

# 5 Abu men held for Zamboanga blasts

Philippines Daily Inquirer/ ANN

MANILA, Oct. 23. — Five suspected Abu Sayyaf activists. The suspects, aged between 18 to 27 years, were arrested for a wave of bombings which killed 12 people including a US soldier, officials said today.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo paraded the handcuffed suspects before television cameras today and later convened a National Security Council meeting to thwart future terrorist attacks. "Without giving details, I think it is also important to reveal that they were virtually caught in the act of preparing for the next bombing," she said.

The chief police superintendent, Mr Eduardo Matillano, said the five be-

longed to an Abu Sayyaf unit headed by Abu Solaiman based on the nearby island of Jolo, where rebel factions holding three Indonesians and four Filipino preachers are on the run from a military operation.

"We received information about them and on the basis of this information, we raided two safe houses. We caught the four suspects in the first house and in the second house we caught the fifth," Mr Matillano said. The seized evidence indicated "they are the ones responsible for the bombings".

Police said they seized a map of Zamboanga, two pistols, explosive chemicals, nails, tools, camouflage uniforms, a bottle of gasoline and a diagram on how to make a car bomb from the safe houses. Pocket-sized

copies of Koran, car registrations, and grocery receipts were also seized. Among the evidence was a baggage tag from one of the two shopping malls bombed on the 17 October.

A police report said the suspects were now undergoing tactical interrogation and had admitted involvement in the bombing. An associate of the suspects, identified only as Alex, was still at large but was being monitored.

Authorities are also tightening security at the Edwin Andrews Air Force base and oil depots in Zamboanga City amidst reports that these would be the next targets.

The arrests came amidst warnings that the series of bombings in Zamboanga and Manila could be a prelude to a "big bang", intelligence sources said.

## 6 killed, 144 hurt in Philippine blast

S 6 Asia - Philippine

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18/10

**Zamboanga (Philippines):** At least six people were killed and 144 wounded, many critically, in bomb attacks in shopping centres in the southern Philippines city of Zamboanga on Thursday, officials said.

The attacks are the latest in a spate of bomb attacks in the troubled southern Philippines this month.

The first blast occurred at 11:30 a.m. in the Shop-O-Rama department store, and was followed half an hour later at the adjacent Shoppers Central shop. Police said they found a third bomb in the area and were in the process of trying to defuse it.

The blasts took place at the same time that ceremonies were being held to turn over command of the military's southern command from Lt. Gen. Ernesto Carolina to Lt. Gen. Narciso Abaya.

The military has tagged a leader of the Abu Sayyaf Muslim kidnapping group as being behind the bomb attacks. A military spokesman said the bombs used in Thursday's attack in Zamboanga city were the same type used in an October 2 bombing that killed a US serviceman and three Filipinos here. Agencies



A policeman rushes to assist a man injured in one of the two bomb blasts in Zamboanga on Thursday.

# Abu Sayyaf beheads two hostages

JOLO (PHILIPPINES), AUG. 22. The heads of two Jehovah's Witnesses kidnapped in a Muslim extre-



**Lemuel Montulo and his sister, Flor, who were abducted by the Abu Sayyaf on Tuesday. Montulo was beheaded on Thursday.** — AP

mist group's stronghold were found dumped in a public market on Thursday in the southern Philippines. Four other members of the Christian sect remained captives. The military and local police had blamed the Al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group for the Tuesday abductions, saying the nephew of a local Abu Sayyaf leader was among the armed kidnappers. But they backtracked on Thurs-

day, blaming a group of bandits headed by the nephew.

The incident, which bore all the hallmarks of an Abu Sayyaf attack, has been a huge embarrassment for the military and the Government of the President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who said just weeks ago that the Abu Sayyaf had been decimated and virtually defeated with the help of a six-month U.S. counter-terrorism training exercise.

"Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water, the sharks called Abu Sayyaf rear their ugly heads again," said the *Manila Standard* newspaper.

