

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 404

Episode Title: Target: Philippines

Description: American troops fighting terrorists in the Philippines have become a model for the global war on terror.

ANNOUNCER

Tonight it's a struggle against terrorism in a corner of the world far from the headlines. This is the Philippines and it's here that American soldiers have carried out what they say is a successful campaign against Muslim extremists: a campaign that's fast becoming a template for U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, a special roundtable discussion with your host, HDNet's Dan Rather.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. TONIGHT WE'RE REPORTING ON THE, QUOTE, "GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR." THAT PHRASE, COINED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE SEPTEMBER 11TH TERRORIST ATTACKS HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH THE HIGH PROFILE BATTLEFIELDS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN. BUT THE WORD GLOBAL IS MEANT TO SUGGEST A MUCH LARGER SCOPE OF OPERATIONS, AND THE PHRASE, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, JUSTIFIABLY OR OTHERWISE, HAS BECOME CONTROVERSIAL.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMERICAN SOLDIERS - IN PARTICULAR ELITE U.S. SPECIAL FORCES - CAN BE FOUND AROUND THE WORLD, IN LOCATIONS RARELY - IF EVER - MENTIONED. PLACES LIKE THE PHILIPPINES. THIS ONE-TIME U.S. COLONY - AND ITS 7,000 ISLANDS STRETCHED ACROSS THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC - WAS A KEY BATTLEFIELD IN WORLD WAR II. AND A CENTURY AGO AMERICA - THEN A COLONIAL PRESENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES - FOUGHT ITS FIRST FOREIGN COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN AGAINST LOCAL MUSLIM WARRIORS ON THESE VERY SAME ISLANDS.

TODAY, THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT IS BATTLING A HOME-GROWN BRAND OF VIOLENT ISLAMIC EXTREMISM, AND AMERICAN TROOPS HAVE RETURNED TO HELP END THIS NEW THREAT. THE COUNTRY'S SPRAWLING SOUTHERNMOST GROUP OF ISLANDS, CALLED MINDANAO, IS HOME TO A SIZEABLE MUSLIM MINORITY - MORE THAN FOUR MILLION BELIEVERS. THEY FEEL THEY'RE OUTSIDERS IN A PREDOMINANTLY CATHOLIC COUNTRY, AND FOR DECADES SEVERAL ISLAMIC EXTREMIST GROUPS HAVE FOUGHT FOR MUSLIM AUTONOMY OR INDEPENDENCE. BUT IN THE WAKE OF 9/11, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED, AND THIS ONGOING CONFLICT ZONE HAS WON THE ATTENTION OF THE WORLD'S ONLY SUPERPOWER.

TO UNDERSTAND THE U.S. MISSION HERE, YOU FIRST HAVE TO UNDERSTAND WHERE AND WHAT THE U.S. TROOPS ARE FIGHTING. THESE MEN BELONG TO THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP, CONSIDERED BY THE U.S. TO BE A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, WITH REPORTED LINKS TO AL QAIDA. THE GROUP'S MEMBERS HAVE KIDNAPPED CATHOLIC PRIESTS, LOCAL BUSINESSMEN AND FOREIGN MISSIONARIES. THEY HAVE TARGETED CIVILIANS IN LARGE-SCALE TERROR STRIKES, INCLUDING THE SO-CALLED "SUPERFERRY BOMBING" NEAR THE CAPITAL CITY MANILA - THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST SEA-BORNE TERRORIST ATTACK WITH 116 CASUALTIES. AND THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS WORRIED THAT THE ABU SAYYAF HAS ALSO PROVIDED A HAVEN FOR MEMBERS OF JEMAAH ISLAMIYA - THE ULTRA-VIOLENT INDONESIAN TERROR NETWORK THAT BOMBED A BALI NIGHTCLUB IN 2002, KILLING MORE THAN 200 PEOPLE - MANY OF THEM WESTERN TOURISTS. ABU SAYYAF MEMBERS TODAY CONTINUE TO EVADE CAPTURE ON TWO REMOTE SOUTHERN ISLANDS, BASILAN AND SULU - WITH ITS BUSTLING CAPITAL CITY, JOLO. THE GROUP HAS REPEATEDLY KIDNAPPED JOURNALISTS TRYING TO INTERVIEW THEM THERE. AND SO THESE PARADISE ISLANDS HAVE BECOME THE CENTER OF GRAVITY FOR A LITTLE KNOWN U.S. MILITARY MISSION. FOR AMERICAN TROOPS HAVE DEPLOYED HERE TO TRAIN AND SUPPORT THE PHILIPPINE MILITARY AS IT STRUGGLES TO WIPE OUT ABU SAYYAF.

THESE ISLANDS IN SOUTHERN MINDANAO ARE AMONGST THE MOST DANGEROUS LOCATIONS ON EARTH: PHILIPPINE SOLDIERS CAPTURED HERE HAVE BEEN BEHEADED, LOCAL CHILDREN CARRY ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADE LAUNCHERS, AND ALL WESTERN VISITORS RUN A CONSTANT RISK OF KIDNAPPING. THIS DENSELY JUNGLED REGION - REACHED BY TRAVELING DOWN DUSTY ROADS AND PASSING THROUGH HEAVILY ARMED CHECKPOINTS - HAS BEEN HERALDED BY THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AS ONE OF ITS BEST SUCCESS STORIES. THESE RAMSHACKLE VILLAGES HAVE BEEN A LABORATORY FOR A NEW, EXPERIMENTAL MILITARY DOCTRINE THAT HAS RECEIVED VERY LITTLE PRESS COVERAGE BACK HOME. BUT LIKE EVERYTHING IN THE QUOTE, "GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR," AMERICA'S FIGHT IN THE PHILIPPINES IS COMPLICATED.

