The former is composed of party members who remain loyal to the ideological formulations and leadership of CPP founder Jose Ma. Sison. The latter are key party leaders and members who broke away from Sison's leadership. The RJs are divided into four distinct organizations.

Ethno-Cultural Separatists

The existence of ethnic minority groupings in the Philippines is a historical result of the incorporation of formerly autonomous peoples by the Spanish and American colonizers. This process of diminishing the sphere of authority of local and regional groupings was continued by the policy of unification and centralization under the Philippine State (Che Man, 1990). Decades of perceived and actual neglect experienced by the minority groups have fuelled their separatist desires. Ethno-cultural separatism in the Philippines has manifested itself through the struggles of the *Moros* in the south and the *Cordillerans* in the north.

Moro National Liberation Front

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) evolved from the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) established in 1968. Rejecting the leadership of the traditional Muslim elite politicians, the younger MIM members organized the MNLF in 1971. In 1974, the MNLF Central Committee issued a manifesto in Tripoli, Libya declaring the goal of establishing an independent *Bangsa Moro* homeland. The separatist struggle of the MNLF resulted in the outbreak of the Mindanao war in the 1970s (Che Man, 1990). Several factions would later break away from the MNLF on the issues of leadership, ideology and autonomy.⁵

Moro Islamic Liberation Front

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is a major faction of the MNLF composed of traditional, aristocratic and religious elites in Maguindanao. It broke away from the MNLF leadership in 1978, and formally organized itself in 1983. Wary of the Marxist-leanings of the MNLF, it seeks the promotion of Islam and the preservation of Moro society (Mogato, 1999).

⁵ Aside from the MILF, another faction known as the "MNLF-Reformist Group" broke away in 1982. The MNLF-Reformist Group was co-opted by the Marcos and Aquino administrations. Another splinter group is the *Mujahideen* Commando Freedom Fighters. More popularly known, as the *Abu Sayyaf*, the group is composed of younger former MNLF guerrillas. Often described in media as an extremist fundamentalist group, the *Abu Sayaff* was organized in the mid-80s. The organization has been implicated in several kidnappings, extortion, banditry, and smuggling activities (Coronel Ferrer, 1997: 217).

Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA)

The Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA) was a splinter organization of the Cordillera People's Democratic Front (CPDF)--the underground united front organization of the CPP-NPA-NDF in the Cordillera region in Northern Philippines. The CPLA differs from the CPDF's view that the Cordilleran issue is part of the bigger three basic problems, namely imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism. It contends that the situation in Cordillera is about the violence brought to its people by the destruction and exploitation of its natural resources by the majority and foreign multinational corporations (Agbayani, 1987; Coronel Ferrer, 1997).

Military Rebels

The military rebels that launched seven coup attempts against the Aquino administration were products of a military that was heavily politicized during the Marcos dictatorship.⁶ Originally known as REFORM (Restore Ethics, Fairmindedness, Order, Righteousness and Morale) in the Armed Forces Movement, RAM has consolidated with the Soldiers of the Filipino People (SFP), the Young Officer's Union (YOU), and the *Alyansang Tapat sa Sambayanan* (ALTAS) to form the *Rebolusyanaryong Alyansang Makabansa*. The ALTAS is composed of Marcos Loyalists within the military, while YOU is an association of younger ideological officers (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997).

RAM was instrumental in the failed coup against President Marcos that also served as catalyst for the EDSA uprising in 1986. The organization led three out of the seven coup attempts against President Aquino. Two other failed coup were led by other military groups but was secretly encouraged by RAM. The Marcos Loyalist forces also launched two coup attempts. RAM consists of members that included ranking officials who graduated from the Philippine Military Academy (Yabes, 1991).

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

The attempts of various administrations to address these armed groups demonstrate the efforts of the Philippine State to enforce domination over a melange of social forces in society. As years of violent confrontations have

6 McCoy (1990) asserted that the emergence of RAM was a response to the President Marcos' transformation of the Armed Forces of the Philippines from an apolitical bureaucratic organization to the strong arm of his authoritarian regime.

proven to be disastrous to the nation in general, the State introduced a series of initiatives to accommodate some of the demands of the insurgent groups.