Brig. Gen. Romeo Tolentino, army commander on the southern island of Jolo in Sulu province, said the heads of the two male hostages were found in bags with notes denouncing them as 'infidels'. The bags were left at food stands about 100 metres apart at the main market in the town of Jolo. The attached notes called for 'jihad' or Islamic holy war, included a passage from the Koan and were written in Arabic and the local Tausug dialect, Gen. Tolentino said.

"They did this because they want to punish the non-believers of Allah," he said. — AP

23 AUG 2002

**PHILIPPINES / PROTESTS MAR BUDGET SPEECH**

**Arroyo declares war on terrorism, poverty**

*S.S. Asia  
The Manila*

*H19-14 ✓  
23/9*

**MANILA, JULY 22.** Thousands of protesters clashed with police as the Philippines President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, seeking to reassure a country battered by economic woes and crime, vowed to win the war on poverty within a decade and to arrest kingpins of corruption and drugs.

In her second state of the nation address, Ms. Arroyo outlined her vision for a classless society with a heavy emphasis on creating and improving job opportunities. She tried to woo jittery foreign investors, calling the Philippines the third-best performing economy in Asia and the best in South-east Asia.

Referring to a U.S. military exercise aimed at helping Philippine troops wipe out the brutal Abu Sayyaf Muslim extremist group, Ms. Arroyo said the global anti-terror coalition has helped break what she called "the cycle of terrorism and criminality." She said Washington would conduct more exercises to boost the poorly trained Philippine military's capabilities. About 1,000 U.S. troops are in the Philippines as part of the current six-month exercise, which ends on July 31. The Abu

Sayyaf has been loosely linked to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network.

With its long-term goals and plea for patience, the speech sounded like a campaign launch for the 2004 presidential election. Ms. Arroyo was swept to power in January 2001 by mass protests that ousted her now-jailed predecessor, Joseph Estrada. There is widespread speculation that she will seek her own six-year term.

Ms. Arroyo asked for an end to political divisiveness, saying the Government needed strong institutions and bureaucracy to implement policy. "A strong republic takes care of the people and takes care of their future," she said. "Thus, a strong republic is the bedrock of the victory we seek over poverty within the decade." She also took a swipe at Mr. Estrada — who last week said the Philippines is dying slowly and accused Ms. Arroyo of weak leadership — by claiming the country would have been bankrupt within a few months if the former action film star hadn't left office early.

"A strong republic takes care of the people and takes care of their future," she said. "Thus, a

strong republic is the bedrock of the victory we seek over poverty within the decade." In a statement published in newspapers on Monday, Mr. Estrada said there was no way Ms. Arroyo could gloss over the country's political and economic ills and the worsening law-and-order problems that have driven away investors.

Outside Congress, thousands of left-wing protesters — including many who backed Ms. Arroyo's rise to power — clashed with police as the demonstrators called for her resignation and demanded land and an end to the U.S. counter-terrorism exercise. Two layers of riot police kept the protesters several blocks away from the House of Representatives, where Ms. Arroyo arrived by helicopter to deliver her speech.

At one point, some of the protesters burned her effigy and tried to remove iron railings used as a roadblock. Backed by water cannons, riot police charged the unruly crowd with truncheons. Stones rained down, injuring several people and at least four photographers, including one from The Associated Press. — AP

THE PHILIPPINES

23 JUL 2002

# Philippines Vice-President resigns post

Philippine Daily  
Inquirer/ANN

MANILA, July 2. - Vice-President Mr Teofisto Guingona has tendered his resignation as secretary of foreign affairs after a "heart to heart" talk with President Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo last night in Davao City, a joint statement issued by them said today. Ms Macapagal accepted the resignation with regrets, effective from 15 July.

Members of the ruling party fear the rift between the President and Vice-President could tear apart the Lakas-NUCD. "Definitely, it has a way of demoralising the ranks of the Lakas party, especially now that Kampo is being reactivated," Rep Mr Magtanggol Gunigundo II said yesterday in reference to Ms Macapagal's original party, the Kabalikatng Malayang Pilipino.