TAKE THIS SECRET JUNGLE TRAINING CAMP IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF MINDANAO. A SEPARATE MUSLIM EXTREMIST GROUP IS PREPARING FOR WAR. THEIR WEAPONS, UNIFORMS, AND MILITARY DISCIPLINE SUGGEST A WELL-ORGANIZED OPERATION. THESE MEN ARE FIGHTERS FROM THE MORO ISLAMIC LIBERATION FRONT - OR M.I.L.F. THEIR GOAL IS AN INDEPENDENT ISLAMIC STATE IN THE PHILIPPINES. THEIR ENEMY, THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT - A U.S. ALLY. SO WHY IS THE U.S. MILITARY NOT HELPING TO HUNT DOWN THIS GROUP? BECAUSE UNLIKE THE ABU SAYYAF, THESE ISLAMIC FIGHTERS HAVE PROVED WILLING TO NEGOTIATE. IN FACT, THESE PHOTOGRAPHS SHOW THE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE PHILIPPINES MEETING WITH THEM LAST YEAR, TRYING TO KICKSTART A PEACE PROCESS WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

EIGHT YEARS AFTER 9/11, THE U.S. NOW SAYS THAT NON-MILITARY SOLUTIONS MUST PLAY A LARGER ROLE IN THE WAR ON TERROR - AND THAT GROUPS LIKE THE M.I.L.F. SHOULD - WHENEVER POSSIBLE - BE BROUGHT INTO THE POLITICAL PROCESS. IT'S ALL PART OF A VERY NEW APPROACH TO ENDING TERRORISM - AN APPROACH IN MANY WAYS PIONEERED BY THE U.S. MILITARY IN THE PHILIPPINES - WHICH IS NOW BEING APPLIED TO BATTLEFIELDS AROUND THE WORLD. THESE PICTURES UNDERSCORE THIS NEW DOCTRINE. FOR IN THE MUSLIM REGION OF THE PHILIPPINES, YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO SEE U.S. SPECIAL FORCES BUILDING A SCHOOL THAN FIRING THEIR WEAPONS. IT'S AN ATTEMPT TO WIN HEARTS AND MINDS, REQUIRING THE USE OF SO-CALLED SOFT POWER.

TONIGHT, WE'LL BE SPEAKING TO AN ARCHITECT OF THIS NEW APPROACH: LT. GENERAL DAVID FRIDOVICH. HE'S THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND THAT MEANS THAT ALL SPECIAL FORCES ON COUNTER-TERRORISM MISSIONS AROUND THE WORLD FALL UNDER HIS COMMAND. AND HE'S APPLYING THE LESSONS FROM THE PHILIPPINES TO BATTLEFIELDS IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN AND DOZENS OF OTHER PLACES HE CAN'T TALK ABOUT.

RATHER

General Fridovich, thank you for being here, appreciate your time

LT. GENERAL DAVID FRIDOVICH, U.S. SOCOM

Thank you sir.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JOINING US ALSO TONIGHT IS FRANK RICCIARDONE, A CAREER DIPLOMAT WHO HAS IN THE PAST WORKED IN CLOSE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE GENERAL.

RATHER

He was U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines from 2002 to 2005 and then served as U.S. Ambassador to Egypt. He is now a guest scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. and has specialized in counter-terrorism diplomacy. Ambassador, welcome to the discussion.

FRANCIS RICCIARDONE, FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO PHILIPPINES

Thank you very much

RATHER

Appreciate you coming.

RICCIARDONE

Thank you very much.

RATHER

We're pleased now to welcome Zachary Abuza, chair of the Political Science Department at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. He is a leading academic expert on militant Islam in Southeast Asia and has spent significant time on the ground in some of the Philippines' most dangerous regions. Professor Abuza, thank you taking time to be with us.

Well, General, let me come to you. I have in mind that one of the things we have a military to do is bluntly put, when necessary, when forced to do so, is to kill people and break things.

LT. GENERAL FRIDOVICH

Sure.

RATHER

Particularly Special Forces trained in that.

FRIDOVICH

Yes sir.

RATHER

Give us some sense of where the U.S. military is, and particularly in the Philippines, with trying to balance the humanitarian development help and civic actions with their -- with their military responsibilities, including training the Philippine army.

FRIDOVICH

There was an agreement that said that we would help them do counter-terror operations, we would build capacity in their military, we would train them in light infantry tactics that might be used. But that we would train them and help them assess themselves as to the capabilities they needed to be able to do that. And then the third cornerstone, or the third pillar, was going to be civil military operations, humanitarian assistance. And that had to do with, going out into the communities where - and they're a regional army. They really don't deploy, they-- they go there and territorially, that's where they are. And they fight, and they live there. Go out into those communities and find out what they need.

And one of our rules were as you determine what the populace said they needed or wanted, we determined, with their help, whether it was a want or a need. And if it was truly a need then we said, "We'll help you do this. But we need either sweat equity from you, resources, manpower, something that we know that you'll buy into the process and the outcome." And that means this: we're gonna get this to be self-sustaining. 'Cause quite often in many countries I've been we give things a lot, it's there, it's gone, you come back six months, a year later, it's gone. This is sustaining. It also starts building a relationship between the population and the government and the forces.

RATHER

Professor, give us the overview. Where do we stand vis-a-vis our mission, our hopes and our goals in the Philippines?

ZACHARY ABUZA, SIMMONS COLLEGE

I think for the most part we've been concerned about the lawless territories in the Southern Philippines. The Philippine government never exerted full control over the Sulu Archipelago and, and large regions of Muslim Mindanao. There are a number of different groups, three separate groups that have been fighting for independence there, with varying degrees of radicalism and ties to Al-Qaida and other transnational groups such as Jemaah Islamiya. The Americans have been very concerned that these organizations have been able to provide sanctuary for members of Jemaah Islamiya, from Indonesia, as well as a number of trainers from Al-Qaida in the past. And so, we're most concerned about this lawless territory.

RATHER

And from your perspective, Mr. Ambassador, where do we stand?

FRANCIS RICCIARDONE, FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR TO PHILIPPINES

In terms of this particular issue, dealing with the manifestations of the Global War on Terrorism in the Philippines, we've done rather well. We've brought together a lot of knowledge from across the U.S. government, but most importantly from the local people themselves.

