



National Alliance for Filipino Concerns

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the Mamasapano Incident

What was the Mamasapano encounter?

The Mamasapano encounter was an attack orchestrated and funded by US military and intelligence agencies and carried out by the Philippine National Police - Special Action Forces (PNP-SAF), as part of "Operation Exodus," on January 25, 2015 in Tukanalipao, Mamasapano, Maguindanao in Southern Philippines. It targeted bomb-making experts, Zulkifli bin Hir, alias Marwan, and Abdul Basit Usman. Both were on the US Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) "Most Wanted List." Marwan, killed in the operation, carried a \$5 million bounty, while Usman carries a \$1 million bounty.

The 73 resulting casualties included civilians as well as personnel of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the PNP - SAF. Of the 73 casualties, 14 were part of communities native in the Cordillera region.

Who were the people involved?

Commanding the operation was PNP General Alan Purisima, who had been suspended since December 2014. Although he was on suspension, Purisima was placed in command by President B.S. Aquino, whose actions violated the chain of command by bypassing the Philippine National Police Officer-In-Charge and the Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government. President Aquino also failed to coordinate with his cabinet officials and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Operation Exodus sent PNP-SAF forces into territory recognized as a bastion of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with whom the Philippine government had been in the process of negotiating a peace accord and had signed a ceasefire.

What was the role of the U.S.?

Numerous news reports citing members of the PNP, AFP and local civilian eyewitnesses as well as the findings from the People's Fact Finding Mission from Feb. 9-11, 2015 point to direct U.S. involvement in the operation, from conception to end. Some of the reports include:

- A source from the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported that the Mamasapano operation was "fully funded by the U.S."
- The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency led the stakeout and surveillance against Marwan.
- Residents from Barangays Tukanalipao, Pidsandawan, Lusay and Tuka submitted sworn affidavits stating they saw drones flying over their communities and hovering above homes for one week prior to January 25. During the Philippine Senate Hearing, the Mayor of Mamasapano also testified that he saw a white object believed to be a drone hovering in the sky during the operation. After Operation Exodus, the drones were gone.
- A Philippine Daily Inquirer source stated that the 84th Company of the SAF and US forces were training in the La Vista del Mar Resort, located approximately 6 kilometers from downtown Zamboanga province.
- A Manila Times source reported that US servicemen were originally "tasked to capture or pick up" Marwan and Usman. The PNP-SAF commandos were supposed to serve only as police security escorts.
- In a statement to the Philippine Senate, SAF Chief Getulio Napanas said that the tissue sample of the slain Marwan was immediately brought by the SAF to FBI agents waiting in General Santos City, indicating that the US had prior knowledge of the operation and were already present in Mindanao to receive the tissue sample for DNA testing. The SAF went straight to the FBI, rather than reporting to the PNP Headquarters or other agency of the Philippine government.
- The U.S. Embassy and the Philippine Department of National Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin have admitted that U.S. soldiers were involved in the retrieval operations after the encounter.
- David Bowdich, FBI Los Angeles Assistant Director in charge, reported that the bureau had a "full partnership" with the PNP "to identify, disrupt, and dismantle terrorist networks." The FBI performed a DNA test on Marwan in the U.S.
- The People's Fact Finding Mission gathered testimonies of various witnesses in Barangay Tukanalipao who said they saw the body of at least one U.S. personnel (purportedly military) among the remains of SAF commandos after the firefight, indicating direct involvement on the ground during the operation.

In implementing Operation Exodus, Aquino and Purisima knowingly allowed the U.S. intelligence agencies and military to violate the Philippine Constitution and terms of military agreements between the U.S. and the Philippines, which prohibit foreign troops from conducting operations on Philippine soil.

What is the history of involvement of the U.S. in Philippine affairs?