Mr Guingona's resignation followed a premature release last week of Ms Macapagal's letter accepting his resignation from the Cabinet.

House of Representatives' Deputy Speaker Mr Raul Gonzalez said the USA was not pleased with the Vice-President Mr Guingona especially for his opposition to the Balikatan Philippine-US joint military exercises.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

# Abu Sayyaf kills 2 hostages

Philippine Daily  
Inquirer/ANN

ZAMBOANGA, June 7. - US hostage Mr Martin Burnham and Filipina nurse Ms Ediborah Yap were killed but Mr Burnham's wife, Gracia, was freed in a military rescue attempt in Siraway, Zamboanga del Norte, the armed forces chief Gen Roy Cimatu said today. Sporadic hostilities are still ongoing, Lt Gen Narciso Abaya said in a television interview.

The armed forces sent more troops from the Army and the Marines to beef up its cordon around Siraway and neighbouring towns in Zamboanga del Norte to prevent remnants of the Abu Sayyaf bandits from escaping, an official said. "We have deployed additional troops to prevent them from getting away," Southern Command spokesperson Lt Col Danilo Servando said on radio.

The radio report also noted an increased presence of American soldiers, participating in the on-

going Balikatan 02-1 exercises, in the encounter site but did not say if they would directly take part in the battle. A military ground commander, Col Renato Padua, said no US troops were involved in the rescue attempt.

The AFP quoted him as saying Kansas native Mr Burnham, 42, "was executed by the Abu Sayyaf rebels" when they realised that a rescue attempt was underway. Lt-Gen Abaya said troops recovered the "three victims" from the encounter, and found Burnham dead.

0 8 JUN 2002

THE STATE

## Philippines, USA to fix next round of war games

Philippine Daily Inquirer  
/Asia News Network

MANILA, June 25. — Philippine and US military officials are to discuss this week the next round of joint military exercises for this year, Manila's military chief Gen Roy Cimatu said today.

More than 1,000 US troops are currently deployed in the southern Philippines, training and assisting the local army against the Abu Sayyaf, a local band of Al-Qaida linked kidnapers. Officials said the American forces have been providing key intelligence data that has led to defeats for the Abu Sayyaf on the field, including one on 7 June when the military rescued the last US hostage held by the group.

Gen Cimatu said he was to leave for Hawaii later today to meet Admiral Thomas Fargo, commander of the US forces in the Pacific to discuss future training exercises.

"Among the topics to be discussed is the ongoing Balikatan (Shoulder-to-Shoulder) exercises in the country," Gen Cimatu told reporters at the presidential palace, where he received last-minute instructions from President Mrs Gloria Macapaga-Arroyo.

Gen Cimatu said he and Admiral Thomas Fargo would also discuss a further geographical spread of the Balikatan to cover the training requirements of other Philippine military units.

Gen Cimatu's trip comes amid increasing appeals from the residents of the rebel-infested southern island of Basilan to allow the American forces to stay longer. Of the 1,000 American soldiers in the south, 160 are US Special Forces troops assisting the local army, while more than 300 are US military engineers building infrastructure.