Marcos Administration

The communist insurgency and Muslim secessionism in the south have provided President Marcos the rationale for institutionalizing martial rule in 1972. The authoritarian regime's policies towards the armed groups were "a combination of hardline policy i.e., the application of the full force of state power to wipe out the insurgents, and the same time provided opportunities for negotiation with the willing insurgents" (Brillantes, 1988). In 1974, Marcos granted amnesty and legalized the highly decimated *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP).⁷

Nevertheless, the emphasis was on the adversarial relationship between the government and the rebels, stressing on the need for the armed groups, particularly the CPP, to surrender unconditionally. There were no efforts to trace the root causes of the insurgencies such as poverty, unemployment and injustices. Instead, he launched a full-scale military offensive to crush these rebellions. As part of its international Cold War policy, the United States provided considerable military and economic aid to the counterinsurgency efforts of the Marcos administration. The hardline militarist position resulted in repression and human rights violations that led to the further growth of the armed insurgencies (Brillantes, 1988).

However, the intensity of the war in Mindanao has resulted in the initiation of peace negotiations between the MNLF and the martial law government. Under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the negotiations culminated in the signing of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement in Libya. The internal Muslim problem was raised to an international level when OIC-member countries and an oil embargo from oil-producing Islamic countries pressured Marcos to negotiate with the MNLF. Nevertheless, the active involvement of the OIC has resulted in the MNLF scaling down its demands from secession to autonomy (Brillantes, 1988; Mogato, 1999).

The Agreement provided for the granting of full autonomy to 13 provinces and 9 cities in Mindanao. It also provided for the establishment of an elected Legislative Assembly and an Executive Council to be appointed by the Assembly. However, the negotiations broke down in 1977. Nevertheless, Marcos implemented parts of the Agreement to give a semblance of addressing

7 For a detailed account of the peace negotiations of the PKP with the Marcos administration, see Pomeroy (1993).

the desires of Muslim Mindanao. He granted limited autonomy to 10 provinces and 7 cities; and set-up a rubber stamp assembly and executive council. The Marcos regime also succeeded in coopting the MNLF-Reformist Group, a smaller faction of the MNLF (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997).

Aquino Administration

The ouster of the Marcos dictatorship in February 1986 has brought about renewed calls for national reconciliation. The Aquino administration extended the hand of reconciliation to the insurgents groups by releasing political prisoners arrested during the Marcos administration. She personally met and opened negotiations with the leaders of rebel groups.⁸ President Aquino initially attempted to implement an integrated approach to the peace process. She constituted an inter-agency program, the National Reconciliation and Development Program (NRDP), to "coordinate and integrate the programs, projects and efforts of the government entities, non-government organizations and the private sector concerning national reconciliation" (Brillantes, 1988). While her administration achieved success in forging peace pacts with the CPLA and the MNLF-Reformist Group, it faced difficulties with the communists and Muslim separatists.

The Aquino administration initiated the first attempt at a peaceful settlement of the communist insurgency. A 60-day ceasefire agreement was reached in December 1986. However, the negotiations were troubled with mutual accusations of ceasefire violations and disagreements over the framework of the settlement. The indiscriminate shooting of protesting farmers near the presidential palace by the police resulted in the indefinite suspension of peace talks in 1987. Subsequent pressures from the military, after several failed coup attempts, led President Aquino to declare a "Total War" policy against the communist insurgents.

With regard to the Muslim separatists, a historic meeting between President Aquino and MNLF Chair Nur Misuari highlighted the resumption of negotiations with the MNLF. This accorded Misuari the opportunity to re-establish his leadership over the Moro movement, weakened by factionalism. However, the talks broke down due to disagreements regarding the implementing structures of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997; Mogato, 1999). In August 1989, the Aquino administration signed into law Republic Act 6734 creating the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

⁸ While President Aquino personally met with Nur Misuari of the MNLF and Conrado Balweg of the CPLA, she never personally met with the NDF leaders/negotiators (Brillantes, 1988).

(ARMM). However, only four of the 13 provinces covered by the Act opted to be a part of the autonomous politico-administrative body inaugurated in November 1990. These four Muslim-dominated provinces included Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi (Rivera, 1997).