From the outset we worked to ask a lot of questions rather than try to dictate answers. We asked them who they were, while trying to represent accurately who we were, and what our interests were, with full transparency. The objective being to understand how they saw the problem, and to see where we could help. The people on the other side, the terrorists themselves, various criminal elements, even some of the legitimate political opposition to the government of the Philippines, tried to portray the Americans as having some other agendas that were nefarious, inimical, to the national interests of the Philippines, or the local interest of the Muslim population in the South.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THERE WERE REASONS WHY THE LOCAL POPULATION WAS SKEPTICAL. AFTER THE UNITED STATES HAD GRANTED THE PHILIPPINES THEIR INDEPENDENCE - FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II - A SERIES OF U.S.-BACKED GOVERNMENTS CAME TO POWER, INCLUDING THAT OF MILITARY DICTATOR FERDINAND MARCOS. THE U.S. MILITARY ALSO MAINTAINED A LARGE MILITARY PRESENCE HERE, MOST NOTABLY AT SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE AND CLARK AIR FORCE BASE. BUT MARCOS' DREADFUL HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AND THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF U.S. MILITARY BASES MADE MANY FILIPINOS WARY OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. AND THE U.S. WAS FORCED TO CLOSE ITS BASES IN THE EARLY 1990S. WITH THE RETURN OF AMERICAN TROOPS TO THE PHILIPPINES' MUSLIM SOUTH NEARLY A DECADE LATER, FOLLOWING 9/11, SOME POLITICIANS HERE - LIKE FILIPINO CONGRESSMAN TEDDY CASINO - SAY THE U.S. MILITARY ISN'T HERE TO HELP THE FILIPINOS.

TEDDY CASINO, PHILIPPINE CONGRESSMAN

The benefits to the U.S. of these practically permanent military exercises are not only the knowledge that U.S. soldiers get, but the strategic positioning that the U.S. military is able to establish in the guise of military trainings.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BECAUSE MANY FILIPINOS ARE SUSPICIOUS ABOUT U.S. INTENTIONS, THE UNITED STATES WENT OUT OF ITS WAY TO SAY IT ONLY HERE TO FIGHT ABU SAYAF.

GEORGE W. BUSH, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT

My government and your government pursue a common objective: We will bring Abu Sayyaf to justice.

RICCIARDONE

The people at the local level and at the national level trust that we are all on the same side dealing with a terrible problem that afflicts them, and that we're making some progress, and we need to continue to work together, be committed, be strong, be creative, be flexible.

RATHER

Well Professor, let me come back to you for a moment. How does our history, a complicated history in the Philippines, and for that matter in the general region, affect this mission?

ABUZA

I think there's also a lot of lingering suspicion about the American intentions now to come back and reestablish bases such as Subic Bay or Clark Air Force Base. What the U.S. military has done, and I think they've done a very good job at this, is trying to convince the people it's not about bases. We're not here, we don't care about places, we don't want them, they don't fit our doctrine right now. They're there in a capacity-building mode. And I think they've done a lot to allay the suspicion. They really have been buoyed by the fact that a lot of people in Muslim Mindanao and Sulu have probably greater suspicion towards their own government, because they provided so little in- in human services, social services, education.

FRIDOVICH

So we'll go in there with Special Forces medics and some nurses and doctors, locals, always a mix. And always with a Philippine face to it. American support, Philippines lead. 'Cause this is about the government of the Philippines treating their population better. And it's powerful because fast-forward to about 2005, 2006 as I was leaving Special Operations Command Pacific, two guys turned themselves in.

They brought their weapons. They gave the weapons to the locals. And we said, "So were you fighters?" And they said, "Sure. But we came back after taking care of..." and they were providing security to Jemaah Islamiya. And they come back after doing this for two or three months. And they looked terrible. They were haggard. They'd been out on the field, as you can imagine. And this one guy's wife, says, "Look at you two, you look terrible, what have you been doing? And why do you even bother?" She said, "Let me tell you what your governments been doing for you. Your son, your newborn son's been circumcised. I got vitamins. Why are you fighting a government that's starting to provide for us?" And they looked around, looked at each other and said, "This makes no sense." That's powerful. And that's about the government of the Philippines and the people getting together.

It has been a great success, continues to be a great success. It's really a remarkable model on persistent engagement, on really staying in touch, in tune with a partner and an ally and a friend, historically. And we learned about the population. We learned about the people. We learned about the key leaders. We didn't make them any promises. But we did what the Professor said we did. We started to get the government of the Philippines to act like a government and start treating all their people to include the Muslims, like their citizens.

And all we were gonna do was indirectly help them start filling in the gaps of the government, of the ill-governed or poorly governed space. I think right now it's still, it's still a great place to point to and say, and we do that at U.S. SOCOM, we point to that as a model of what persistent engagement with the right tools, not necessarily all military, even many military tools, get to the heart of the War On Terror.

RATHER

Mr. Ambassador, what about this using military people to do these humanitarian works: is it a little out of balance? We have too many military people doing this and not enough people out of the Foreign Service or with things like the Peace Corp and other. Talk to me about that.

RICCIARDONE

Well, you're speaking to a field guy. And my perspective is whatever works, grab it and run with it. We had a very important United States Agency for International Development office that had been active in the Philippines for many years.

Now U.S.A.I.D. didn't have all the resources we'd like to have. And if, you know, if General Fridovich, then Colonel Fridovich at the time, had the ability to hire a few thousand men to break rocks, to-- to lay down a road around Basilan island, I was just delighted he could do that when A.I.D. couldn't. A.I.D. could do many things - they had experts in microfinance that the military didn't have. So we just put it all together at the field level. And Washington kind of turned us loose to do it.

RATHER

Professor, you've been patient here, but let me draw you into this. You've heard what the Ambassador and the General had to say. Do we need a dose of, of reality, that's contrary to what we've heard here?

ABUZA

Oh we, we definitely need a dose of reality. I think that what's made the Philippines successful is the footprint has been very small. It's a very small operation, and I think that's important. Counter-insurgency is counter-intuitive. You gotta go in with less to do more. You go in with too many forces, you're in the people's faces, you are too concerned about force protection, that really alienates you from the local population. My real problems, though, with what we've been doing, though, is that we haven't addressed some of the larger issues about institutional corruption in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which is our legion.