THE STATESMAN

26 JUN 2002

# Arroyo raises flag in reclaimed Basilan

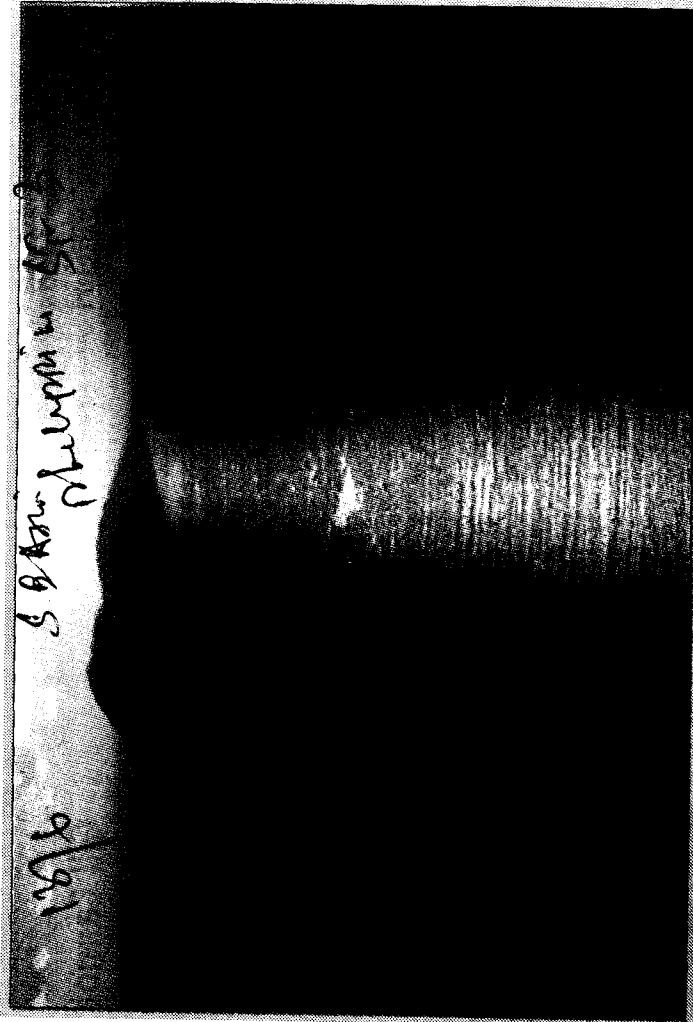
Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANIN

LAMITAN, June 12. — President Ms Gloria Arroyo today led the Philippines in celebrating its 104th independence anniversary by raising a flag in this war-ravaged town in a symbolic gesture to reclaim the area from Abu Sayyaf bandits.

Ms Arroyo became the first Philippine leader to raise the national flag here since a daring Abu Sayyaf siege of a hospital and church compound in June last year. The president skipped the traditional independence ceremony held in the town of Kawit south of Manila, where independence was declared on 12 June, 1898, by revolutionary hero Emilio Aguinaldo from the balcony of his home.

Wearing a maroon suit draped with a native scarf, Ms Arroyo led her top defence and military officials in raising the flag at Lamitan's municipal hall in front of a crowd including several US military officers. She did not talk to reporters and was immediately flown out by military helicopters.

In an Independence Day message prepared at the presidential palace in Manila, the president urged the country to unite in fighting poverty, corruption and terrorism.



A Philippine Navy ship patrols the waters of Basilan at the break of dawn on Wednesday, Philippines's 104th Independence Day. The nation's President unfurled the national flag on this island, reclaimed from the Abu Sayyaf guerrillas recently. — AFP

and corruption, and put up a common fight against international terrorism."

Ms Macapagal-Arroyo spent the night in Lamitan to view the remains of slain hostage Ediborah Yap.

Last year, in a grisly reminder of the new hostage crisis that the country had been plunged into, the Abu Sayyaf bandit group executed American hostage Guillermo Sobero as an "Independence Day gift" to Ms Macapagal.

Sobero — whose body was found weeks later — was one of 20 hostages the Abu Sayyaf abducted from the Dos Palmas Resort on 27 May. She said the ongoing Balikatan joint war exercise with US forces "holds a profound significance to national security". In a speech before the diplomatic community during the day she reiterated her administration's commitment to crush the scourge of terrorism in tandem with the USA and neighbours in the Asean.

The Balikatan exercise will officially end in July, but is likely to be extended in response to clamour by residents and local officials in Basilan, a stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf group supposedly linked to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaida.

our by residents and local officials in Basilan, a stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf group supposedly linked to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaida.

