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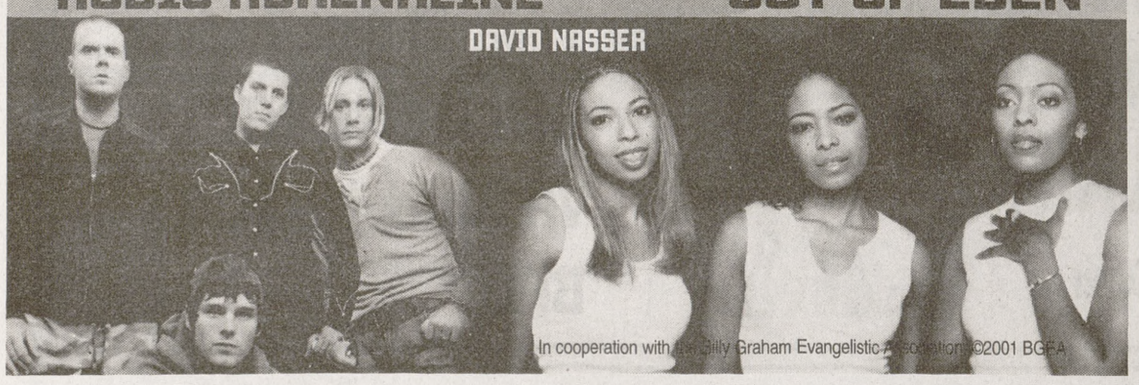
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American troops deployed to control Muslim extremists

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Deploying some 660 U.S. troops may help control the Muslim extremist group that has plagued the Philippines for a decade, but the escalating American involvement will test ties between Washington and one of its closest allies in Southeast Asia.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo welcomes the U.S. military buildup, saying it could help deliver a fatal blow to the Muslim extremist group Abu Sayyaf, which has been linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

But the military mission could also further inflame the country's Muslim minority and alienate some of the president's leftist supporters.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said at the Pentagon that up to 250 U.S. troops were in the country and "several hundred more" would follow. A "small number" of the Americans were on the southern island of Basilan, an area where Philippine forces have been battling Abu Sayyaf rebels.

Philippine officials say the six-month joint exercise will total about 660 troops, including 160 U.S. Army Special Forces, and some will be allowed to work in the southern Philippines.

It would essentially be a new front in the U.S.-led war on terrorism, but a radically different mission from Afghanistan — shifting to a heavily support-based role helping a friend rather than ousting an adversary and coping with tropical jungle instead of snow and desert.

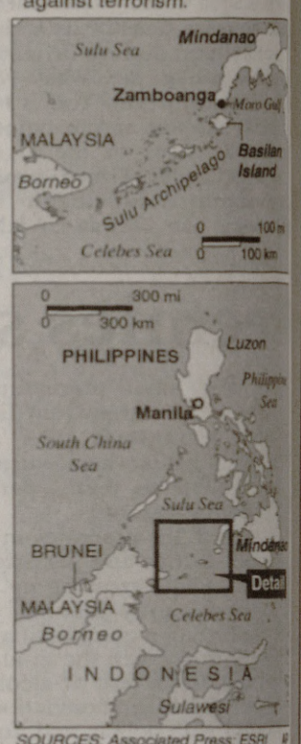
The aim is to help eradicate the Abu Sayyaf. But the group — which now holds two Americans and a Filipino hostage — has defied successive governments for 10 years in the jungle-covered mountains of the remote southern islands.

Abu Sayyaf has only about 800 fighters, but it is a loosely knit federation of gangs that can escape by melting into the jungles or dropping weapons and blending into the local populace.

The guerrillas do not fight head-on, meaning that wiping out Abu Sayyaf — even with U.S. help — would be a lengthy task. Even before the start of the six-month exercise, the Philippine government is saying it may be extended to a year. And that much time in the jungle — making war on a guerrilla force — is a daunting prospect for those who remember Vietnam.

U.S. troops in Philippines

Hundreds of U.S. troops are being sent to the Philippines to support government efforts against terrorism.



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

Suit filed against Andersen

(AP) — A Tulsa, Okla.-based energy company has sued Arthur Andersen LLP, the accounting firm that issued audits for Enron Corp., and experts predict that Andersen will soon face a rash of similar lawsuits accusing it of complicity in Enron's spectacular collapse.

With so much money at stake and potential victims including shareholders, employees and clients of Enron, most experts believe the anticipated avalanche of lawsuits will be lumped together into a few cases and granted class action status.

Lawyers for Samson Investment Co. filed a suit against Chicago-based Andersen on Tuesday, claiming it "recklessly disregarded evidence of questionable financial transactions between Enron and its insiders."

The lawsuit was filed the same day that Andersen fired a senior auditor who organized a mass destruction of Enron documents last fall after federal regulators had requested information about the failing energy company. Andersen also said that four partners in its Houston office would be stripped of management responsibilities and that three auditors had been put on administrative leave.

Andersen's exposure to litigation could be the largest ever for an accounting firm because Enron's bankruptcy was among the largest in history, said Mark Cheffers, chief executive of AccountingMalpractice.com, which helps accountants reduce their liability exposure.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush honors Sept. 11 hero

WASHINGTON (AP) – A post office in New Jersey is now a memorial to a hero of Sept. 11.

President Bush signed legislation Wednesday naming the Cranbury, N.J., post office after Todd Beamer, a passenger on the hijacked plane that crashed in Pennsylvania.

Beamer uttered the now famous words "Let's roll," which officials believe was the signal for passengers to attack the hijackers.

Beamer, 32, was one of several passengers aboard United Airlines Flight 93 who made phone calls to relatives or authorities, alerting them that a hijacking was taking place and saying they were making plans to fight back.

Jermarr Arnold executed

HUNTSVILLE, Texas (AP) – A convicted killer with a history of violence in and out of prison was executed Wednesday night for fatally shooting a jewelry store clerk during a robbery nearly 19 years ago in Corpus Christi.

Jermarr Arnold, 43, had blamed the mayhem in his past on mental illness.

Arnold, his confident voice booming into a speaker in the witness room, took responsibility for the killing, asked for forgiveness and thanked the members of his victim's family for attending.

"I'm deeply sorry for the loss of your loved one. I can't give you any answers. I can give you one thing. I give you my life, a life for a life," he said.