The military and police in the country have egregious human rights records. It's, it's getting a lot better. Now, I, I'd like to think that a lot of it has to do with the training and the oversight and the, the presence of U.S. troops there. So there is a lot of collateral damage - the Philippine military is, is not the American military. And I think we have to understand that it- it's incumbent on us to keep on this training so it happens less. And it, it does happen less than it used to. It's still a problem.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

INDEED ONE MAJOR FEATURE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MILITARY DOCTRINE HAS BEEN THE TRAINING AND IMPROVEMENT OF ALLIED ARMED FORCES. THIS ALLOWS AMERICA'S PARTNERS TO CARRY OUT COUNTER-TERRORISM MISSIONS THAT MIGHT BE TOO POLITICALLY SENSITIVE FOR U.S. TROOPS TO CONDUCT. PUTTING A "LOCAL FACE" ON THE MISSION IN THIS WAY IS NO LONGER RESTRICTED TO THE PHILIPPINES; IT IS NOW EMPLOYED WIDELY ELSEWHERE. THE U.S. MILITARY SPLITS THE WORLD INTO DIFFERENT REGIONS, OR COMMANDS. SOON AFTER 9/11 THE U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND - OR PACOM - WHICH INCLUDES THE PHILIPPINES AND SOUTH EAST ASIA, WAS COMMANDED BY FOUR-STAR NAVY ADMIRAL WILLIAM FALLON. BACK THEN, GENERAL FRIDOVICH SERVED UNDER FALLON, BUT HELD PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL SPECIAL FORCES TROOPS IN THAT REGION, INCLUDING THOSE TASKED TO HELP DESTROY THE ABU SAYYAF IN THE PHILIPPINES.

RATHER

We've had several reports recently say that U.S. Special Operations teams have conducted unilateral raids inside Syria and Pakistan. So that being the case, why can't we, or can we, just go in and destroy Abu Sayyaf on our own, if they're a real threat to our interests?

FRIDOVICH

Admiral Fallon and I had the same conversation in 2003 when he came onboard. And I'll be very, I won't bust any classification here. "Can you go there and do that?" he asked me. I was a one star talking to the four star. "Yes, sir, I can do that, but you'll never ask me to do that.

"I won't?" "No, sir. And before you think I'm being bravado, let me explain to you how I'm gonna do that and who I'm gonna use to do that." And as Special Operations Command Pacific, I had the ability, I had, I had aircraft out that worked for me. I had Special Forces battalion that worked for me. I had SEALs that worked for me. I had everything I needed to do that mission.

And we knew everything we needed to know to do that mission. And I said, "Here's how long it's gonna take. Here's what we're gonna do." And in about ten minutes I showed him how we would do it and what we would get after. And then I gave him the outcomes. I said, "Here's, you're, you're gonna get some version of this, this, or this at the end."

RATHER

As a result?

FRIDOVICH

Yes, sir. And I said, "Let me ask you a few questions. Before I do this, you need to give me two approvals - in writing - one from our President and one from their President. And then you need to tell me will this be for attribution or not?"

So I said, "At the end of the day, you'll never ask me to do that." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Well, whether you get those two approvals or not, what you really have to understand, if I, we do this and we're successful, it will be attributable. You will change how the Pacific and all those Pacific Rim countries view the U.S. militarily and diplomatically for decades to come. Is that worth it?"

And he slumped in his chair and he said, "You're right." And being the four star that he was, he said, "So how are you gonna do it?" And I said, "We'll train them to do that within the confines of their own law."

RATHER

I'm gonna come back to some of this in a moment. When we return, we're going to go a bit more in depth with the specific Islamic groups and how the US should confront them. That'll be next, so stay in here with us.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

A JUNGLE CLEARING IN THE REMOTE PHILIPPINE REGION OF MINDANAO CONSTITUTES A TRAINING CAMP FOR THE MUSLIM INSURGENT GROUP - THE M.I.L.F. THIS IS WHERE HUNDREDS OF SELF-DESCRIBED JIHADISTS LEARN HOW TO FIGHT. THE COMMANDER OF THIS CAMP TOLD OUR REPORTER/PRODUCERS BARNABY LO AND WILLEM MARX THAT THESE DEDICATED SOLDIERS YOU SEE HERE ARE JUST A FRACTION OF HIS ORGANIZATION'S TOTAL FIGHTING FORCE. AND THEY ARE ALL SWORN TO COMBAT THE PHILIPPINE ARMY.

ON THIS DAY OF TRAINING FOR THAT COMING BATTLE, A LIVE-FIRE EXERCISE IN FRONT OF OUR CAMERAS WENT HORRIBLY WRONG. THE INSTRUCTOR, IN A CARELESS FIT OF BRAVADO, SHOT HIS HIGH-CALIBER ASSAULT RIFLE DOWN INTO HIS YOUNG TRAINEES. ONE OF THEM DIDN'T GET UP. HE WAS DEAD WITHIN HOURS. A MARTYR, ACCORDING TO THE MAN WHO SHOT HIM.

AND WHILE THESE TRAINING CAMPS HAVE THE LOOK AND FEEL OF AL QAIDA, THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT OFFICIALLY CONSIDER THIS GROUP AND ONE OTHER LIKE IT TO BE TARGETS. INSTEAD THEY ARE CONSIDERED PART OF A DOMESTIC INSURGENCY THAT POSES NO THREAT TO AMERICAN INTERESTS.

BUT WHEN THE U.S. MILITARY GOES OVERSEAS FOR COMPLICATED AND DELICATE MISSIONS, IN PLACES LIKE THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES, THEY OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES STRUGGLING TO SEPARATE FRIEND FROM FOE. AND THIS IS AS COMPLEX A SITUATION AS YOU WILL FIND ANYWHERE. THE ORIGINAL MUSLIM REBEL GROUP HERE, CALLED THE M.N.L.F., OR MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT, SIGNED A PEACE TREATY WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN THE MID 1990S. BUT DESPITE THEIR PEACE DEAL, WE MET MEMBERS OF THAT ORIGINAL REBEL GROUP WHO SAID THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO FIGHT THE GOVERNMENT, AND IF NECESSARY, THE AMERICANS.