She said: "By remembering that day in history, we hope to remind our people of how hard a struggle our forebears had fought, of how much blood had been shed, to win our country's place in the community of nations." She said Filipinos should "flesh out democracy in term of alleviating mass poverty, eradicating graft



S B Abu  
Philippines

# Crackdown on Abu Sayyaf

110-14  
9/6

By Amit Baruah

**SINGAPORE, JUNE 8.** The Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has ordered the launch of "search and destroy" operations against the Abu Sayyaf militant group in the southern Philippines.

The orders came a day after two hostages, an American and Filipino, died during a rescue operation launched by the military. "The President has issued clear orders. The military is now carrying out search and destroy operations versus the Abu Sayyaf guerillas," the President's National Security Adviser, Rolio Gozlez, said in Manila today.

In a related development, the family of the dead American hostage, Martin Burnham, has called upon the Philippine Government to wipe out the Abu Sayyaf. "We would like to see the military continue and take care of this Abu Sayyaf group," Paul Burnham, Martin's father, said. "This is a terrorist group that has been hurting the Philippine people for a long time.... we hope they will be able to eradicate this kidnap-for-ransom gang and take care of many of the problems," he was quoted as saying.

While it remained unclear about who was responsible for the deaths of Martin Burnham and Ediborah Yap, the Filipino hostage killed, Philippine officials said they were killed probably in the cross-fire.

Separately, the U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has said the rescue operation was "understandable" despite the death of Martin Burnham. "The Burnhams (Martin's wife, Gracia, was rescued after being shot in the leg) have not been well and they lived in captivity a long time, and it seems to me that the attempt to save their lives was understandable".

Every hostage situation, Mr. Rumsfeld said, was a dangerous one.



**The Philippine Armed Forces Chief, Gen. Roy Cimatu (right), examines the bruises on the arms of the rescued Abu Sayyaf hostage, Edwin Reseroni, in Sirawal, on Saturday. — AFP**

09 JUN 2002

THE HINDU

# Philippines seals rebel route

S H Asia, Philippines T-3 10/6

**Manila, June 9 (Reuters):** Philippine forces today sealed escape routes of Muslim rebels blamed for the death of two hostages, including a US missionary, and tightened security in surrounding areas to stop any attempt to seize fresh hostages.

"We will not let them get away with this," regional military commander Major General Ernesto Carolina told reporters as hundreds of soldiers scoured the jungles of Zamboanga del Norte on southern Mindanao island for Abu Sayyaf guerrillas linked to Osama bin Laden.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo ordered "search and destroy" operations against the Abu Sayyaf after two hostages held by the gang for over a year, American missionary Martin Burnham and Philippine nurse Deborah Yap, were killed in a blaze of gunfire during a military rescue raid on Friday.

Gracia Burnham, also a hostage, survived with a bullet wound in her leg and is scheduled to leave for the US on Monday to rejoin her family in Wichita, Kansas.

A Manila television commentator said the deaths of the hostages were a blow to the Philippines' image at a time

when it was seeking to attract investors and tourists.

Other analysts appeared unperturbed. "On Monday, I don't expect local stocks to react dramatically given that more or less we expect incidents of this kind," said Astro del Castillo, director of the association of security analysts of the Philippines.

Carolina ordered naval gunboats to step up patrols off the Zamboanga del Norte coast to prevent the Abu Sayyaf from escaping to nearby islands.

Police said they had also ordered their units in nearby populated centres to watch out for suspicious people in case they turned out to be rebels looking for new hostages to snatch.

Arroyo had said the Philippines military would be under no constraints now that the rebels had no more hostages.

Regarded as the most violent of the Muslim separatist groups, the Abu Sayyaf was founded in the early 1990s by young Muslim ideologues who preached a vision of a separate Islamic state.

The group continues to claim to fight for an Islamic state in the south of the mainly Catholic Philippines but pursues kidnap for ransom as its main activity.

The US has linked the Abu

Sayyaf to bin Laden and his al Qaida network.

The Burnhams had worked for 15 years in the Philippines as missionaries for the Florida-based New Tribes mission.