Ramos Administration

Ironically, the ascension of former Armed Forces Chief and General Fidel V. Ramos to the presidency, in 1992, facilitated the most comprehensive and substantial efforts at reaching a peaceful settlement with the insurgent groups.⁹ The election of Ramos coincided with fundamental transformations, in the national and international scene, as a result of the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization. Recognizing the importance of peace and political stability as foundations for economic development, President Ramos formed the National Unification Commission (NUC) in 1992 to undertake consultations with various sectors of society and the rebel groups, in order to formulate an amnesty program and the process that will pave the way to a just and lasting peace. (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997: 175).

Unlike the Aquino administration, which had to contend with a hostile segment of the politicized military, the Ramos administration was able to consolidate the institution behind its initiatives for a political settlement of the armed conflicts. As part of its confidence-building measures (CBMs) with the NDF, it repealed the Anti-Subversion Law (Republic Act 1700), and released a number of political detainees that included some of the top leaders of the communist movement. It also considered the granting (albeit limited, conditional and selective) of general amnesty. On the other hand, negotiations with the MNLF were resumed upon the active mediation of the OIC and Indonesia (Rivera, 1994; 1997).

The Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) was formed in 1993 to address the recommendations of the NUC. The OPAPP was also tasked with the coordination of government agencies specifically created for the implementation of peace programs. These agencies include the National Program for Unification and Development Council (NPUDC), the National Amnesty Commission (NAC), and the Government Peace Negotiating Panels (GPNPs) (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997: 175).

⁹ According to Rivera (1994: 253), "the election of a key military officer like Ramos to the country's presidency has made it easier for the politicized military to accept initiatives for a political settlement of the armed conflicts."

In 1995, the government successfully concluded the peace negotiations with RAM. This paved the way for the election of former rebel Colonel Gregorio “Gringo” Honasan to the Senate. By 1996, the peace agreement with the MNLF was signed, leading to the election of MNLF Chair Nur Misuari as the governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the creation of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). Despite the intermittent deadlocks encountered by the negotiating panels, negotiations with the NDF progressed with the discussion of substantial issues (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997: 8).

Estrada Administration

The peace negotiations with the remaining rebel groups took a different turn upon the election of President Joseph Estrada in 1998. Buoyed by an overwhelming mandate and vast popularity among the poor masses, President Estrada has set a series of ultimatums and deadlines for the conclusion of the peace talks. The leadership of the MILF and NDF reacted negatively to the hard line stance taken by the President.

To complicate matters, President Estrada and CPP Chair Jose Maria Sison have resorted to personal attacks and insults over the ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States of America. The CPP-NPA-NDF pulled out of the peace talks, while the Estrada administration is considering opening negotiations with other factions of the splintered communist movement. Thus, the current actions of the Estrada administration have effectively negated whatever amount of goodwill that was established between the Ramos administration and the NDF.¹⁰

On the part of the MNLF, a sense of disappointment is slowly growing among its leadership because of the diminished support from the national government in fulfilling the remaining portions of its peace agreement with the previous administration. Despite the successful integration of its military arm with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, much of its energy has been spent struggling with the bureaucracy. Given the muddled peace policies of the Estrada administration, great difficulties are threatening the smooth passage from the transitional phase to regular regional autonomy based on the 1996 Peace Pact (Mercado, 1999; Timonera, 1999).

¹⁰ This prompted CPP-founder Jose Maria Sison to conclude that since President Ramos was Armed Forces chief and defense secretary before becoming president, he did not have to prove his worth. In Sison’s view, Ramos was more flexible in the peace negotiations, unlike Estrada who “is an actor pretending to be brave and knowledgeable in military operations”.

The situation is compounded by the growing disillusionment of former MNLF guerrillas with the leadership of Governor Nur Misuari. They are beginning to grow impatient with the seeming lack of concrete benefits of the peace agreement. Some even suspect that only a few people close to Misuari are enjoying the fruits of the peace process. The declining popularity of Misuari has resulted in the MNLF's twice successful lobby for the postponement of the ARMM elections (Mogato, 1999).

Battle fatigue has diminished the chances of older MNLF veterans in taking up arms again. The military is more concerned with the younger and more radical MNLF members, some of which already affiliated with the MILF and the extremist Abu Sayyaf. Thus, the 1996 Peace Pact is threatened by: 1) non-integration into the military and police, 2) lack of livelihood programs, 3) alleged favoritism in giving positions in the ARMM and SPCPD, and 4) alleged mismanagement of funds given to ARMM and SPCPD (Mogato, 1999).