HADJI GAFFUR (TRANSLATED FROM TAUSUG)

It will be a shame if the Americans fight us because they're the most powerful country in the world. But if they fight alongside Filipino soldiers, even if they're Americans, even if they're red-headed, we will fight them.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND THEN, JUST A FEW MONTHS BACK, THE M.I.L.F., WHOSE TRAINING CAMP WE VISITED, BACKED OUT OF THEIR OWN PEACE DEAL TO RESUME HOSTILITIES. AND THERE'S MORE. THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO THE PHILIPPINES KRISTIE KENNEY HAS MET WITH THE M.I.L.F. BUT ONE OF THE M.I.L.F.'S COMMANDERS WARNED THAT IF HIS FIGHTERS FELT TRAPPED BY NEARBY AMERICAN TRAINING EXERCISES, THEY WOULD HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO DEFEND THEIR TERRITORY.

THES AMBOLODO (TRANSLATED FROM BISAYA)

I think we might be able to avoid direct confrontation with them. But if we're pushed to it then we'll have no choice. The only one we fear is Allah.

RATHER

So, General, as you and the others around the table have consistently said: complicated. How are American soldiers and commanders, for that matter, how are they supposed to sort their way through all this complicated, Philippine domestic affairs? And could or could not the interests of the United States in places like this differ from those of our Philippine allies?

FRIDOVICH

I actually would I would take a good punt and a pass on this one. And I'll tell, let me just, because I would do this anyway. I would really defer both to the professor and the ambassador about what do you want us to do here?

RATHER

You're saying listen. I represent the military part of this piece. And we do what the mission is. And there's some lack of clarity, if you will, on what the mission is. Mr. Ambassador, let me turn to you, what is it? What do you tell them, these are bad guys, but they're not seen officially as a direct threat to the United States. Now, what's our policy? What's our goal? Do we deal with them? When we say the Philippines has to deal with that, and we keep our guys working on something else? Help us out here.

RICCIARDONE

Well, we work very hard to refine the goals of the United States through a lot of consultation with the Government of the Philippines, and the local people, and drawing on the expertise that was out there. Foreign expertise, meaning American expertise, like Professor Abuza. A lot had been written about the, the tribal, the clan affiliations, the ethnic ones.

We studied hard, asked a lot of questions. There was no point in defining more people to be our enemy than particularly wanted to be our enemy. We had been dealing with them the Moro National Liberation Front, the M.N.L.F., ever since they had made peace with the Government of the Philippines under President Ramos in the mid-'90s.

The M.I.L.F., the Moral Islamic Liberation Front, which had broken away and had not joined that peace, was a bigger question mark. And in fact, we made clear that we had questions. We genuinely didn't understand who they thought they were. How they were going to try to advance their agenda, their political agenda more than a religious one.

And I asked at one point publicly in, in some media interviews, actually repeatedly, to make clear, who are the M.I.L.F. really? They profess that they want nothing more than autonomy, democracy, peace, development, and yet they seem disposed to use violence. It seems to us that they're at least tolerating the presence of Abu Sayyaf.

They need to define themselves. Are they, let me put it in the stark terms of, with us or against us? Realizing that they could be both. But were they prepared to use lawful means to go after their political goals? Or only unlawful ones? Not just civil disobedience, but would they be blowing things up? Killing innocent people? Practicing terrorism? And actually the leader at the time, responded with a letter to President Bush, Saying, "Here is who we are. And what we want. And what we expect from the United States. We would welcome American assistance in- in negotiating a good, a just, and a permanent solution to our legitimate historic grievances." That put them on the, the track, and us on a track of being able to deal with each other.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS THE REMARKABLE LETTER THAT THE AMBASSADOR SAYS WAS SO IMPORTANT. JUST THINK...IT WAS SENT BY A RADICAL ISLAMIC GROUP - THE M.I.L.F. - TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. AND BECAUSE OF THIS OVERTURE, THE HEAVILY ARMED INSURGENT ORGANIZATION NEVER MADE IT ONTO WASHINGTON'S LIST OF BANNED FOREIGN TERROR GROUPS. INSTEAD, ACCORDING TO DIPLOMATS LIKE RICCIARDONE, AMERICA'S DECISION TO LEGITIMIZE THE M.I.L.F. HAS GONE SOME WAY TO DIFFUSING THE EXPLOSIVE CONFLICT IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.

RICCIARDONE

We still have questions about the M.I.L.F. And what they really want, and how they go about it. But we found it most effective not to use a broad-brush definition of the MILF as terrorists, that we won't deal with no how, no way, no time, no circumstances. But rather discriminate among their different factions, and see if we could support the people who were going after a negotiated solution with the government.

RATHER

You got something General?

FRIDOVICH

That, that's, that's probably a, a huge takeaway for the future. One of the key things that we understood very clearly and early on, once we learned about who the true enemy was, and what the real prize was here, it's not about defeating those five or six guys that are on the battlefield, it's the population. That's your center of gravity. On the ground it became the thing that we were trying to get ourselves and the government closer to, was the population. 'Cause by, if you do that, the tradeoff is that the terrorists have a less of a place to work from.

RATHER

Professor, again, help me help the audience understand, give us the big picture here.

ABUZA

I think we have to understand that these groups are very fluid. And they change. The real problem, I think, is that in many ways we, we bought into the notion that Abu Sayyaf was the real problem and not the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, which was really giving sanctuary to far more Jemaah Islamiya members...

RATHER

Excuse the interrupting. Define those for us, because I think our audience may be a..

ABUZA

Well, they're..

RATHER

...little confused.

ABUZA

...they're three different groups. They more or less all emerged from one organization that was founded in 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front. And they signed a peace agreement with the government in 1996. You had an Islamic group that broke away from them and are still fighting for an independent Islamic state. And then you have a more radical, small splinter group, the Abu Sayyaf.

The problem with the Philippines is they've never been able to come up with a holistic strategy for dealing with the South. They believe that you can divide and conquer. And it's a very hard thing to do, you just cannot do that in the Southern Philippines. And I think we've been in part captive to that: their agenda. We haven't used our leverage in my view, to get the government to really come up with a comprehensive program for all of Mindanao.