The U.S. has used the Philippines as a model for its foreign relations, including its wars of aggression in the 20th century. With the Philippine American War in 1899, the U.S. attempted to subjugate the Philippines for its strategic location as a launch point into the Asia-Pacific region; and as a source of cheaper raw materials and a market for its excess goods, to attain greater profit for its growing capitalist economy. For several decades, the Philippines was a U.S. colony and home to the largest American military bases outside of the U.S. After the Philippines was granted independence, the U.S. maintained control of the country through economic and military agreements, which are still invoked today to justify the presence and involvement of U.S. military in the Philippines.

A long history of militarization has occurred particularly in the southern island of Mindanao, where large oil, natural gas, and mineral reserves are located, and where the people's resistance to appropriation of their land has been the strongest. Conflict over control of Mindanao continues today, with active intrusion and speculation by foreign multinational mining, tourism, agribusiness, oil and energy companies, in collaboration with the landed elite backed by the Philippine military and private armies which terrorize the indigenous communities.

Now, using the rationale of the "war on terrorism," the U.S. continues to violate Philippine independence to reinforce its dominance in its economic and political relationship with the Philippines. Over 660 U.S. special operations forces have been based in Mindanao. Tens of thousands of U.S. troops and advisors participate in joint exercises with the Philippine military annually under terms of the Visiting Forces Agreement, despite the legal challenges to the constitutionality of the agreement all the way up to the Supreme Court. American military personnel have committed numerous crimes against Filipinos, including the rape of "Nicole" by Lance Corporal Daniel Smith in 2006 and the murder of transwoman Jennifer Laude by Marine Pfc. Joseph Scott Pemberton in October 2014. In February 2012, the U.S. dropped so-called "smart bombs" on a village in Jolo, Sulu allegedly to smoke out Marwan but instead killing religious leaders and civilians; Aquino made no appeal for investigation or accountability for the incident.

Who is accountable for the operation?

President B.S. Aquino and the U.S. government. Aquino placed his own SAF commandos in inevitable danger in a sensitive operation under the command of corrupt and suspended General Purisima, while covering-up US involvement. He disrupted the chain of command of the PNP and kept the plans for the attack secret from the leadership of PNP, DILG and AFP. He did not attend the arrival honors for the SAF troops killed, gravely offending their families. Amidst all this, he has invited further criticism from the Filipino people by attempting to evade responsibility and making contradictory statements regarding the fiasco. As for the US government, they willfully violated Philippine sovereignty, utilized Filipino forces and violated the human rights of Filipino civilians in a U.S.-orchestrated military operation, and put a fragile peace accord at risk to pursue its own "war on terror."

What have been the effects of the operation?

There has been an outcry among Filipinos for truth and accountability for Operation Exodus. Filipinos are angered by the violation of Philippine sovereignty, needless deaths of over 70 people, and threats to the peace process by an operation which had no benefits for the Filipino people. Many are worried by the erroneous calls for "all out war" against the MILF, which would threaten the lives of millions of people, fail to resolve the roots of the conflict, and do nothing to hold Aquino and the U.S. government accountable for the Mamasapano incident. The event reinforces that President Aquino prioritizes the U.S. government's agenda and lacks the political will to do what is best for the people of the Philippines.

How does it affect Filipino-Americans?

All residents of the U.S including Filipino-Americans pay taxes that fund the actions of the U.S. military and its intelligence agencies which result in the senseless deaths of Filipinos back home, and aggravate conflicts that make the whole world less secure for all people. We, as citizens, residents, and workers of the United States, have the responsibility to make our voices heard and get involved in the political process and public arena to demand truth and accountability for the Mamasapano incident.

What actions can you take?

Some actions that you can take include:

1. Join or hold an educational discussion on the issue of the Mamasapano encounter.
2. Participate in the activities calling for truth and accountability in the Mamasapano encounter and for the formation of an independent truth commission to further investigate the incident.
3. Lobby your local officials such as Congressional representatives to look into this matter and ensure the U.S. is not violating international laws or treaties with the Philippines or other countries, and your tax dollars are not used to fund human rights violations.
4. Learn about the roots of conflict in Mindanao regarding land and resources, and the strategies implemented to perpetuate the conflict, including vilification of Muslim communities.