The current difficulties in realizing government commitments under the peace pact serves to reinforce the MILF's apprehensions about the peace process. Unlike the MNLF, it rejects autonomy and continues to envision an independent *Bangsa Moro* homeland. It was originally the hope of the Ramos administration that the realization of the promised peace and development under the 1996 peace agreement would render redundant the issues raised by the MILF (Mercado, 1999).

After two years of delay and way into the new administration, the formal talks between the Philippine Government and the MILF was opened on October 25, 1999. This was preceded by a series of military encounters that displaced hundreds of families in Mindanao. The prospect of achieving peace with the MILF, however, remains unclear. This is a function of President Estrada's "casual style of leadership and his non-appreciation of policy and strategic thinking" (Vitug, 1999). Hence, the "lack of vision and direction, plus the seeming dominance of military minds in the government's technical committees and peace panel, would definitely prolong the ambiguity, restlessness, uneasiness and the often on-off implementation of the ceasefire agreement" (Mercado, 1999). Unlike the Ramos administration, the peace negotiations under the Estrada administration is also impaired by the lack of an influential international third party mediator. This difficulty is more evident with the NDF, since it is linked with the delicate issue of belligerency - that government refuses to recognize. On the other hand, the MILF does not enjoy OIC recognition. Recently, the Indonesian government has indicated its interest in mediating the peace negotiations.

THE DYNAMICS OF PEACE BUILDING: CONCLUSION

Power cannot exist in vacuum. Political situations continue to provide dynamic opportunities that state and social movements seize or create to realize their objectives (Rivera, 1997). The Philippine experience at addressing the various armed conflicts through a negotiated peace settlement is illustrative of the delicate interplay of external and internal determinants.

The internal armed conflicts in the Philippines were borne out of historical socio-economic and political inequities. In recent years, there has been a growing realization that the attainment of lasting peace in the Philippines should be anchored on two major premises. The first is that major reforms will have to be implemented to address the sources of discontent and create the conditions for lasting peace. Secondly, armed response to the insurgencies has not and will not put an end to the rebellion (Coronel-Ferrer, 1997).

The current breakdown and impasse in the peace process reveals the inherent limitation of the statist approach anchored on the leaders of both government and the insurgent groups. Recently, there have been proposals to shift the focus of the peace process to the local level highlighting the crucial role of civil society organizations.

Appendix : Peace Process in the Philippines

	Marcos	Aquino	Ramos	Estrada
International Pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ US Cold War policies provided military assistance to fight communist insurgency ➤ Strong OIC lobby initiated negotiations with MNLF; 1976 Tripoli Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continued US support for counter-insurgency efforts ➤ Continued OIC support for peace; 1987 Jeddah Accord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ End of Cold War ➤ 1996 Peace Agreement with MNLF concluded in Jakarta 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Absence of international third party mediator for peace talks with the NDF; issue of belligerency ➤ MILF is not recognized by OIC; possible peace support by Indonesia
Opening of Political Opportunities Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Repressive authoritarian rule ➤ Hardline militarist policy ➤ Non-implementation of Tripoli Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Initial opening of democratic space ➤ From policy of national reconciliation to hardline militarist policy ➤ Peace pact with CPLA ➤ Failed peace talks with NDF & MNLF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strong government commitment to negotiated peace settlement ➤ Peace pact with military rebels ➤ Peace pact with MNLF; exploratory talks with MILF ➤ Intermittent negotiations with NDF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Muddled policy, hostile government attitude ➤ Breakdown of talks with NDF ➤ Opening of formal talks with MILF
Internal Movement Dynamics	<p><i>NDF</i>-growth in membership; intensification of guerrilla warfare <i>MNLF</i>-initial strength decimated by factional splits</p>	<p><i>NDF</i>-internal political & ideological debates; resumption of armed hostilities <i>MNLF</i>-reorganized & consolidated membership; intermittent war <i>CPLA</i>-supportive of government's anti-communist campaign</p>	<p><i>NDF</i>-major factional splits; reaffirms orthodox strategy; dead-locked negotiations <i>MNLF</i>-successful negotiations; political incorporation <i>RAM</i>-successful negotiations; political incorporation <i>MILF</i>-exploratory talks</p>	<p><i>NDF</i>-resumption of armed hostilities <i>MILF</i>-ongoing peace talks; contentious issues</p>

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