RATHER

Mr. Ambassador, if Abu Sayyaf is a cancer, let's have a cancer operation, cut it out. And the General says he can do it. If you, if the commander-in-chief says "do it," he can get it done. A lot of people would say, "Listen, we'll deal with the consequences later. But the important thing now is to get the cancer out of the body, which is to say this group of really bad guys, just cut them out. And we'll deal with the consequences later." What's wrong with that?

RICCIARDONE

What's wrong with that is it is not strategic thinking. And thank god our military, in my experience, doesn't think that way. It's 'cause it's not a simple matter of killing these 12 guys or 20 guys or whatever it is. It's the disease process you want to extirpate. And you don't wanna kill the patient when you're killing these few cancer cells. We wanna make sure they can't grow back, replicate, convince other young men to come up and take their place. That, we're after the big game here, the longer term, sustained relationship. And the only way you can do that, seems to me, with, with a host government, where there is a government and leadership, how, whatever the degree of popularity, look, as long as it's a legitimate recognized government, we need to work with them.

RATHER

But based on your experience, and we'll come back to the main thrust what we've talked about here, right now in the southern part of the Philippines, that's the Muslim part, is the United States seen as a hostile power? Are we seen as the Iranians once saw us as the Evil Satan? I mean, what is the standing of the United States by reputation in that part of the Philippines?

ABUZA

It's improved dramatically because of the civil action, because of - we now have almost 80 percent of U.S. A.I.D.'s operations in Muslim Mindanao. So the presence of the United States is more or less seen as being benevolent. But I think the most important reason why the Muslims are supporting us now is they really see the Americans as being the only people that can force Manila's hand to implement a durable political solution for Mindanao. And that if we were not there, if we were not pushing them so hard, that the Philippine government would, would simply punt on the peace process.

I don't like to use the "Global War on Terror." I prefer the "long war," because it is gonna be a long war. And we can't do all the fighting ourselves. And I think we've really gotta rely on the counterparts in the host nations. And so the best counterinsurgency and counterterrorism we can do is institution building. I think it would be very easy for what we have on the ground in the southern Philippines right now to eliminate the Abu Sayyaf threat very quickly.

RATHER

But then you come to the, the general's point: Then what?

ABUZA

But I don't think it's worth doing. I think we've gotta get the Philippines to do it. Now, I have my own skepticism that they will still be able to do this or have the will once we pull out and leave. But I'd like to think that, that what the General said is, is the correct approach.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PROFESSOR ABUZA - AND OTHERS WHO FOLLOW PHILIPPINES EVENTS CLOSELY - SAY THAT WHILE U.S. PRESSURE WILL PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN ANY LASTING PEACE WITH MINDANAO'S MUSLIMS, THERE REMAIN VERY SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT AND ITS MILITARY. WORKING ALONGSIDE THAT MILITARY, THE U.S. HAS HELPED KILL MANY OF THE MOST WANTED ABU SAYYAF MEMBERS, PROVIDING INTELLIGENCE AND SURVEILLANCE SUPPORT. BUT THERE'S A RISK TO AMERICAN INTERESTS WHEN THE U.S. IS SEEN TO BE WORKING SO CLOSELY WITH A PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT THAT IS STILL DEEPLY MISTRUSTED BY THIS MUSLIM POPULATION. THAT PART OF THE DISCUSSION WE'LL HAVE WHEN WE COME BACK, SO STAY HERE WITH US.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IF YOU WANT TO SEE HOW COMPLICATED A TASK U.S. TROOPS FACE HERE, YOU NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THIS HOSPITAL ON THE ISLAND OF SULU. U.S. SPECIAL FORCES APPARENTLY RECEIVED INTELLIGENCE THAT THE HOSPITAL MIGHT BE USED AS COVER BY ABU-SAYYAF TERRORISTS PLANNING TO ATTACK A NEARBY AMERICAN BASE. SO, ACCORDING TO LOCALS, THE U.S. MILITARY FORCED THE HOSPITAL TO CLOSE. DOCTORS WERE OUTRAGED THAT PATIENTS COULDN'T BE TREATED. DR. SILAK LAKKIAN IS THE CHIEF DOCTOR AT THE HOSPITAL.

DR. SILAK LAKKIAN, PANAMAHO HOSPITAL

Personally, as long as their motive, as I said, is but purely humanitarian, we have no problem with them. But if they interfere with operations of hospital like this just because there is alleged threat, we really don't like their presence here in this area.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE U.S. EMBASSY DENIED THE DOCTOR'S ALLEGATIONS. BUT THAT DIDN'T SATISFY THE LOCAL POPULATION. SOON AFTER THE ALLEGATIONS WERE MADE PUBLIC, HUNDREDS OF PROTESTERS DESCENDED ON A DETACHMENT OF SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIERS BUILDING A SCHOOL. THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS WERE FORCED TO EVACUATE- FAST. THE PROTESTORS SHOUTED "ALLAH AKBAR"...GOD IS GREAT. THIS BALANCING ACT BETWEEN PROTECTING YOUR TROOPS AND WINNING THE TRUST OF A LOCAL POPULATION IS THE CHALLENGE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY WARFARE, AND MAY PROVE CRUCIAL IN THE LIKELY BATTLEFIELDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

RATHER

Now question, should force protection, including the protection of these young valiant Americans we have doing this dirty, tough, dangerous work in there, should force protection trump other considerations, such as the sensitivity of the local population to the presence of U.S. forces?

FRIDOVICH

You know, R.O.E., Rules of Engagement, and force protection are designed the same way, that if they're practiced, they're rehearsed, they're studied, they're trained to. And that I can't really say as a commander, at any level, I can't do anything that's gonna add risk to what they do. But at the end of the day, there are valiant kids out there, men and women that are putting everything at risk. And there's not a whole lot of infrastructure there. Again, this is at the far reaches of the military.

RATHER

Well, the point here, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that it's case by case, situation by situation-- when to go to the sword, or this case to go to the weapon-- and when to have heightened sensitivity. Are our Special Forces people trained? Are there conversations about this? Are they trained?

