

# The Maguindanao Massacre: Two Months After

Saturday 23 January 2010, by [SOLIS Richard](#) (Date first published: 23 January 2010).

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Last January 20, 2010, a third hearing of the principal suspect of the Maguindanao massacre Andal Ampatuan, Jr was held in Quezon City. It was a hearing on bail which the lawyers of the suspect requested so as to have him outside of the detention but making him available for hearings. It was during the hearing that the prosecutors presented the third witness after the second witness withdrew saying that his earlier signed affidavit was made under duress. The day before the hearing families and the widows of the slain journalists filed a case to the Ombudsman in Mindanao against military officials namely Major General Alfredo Cayton (the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Commander) and Colonel Medardo Geslani (then the 601<sup>st</sup> Brigade Commander) who were not only cleared in their role in the Maguindanao massacre but have also been promoted.

Meanwhile, nothing can be heard on the situation of Andal Ampatuan, Sr. who is staying in the Eastern Mindanao Command (EASTMIN Com) headquarters under Lt. General Reynaldo Ferrer who was the 6<sup>th</sup> ID Commander two years ago when the Ampatuans ruled over Maguindanao. Nothing also can be heard on the Ampatuans housed in the Criminal Investigation and Detention Group or CIDG in General Santos City, except that once in a while some media people could see them outside of their so called detention center.

We have not heard any development on what happened to the billions of pesos and millions of dollars which had been taken out from the vaults of the Ampatuans mansions. Aside from the presence of Secretary Jess Dureza in the Ampatuan mansion when he negotiated the surrender of the Andal Jr. and the convoy which came out from the Shariff Aguak mansion during the night bringing the so called evidence to General Santos City. The convoy's night trip was only exposed or known to the public because it was ambushed or fired upon by unknown persons almost similar to the incident when the helicopter where Secretary Dureza was fired upon when it left the Ampatuan mansion with Andal Jr.

And no explanation yet has been heard about the arsenal of weapons and bullets which have been found in the properties of the Ampatuans. Discoveries of more weapons and bullets have continued up to today. Many of the weapons and bullets were marked as government properties.

And worst, nothing can be heard about the members and officers of the Philippine National Police and Civilian Volunteer Organizations who had been directly identified together with the principal suspect when the most cruel and inhuman acts were done to the fifty seven (57) people including the wife and relatives of Toto Mangudadatu, their two women lawyers, journalists and the drivers including those who happened to pass on the road of Maguindanao on November 23, 2009.

## The Making of the Warlords

The Ampatuans have started to amass their wealth and accumulate their military hardware in the early years of the Arroyo administration. At the time of President Estrada's declaration of an all-out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) it was also a time when the Ampatuans had formally severed their relationship with the MILF. Before that, it had been known in the Maguindanao areas that the Ampatuans had been in amicable relationship with the MILF even giving them regular logistical supports.

The AFP's 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at that time (or even today) is outnumbered and even outgunned by the MILF with the ratio of almost 2 to 1 and hence, it greatly needed the help of the civilians who could be armed and could be funded by friendly politicians but also considered the MILF as a threat, hence, the start of arming the followers of the Ampatuans.

Mrs. Arroyo had seen the potential of the Ampatuans especially that 2004 elections were coming and she knew very well that she needed aside from political machineries, the military and the likes of Ampatuan who could be trusted to follow her order in exchange of limitless financial and military logistical support. The victory of Mrs. Arroyo in 2004 elections was made possible by the Muslim Mindanao votes, especially from Maguindanao. Thus, began their symbiotic relationship. In the guise of its fight against the MILF the Ampatuan had begun to build up its own army and acquire sophisticated weapons which everybody knew that it could only be possible with the help and approval of the army and the police. The obvious unique relationship between the Ampatuan and their Commander in Chief aside from a direct order from her, both the army and police gave whatever the Ampatuans requested or turned their heads away when the acts of the Ampatuans were contrary to the laws. In fact, it is a public knowledge that from the Division Chief of the Army up to at least the battalion levels as well as the Regional Chief up to the provincial commander of the Police had received generous gifts from the Ampatuans in the tune of five millions to a million each depending on their level of responsibilities.

It is no wonder that during the 2006 controversy of the Hello Garci scandal or the 2007 senatorial election when the Commission on Election (COMELEC) Provincial Officer Lintang Bedol got entangled to widespread election fraud in favor of Mrs. Arroyo and the senatorial slate of the ruling party respectively. It was in the province of Maguindanao that Garcilliano and Bedol had hidden and nobody but nobody dared to locate or touch them.

Through the years the Ampatuans had built up their private army and collected weapons which could fully arm a division. The political favors from Mrs. Arroyo had been fully maximized by the Ampatuans beyond the province of Maguindanao. All Andal's Sr's sons were made mayors or he created new municipalities and place his other sons as mayors and other relatives as councilors. The traditional ruling elites of the Moro had to vow to the new paramount elite or joined him through intermarriages. The MILF could not get him for he became elusive and had himself surrounded by many bodyguards. He built mansions anywhere so as not to make a pattern of his whereabouts.