Gracia Burnham had a tearful meeting with the four children of the dead nurse Deborah Yap in Manila today.

"There were tears on both sides," US embassy spokesman Frank Jenista said, describing the meeting. Military officials said they were still verifying whether the two hostages were

killed by their captors or in crossfire. "Many of those things are classified. So we will just have to wait for what the military feels can be revealed," Arroyo told reporters when asked for details on how they died.

"Remember, this is an ongoing operation so it is difficult to give out too many details," Arroyo said.

The deaths of Martin Burnham, 43, and Yap, 45, brought a grim end to the longest hostage drama in the Philippines involving foreign captives.

10 JUN 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

# Arroyo dismisses coup rumours

S. B. Aron  
Philippines

HD-19

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 4. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) dont need to conduct loyalty checks despite recurring and persistent rumours of a coup attempt, the Philippine President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, said today.

The military and police are highly professional, there is no moral cause for them to be against the Government that the Constitution mandated them to protect, Ms. Arroyo said at a press conference in the southern Philippine city of Cotabato.

A spokesman for a shadowy military group, who was reportedly aware of a coup attempt, had sparked suggestions that a plot had been hatched to oust the Arroyo Government.

The President, however, said today that security officials had been doing their job very well and had moved against specific individuals that are implicated in

some of these adventurist activities. Other reports said that the militarys intelligence wing was on the look out for bigger fish after a Navy lieutenant was arrested with a huge cache of plastic explosives.

Lt. Senior Grade, Donn Anthony Miraflor, was arrested on December 30 with C-4 explosive enough to blow up several major buildings in Manila.

A spokesman for the President, Rigoberto Tiglao, stated that military intelligence was still undertaking an investigation because what they have caught is a lower ranking officer.

They think bigger, higher ex-officers are involved, the spokesman was quoted as saying.

Separately, a military spokesman named a senior officer who was being investigated. So far, we have yet to receive the latest findings. These are just speculation (on) his (the senior officer's) responsibility. That is why investigators talked to him, and he cooperated, the spokesman said.

THE HINDU

# Philippine President ready for talks with Opp, rebels

PHILIPPINE DAILY  
INQUIRER  
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

VALENZUELA CITY, Jan. 12. — The Philippines President, Mrs Gloria Arroyo, is open to dialogues with foes and critics from all sectors, but keeps the door half-opened for the former President Joseph Estrada, detained Governor Nur Misuari and the People's Consultative Assembly.

"Why not? In the spirit of healing," Mrs Arroyo replied when asked if she was willing for a dialogue with Estrada and his family. "But of course there are certain parameters that I would not be able to provide for."

"With his followers, yes," the President replied when asked if she would be willing to talk with Misuari.

"It's up to them," she said

of the PCA.

In her closing statement during the live telecast of "May Gloria sa Bukas Mo," President Arroyo said she



**Mrs Arroyo: Healing touch**

was opening the door of Malacañang for "healing talks" with her critics.

She said a dialogue with Estrada would be limited "to

his personal circumstances, like his comfort, his dignity as former President and as a man whom people still love."

"The wheels of justice will have to proceed," she stressed. Mrs Arroyo also expressed willingness to talk with the followers of Misuari, but declined to comment on reports that Misuari's followers want her to visit their detained leader "to defuse the tension."

"This is the first time I've heard of this," she said.

Estrada is held in a hospital detention centre while awaiting trial for plunder allegedly committed during his 20-month Presidency.

Misuari, who is facing charges of rebellion for the short-lived Jolo uprising in November that left more than 100 dead, is held in a military camp in Sta Rosa, Laguna.

THE STATESMAN

13 JAN 2002

# War against terror moves to Philippines

By HARVEY STOCKWIN  
Times News Network

HONG KONG: The second front in the American war against terrorism opened on Tuesday with the beginning of a joint Philippine-American 'Exercise Balikatan' (shoulder-to-shoulder) in the southern Philippines, in which 650 U.S. troops are due to take part. The enemy is a foe who was never entirely defeated in the 45 years that the Americans ruled the Philippines from 1898 to 1945.