FRIDOVICH

Yes. Actually they're, they're, they go through a lot of situational training. They do several things before they go down there, even now. They get trained in law of land warfare, they go over the Rules of Engagement. They're put in situations that makes them make the choices and they're critiqued and/or, you know, re-assessed all the way through. You know, it's always graduated response. The first thing is not to reach, especially down there, it's unlike other places. You don't reach for a weapon at all. You know, you're thinking through.

RATHER

Let me get straight, squared away. What is the agreement with the United States with the Philippines that Americans will not engage in combat operations? What is the agreement? Is it practical? How does it work on the ground, if it does?

FRIDOVICH

Great question. And this is something that we really worked through in the first probably 90 days that I was down there in command of the ground element. The constitution, their constitution prohibits us from doing that. That's why we had all of our guys, and I think for some of the guys after 9/11, that they were a little bit, I'd say put off that, hey, I came down here to do this. And we sat down. And we had to kind of rein them in and say, "Look, I mean, we're-- you know, we're-- we're built to be aggressive." I mean, that's-- you don't want us any other way. But you gotta understand-- and this is where I think it's unique to special forces-- yes, I can shoot you in the face with the truth or shoot you in the face literally. But I want you to get there a different way. And there's maybe not in me, but there's an air of confidence, not arrogance, but confidence in how you get things done.

And our guys you know very well are older and much more mature. They're experienced. They're not 18- or 20-year-old kids coming off. They're, our average age is about late 20, 28, 29. They've been in the Army for at least four or five years.

RATHER

That's the average age of Special Forces?

FRIDOVICH

Special forces. And that's who we're using primarily down there. They can accompany, if invited. But if they're out there with them and they get fired upon in, in any order, this is standard orders, they always have the right for self-defense. So they can return fire. They also have, under the rules of engagement, the ability to protect the Philippine counterparts and any Philippine equipment and/or things that the Philippines designate as critical. So-- and that's been working very, very well since 2002. And that was the first agreement. And it was difficult to get there. But we had to-- we had to get through it. And we've done that. And we've used it down to the company level several times but only for specific missions.

And if it's gonna save our life and limb, they're allowed to go ahead and engage. There's been some very, very large heroic acts that are very- done very quietly underneath the radar like getting wounded Philippine soldiers or marines or SEALs out under fire that we, we know about, we hear about, we get them out, we take care of them. We in, in the U.S., in quite a way, are the primary medical evacuation means by which we safeguard not just our lives but their lives as well.

RATHER

Well, let's broaden this out and move on for just a moment. How do the Islamic extreme movements in Southeast Asia, and in particular the Philippines, differ to what you would encounter, say in Afghanistan or Iraq? Mr. Ambassador?

RICCIARDONE

Islam itself is a, something that's polymorphous. It can take on local coloration. I'm talking about ordinary Islam. I'm not talking about terrorism. People live their faith in, in different ways. Depending on the nature of their societies, the geography, the climate, et cetera. The conflict in the southern Philippines is, has a religious dimension in that the minority group there defines itself as Muslim, and is seen by the majority as Muslim. But there's a heavy ethnic and tribal/clan dimension to it, and a large economic, fundamentally political one. The M.I.L.F. now, are fighting for very defined local autonomy, they are not part of a global jihad in that sense. As Al-Qaida itself sees itself. I think maybe Al-Qaida looked upon them as a, a kind of franchise operation.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MARSH AREAS OF CENTRAL MINDANAO HAVE BEEN USEFUL FOR FOREIGN TERRORISTS LOOKING FOR HIDING PLACES. AL QAIDA HAS HISTORICALLY SOUGHT OUT TERRITORIES SUCH AS THIS: POORLY GOVERNED, WITH DIFFICULT TERRAINS AND DISAFFECTED OFTEN HOSTILE POPULATIONS, WHERE AMERICAN FORCES HAVE STRUGGLED TO OPERATE SUCCESSFULLY: JUST LIKE SOMALIA, YEMEN, AND AFGHANISTAN. WHAT MAY MAKE MINDANAO THE EXCEPTION IS THAT RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW, THE UNITED STATES FOR ONCE HOPES TO GET AHEAD OF AL-QAIDA AND ITS AFFILIATES - TO BE PROACTIVE RATHER THAN REACTIVE. THE MINDANAO COUNTER-TERRORISM MODEL IS INTENDED TO PREVENT VIOLENT ISLAMIC TERRORISM FROM LAYING DOWN PERMANENT ROOTS IN THIS REGION.

RATHER

Well, General it occurs to me and I want to hear from you what some of the differences are: the movements in Southeast Asia, the Philippines in particular, differences, and differences in how we encounter these groups in say, Iraq or Afghanistan?

FRIDOVICH

I think you could look at that as a microcosm. And, and look at that with all its complexity. And that's really the word that you used that sums it up quite well. That's the microcosm that you might look at-- in almost any tribal region of Afghanistan or Pakistan. And that's a question I ask all my, my Intel types all the time. Where next? Where are they gonna go? I mean, this is, this is really, this is serious, serious business.

And you say, "Okay. You know? What are those things, those templates that they need?" They need that population. And it's a lot like the marsh area, the Balutan marsh area in central Mindanao, where it's very difficult terrain. Instead of mountainous, a little bit of mountainous but very, lots of water. You've got to know you're way in, and know your way out. And you're only gonna do that if you're local.

And you look at that microcosm and apply it to what's going on, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, you've got a, a relatively difficult model. But the good news is you can start getting your brain around that. You can start thinking through, what are the complexities? And how do you go ahead and simplify them? And starting doing something about those - those kind of challenges? So I think it serves very, very well to understand what's going on academically, theoretically, and also practically. What we all have to do around the table to get after what happened in the marsh area in central Mindanao, to how that also looks the same way in Pakistan, Afghanistan. But where it also might occur in the future.

'Cause we want to go - and this, I think, you'll be encouraged to hear this - we want to go from a threat-based to an opportunity-based. And that's where you put the population, at the center. And I think there might be room to do things like that in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I don't know. I just think this is something we, and we'll have to go ahead and work through. But not just be threat-oriented, but look at, be an opportunity-oriented - 'cause what we're gonna do is get out ahead of them at a certain point. And I think that's really what we've-- some of the key things that we've learned in the Philippines.