With Maguindanao solidified in his control Andal Sr wanted to grab political positions in the ARMM and with Arroyo's blessings and support his son Zaldy became the governor of ARMM. With his political base expanded so also his economic and military powers.

Anybody who dared to oppose his wish and command would surely meet their uncivilized death. Whatever the Ampatuans want the Ampatuans get. Be these the lands, properties and even persons like if they are interested with women they could always get their way.

The feelings of impunity in committing crimes for the Ampatuans had started long time ago. Their

abuses of their power had reached its height that in the middle of last year there were several meetings which took place in different areas in and outside Mindanao where most of the old and current ruling elite and political leaders of the Bangsamoro to discuss how to unite and work together to stop the seemingly unstoppable and the unsatisfiable greed for power by the Ampatuans. The family of the Mangudadato was one of these families. There was strong belief that the Ampatuans had sensed such a move. And the result was the bloodiest and cruelest election related massacre of November 23, 2009.

## **The Sponsors and the Co-sponsors of the November 23, 2009 Disaster**

The Maguindanao massacre was a disaster waiting to happen. It had been made possible by the evolution of events and moves not by the Ampatuans alone. Mrs. Gloria Arroyo first and foremost had created the Ampatuans as signs of paying her gratitude for her 2004 victory over the legendary hero of the Bangsamoro-Fernando Poe Jr. The 12-0 results of the senatorial elections in favor of the ruling party of Mrs. Arroyo with Mr. Chavit Singson from the Northern part of the Philippines as number one setting a precedent that a non Muslim candidate became number one in a Muslim area and controlled by a Muslim politician. Chavit's qualification was simply he was a gambling partner of Andal Sr. when they played anywhere in the world's casinos, had given the Ampatuan the feeling that they could manipulate the votes and make or unmake a politician.

The military and the police establishments have also contributed a lot in the making of Ampatuans. They provided the arm and muscles of the latter knowing fully well that those favors were not anymore for the war against the MILF but against all those who dared to oppose the whims and caprices of the Ampatuans. For instance, the East Mindanao Commander who became the Martial Law administrator and custodian of Andal Sr was the head of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during the peak of Ampatuans's power. Shortly before Lt. General Reynaldo Ferrer was promoted to the East Mindanao Command there was a big fire in the armory of the 6ID. This is why it would not be surprising if many of the weapons of the Ampatuans were coming from the supplies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

There is even no need to continuously raid the different mansions of the Ampatuans in different parts of the country to discover the source of these weapons. A thorough and objective investigation will surely lead us to the Department of National Defense and its units in Mindanao. Unless those raids are meant to locate the millions if not billions of pesos the Ampatuans and not really to find those missing weapons and bullets.

The traditional politicians have also big role to play in the making of the Ampatuans. A case in point here is Representative Simon Datumanong, a close ally of Mrs. Arroyo. He represents the second district of Maguindanao which is the main political and economic base of the Ampatuans. He is the nephew of Andal Sr. All these years, one could never heard anything from Representative Datumanong except when he protested the short lived declaration of Martial Law in the province.

And last but not the least is the role of the religious in the making of the Ampatuans. Religious here refers to practicing of faith be it Islamic or Christianity. It is important to note that almost all of the children of Andal Sr had been studying to religious schools (Notre Dames). What values have been inculcated or imparted by the teachings of these schools on the young Ampatuans. Or much commercial aspects and less moral and spiritual values have been the concerned of these so called religious schools. Where have been the religious leaders from both faiths all those years when the Ampatuans were committing those crimes before the November 23, 2009? Or were they playing footsie with this devil incarnate but the first to justify the declaration of Martial Law to save their

mentors and friends.

### **Beyond November 23...**

The November 23, 2009 Maguindanao Massacre was done by the Ampatuans but with the help of the people mentioned above. Genuine Justice can only be achieved if all those who were involved should resign first. Otherwise, many would believe that the whole process of arresting and prosecuting Andal Jr. and the detentions of the Andal Sr. and his sons are part of the divisionary and cover up moves by Mrs. Arroyo, her allies and the military and the police to save themselves. In fact since the short lived declaration of Martial Law had been considered as unconstitutional and on this basis Andal Sr and his sons were arrested and detained for crime of rebellion, one should not be surprised that one day while the whole nation is focused on events like the boxing of Manny Pacquiao, Andal Sr and his sons will just freely walk away from their detention centers and resurface their billions and reclaim their power. And then another massacre is about to happen. This time much worse than the massacre two months ago today. This will be the massacre of our democracy. With their billions and connections they can create situations in the whole of Mindanao so as the failure of elections will be guaranteed. And then they will live happily ever after with their mentor.

**By: Richard Solis**

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