The new frontline could hardly be a greater contrast to the arid mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. It is the lush medium-sized jungle-covered island of Basilan, a short ferry ride from Zamboanga City, in the southwestern corner of the largest Philippine island of Mindanao. The foes are basically the same as those who engaged the Americans when they colonised the Philippines — a section of the Muslim minority ostensibly seeking independence from the predominantly Roman Catholic country. More often, those fighting for such causes indulge in banditry and kidnapping for economic gain.

This is particularly true of the main current foe, the Abu Sayyaf (meaning 'Father of the Sword'), the smallest of the three Muslim political groups in the southern Philippines. The Abu Sayyaf have made a small fortune in the last few years from kidnappings and the willingness of Southeast Asians and Libyans to pay hefty ransoms for their release.

Currently the Abu Sayyaf hold two American missionaries who were kidnapped in a daring raid on a beach resort on the western island of Palawan last May, as well as one Filipina nurse. A third American was taken at that time and subsequently beheaded. It is thought the three hostages are being held somewhere on Basilan.



Defence secretary Angelo Reyes gestures during a news conference at the defence headquarters in suburban Quezon City, Philippines, on Monday.

These kidnappings are not the only reason bringing the U.S. troops to Basilan and Zamboanga for Exercise Balikatan, the main object of which is to train and assist the Filipino troops who have been scouring the Basilan jungle searching for the kidnap victims for the last seven months.

"The criminal terrorist Abu Sayyaf", as they were called in an official Philippine statement

issued on Monday, would certainly appear to have had links in the past with Osama bin Laden's family, though whether it is actually part of the Al Qaeda network remains more open to doubt. But the Americans are clearly anxious to make sure that Abu Sayyaf does not get such local control that it can offer a refuge in southeast Asia to Al Qaeda remnants fleeing from Afghanistan and West Asia.

The Philippine statement stressed that "U.S. personnel will not be engaged in combat and will be under the command and strict supervision of Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) officers." However, the Americans will be armed and able to fire back if attacked. Bearing in mind the strong nationalist sentiments that resulted in the closure of two big American military bases in the Philippines 10 years ago, the statement carefully stressed that the exercise "does not in any way involve the setting up of U.S. military facilities. The U.S. personnel will be based and housed in AFP camps and posts."

The plan is for 150 U.S. Special Operations Forces plus 500 support and maintenance soldiers to join with the 1,200 Filipinos deployed to hunt down the Abu Sayyaf. Obviously, there is scepticism that the role of the U.S. troops will be purely advisory. As Manila journalist Max Soliven put it, "...this raises the spectre abroad that we're on the way to becoming another Vietnam". Exercise Balikatan is scheduled for an initial six months, but this may be extended until the end of the year.

# USA treads warily on Philippine warpath

*Philippines*  
**ASSOCIATED PRESS**  
ZAMBOANGA, Feb. 2. — Rejecting comparisons with Afghanistan, Brig Gen Donald Wurster, head of US troops on a six-month counter terrorism training mission here reassured that while US Special Forces intend to enter combat zones in southern

Philippines, they would only use their weapons in self-defence. “We want to destroy terrorism and they’ve asked for certain kinds of help ... which we’re offering,” he said today. USA would abide by the limits set by democratic nations such as the Philippines, which has been offered

US combat assistance but rejected it, he said. The US troops have been providing training and weapons to the poorly equipped Philippine military to help destroy the Muslim extremist Abu Sayyaf group. Although most of the American soldiers have not arrived yet, the train-

ing exercise officially opened on Thursday. The training programme envisages about 160 Special Forces among the 660-strong US contingent accompanying Filipino troops to battle zones on Basilan Island, where the Abu Sayyaf militants are currently holding four hostages.

THE TELEGRAPH  
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