RATHER

Well, fair or unfair, General, to say that what we've done in the Philippines, what we're trying to do in the Philippines, can be seen as a Petri dish for handling both threats and opportunities in other parts of the world? Or is that too strong?

FRIDOVICH

I think it's reasonably accurate. I mean, I think there's not all of this is gonna fit. But I think the intellectual and the strategic energy you put to understanding that, does apply. And then recognizing the differences. It's the neat thing about the southern Philippines, it's different from island to island.

And it's different everywhere you go. But that's one of the key aspects of it. Understanding the differences - not just the similarities, but the differences. And I think that's the applied learning. That's the Petri dish, I think, sir, that you're getting at. That you look in, say, "Let's put a couple of different lenses or eyes on what we're gonna do here. And how we might help those governments." Afghanistan government, Pakistan government, to go through those tiers and win back that population. So it's not too strong, I don't think.

RATHER

Well, Professor, is what we've learned in the Philippines, what we're trying there, applicable to other places? Or is it a case of saying, "Listen. Don't learn from the last war. Look forward and, maybe a few things, but this is not applicable every --other places"?

ABUZA

Yes. But the yes is, they've done so much right there. And I, I think they really have learned about the complexities of different environments, and being very adaptive, and understanding it's not just about religion, or it's not just one group, because these groups change over time.

It's about understanding the factions and the clans. And the Philippines is a very good example of that. And it can be applied elsewhere. But part of me just says, "Hey, we're not fighting in the Philippines." And that, and the fact that we're simply there in a more of a passive capacity, providing training and intelligence, support, makes it a very different environment than when we go into a place like Afghanistan, where, you know, we can try to do the same types of things and win back the population with these civic actions. But if you're also fighting, that is going to change the situation. So I think we look at the success of the Philippines, and realize well, it's, it's not a perfect example of going in and, and where you're trying to do this in a full combat situation.

RATHER

General, let me come back to something that was said earlier. There are times when as they say in baseball, when the pressure's greatest the temptation is to throw it, to start throwing harder, when in fact good pitchers know it's time to throw easier. Does that fit in the Philippines?

FRIDOVICH

I'm with you. I'm scaring myself, I gotcha...

RATHER

You're scaring me as well...

FRIDOVICH

What we found- is what we found out early on in the Philippines. You can't apply anymore direct military power and change the outcome. You've got to apply other things. It's not about mass. It's about finesse. It's about thinking through the problem. So I absolutely understand that, you know, okay, you know, you're behind. And you want to start throwing harder and do more. And the answer might not be, it might be technique. It's like telling a four-star, "I can do that. But you don't want me to, do ya?" And to get Admiral Fallon to say, "Okay, you know, I'll give ya some time to do that." Two years to the day, he was leaving, I said, "The guys that you wanted dead are dead. And we didn't do it. The Filipinos did it, legally, legitimately.

The problem is there's no, there's little strategic patience for doing what we just said. And you've got to understand that it is a long war. If it is a long war, it's a marathon. You're not gonna sprint every time to an objective to knock it down. You've got to think through how do you get them to do it? And that is something that does, that does apply readily from regardless of Southeast Asia, southern Philippines, into other places. Strengthen the partnership.

RATHER

Mr. Ambassador, in your opinion and based on your experience, what's the single most important thing that Americans need to know about the Philippines and our efforts in the Philippines right now?

RICCIARDONE

Well, we'll take this to also the larger question we've been discussion, been discussing. And that is the question of the Philippines and, and terrorism. Terrorism, whether in the Philippines' example that we've seen, or, or globally, to me is not inherently, or fundamentally, a military problem.

It is a dreadful, national security issue, which has military components. And you can apply military elements to resolving it or confronting it, or defeating it. But it is not inherently military. And when we use phrases like "The Global War on Terrorism," "The Long War," we are subtly but very importantly defining it as a military thing.

But if we do not resource our intelligence services, our law enforcement, our diplomacy, our-- having the people and the training to be able to deal with the problem in its many manifestations, whether in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or in the Philippines, we're gonna be defining it in sports metaphors and military metaphors that don't work.

And we will not be bringing to bear what we as a nation have to bring to bear to the problem. So for me that's, that's the lesson of confronting terrorism in the Philippines. Don't look at it as a military phenomenon to be cured, or addressed with purely military means. Value and appreciate the incredible resources and capabilities of the United States military. Bring them to bear where we can with host nation militaries. And employ that force or the threat of it where it will work. But realize that's not going to, to address the, the fundamentals of the problem in every place and every time.

RATHER

I see. Professor? Single most important thing people should know and understand about the Philippines?

ABUZA

Well, I think it's, we just have to understand the importance of, of space, and governed space, and ungoverned space. What we've seen in the southern Philippines we've seen in places like the Horn of Africa. How important it is. And so again, I support what the military's done there. I don't think it's panacea. We've got to work on building up governance and political institutions in these countries. And really holding the governments that we're working with, with benchmarks. And giving, making sure they have ownership, and, and improve the services, and, and their governance.

Because, you know, at the end of the day I would be very concerned that should another conflict break out in another part of the world, and, you know, with diminishing military expenditures, the special forces might be pulled out. And if you're not standing there over the Philippine military, will they keep up the fight, or have you really built up that institution so that they're doing what over the long-term, without us there, without the constant support, will they be doing it? And so we've really got to think long-term, not just about eliminating those 12 guys, but building up real commitment to tackle this problem. And giving them the political resources and, and more importantly the political will to do so.

RATHER

I want to thank you all. You've been very generous with your time and your insights. And thank you very, very much for a fascinating discussion.

As we've explored tonight a challenge like the Philippines and what it represents is not an easy one to solve. While the Obama administration grapples with the economic crisis and the major battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan, it will also have to develop policies for places like Southeast Asia, that are of vital importance, but are not front-page news. We just simply have to have bold ideas and large policy goals- that's true. But we must understand that what may work for one part of globe may not work for another. The world is increasingly interconnected, but that does not make it uniform. There's a need for American leadership, diplomacy, and force, wisely applied. Achieving success is a matter of finding the right balance. And that's our program for tonight. From New York, for HDNet, Dan Rather reporting. Good night.