Pirates and pearls: Jikiri and the challenge to maritime security and American sovereignty in the Sulu Archipelago, 1907–1909

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Abstract
In 1908–1909, maritime commerce, fishing and traffic in the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines almost came to a standstill due to a surge in piracy and coastal raids that challenged US colonial rule in the area. The leader of the outlaws was a renegade subject of the Sultan of Sulu, a Samal named Jikiri. Together with his followers, Jikiri was responsible for the murders of at least 40 people in numerous raids on small trading vessels, pearl fishers, coastal settlements and towns throughout the archipelago. In spite of the concerted efforts of the US Army, the Philippine Constabulary and private bounty hunters, Jikiri was able to avoid defeat for more than one and half years, before he was eventually killed in July 1909. His decision to take to piracy was triggered by the failure of the US authorities to pay compensation for the loss of the traditional claims that many families in the Sulu Archipelago had to the pearl beds of the region, as stipulated by a law on pearl fishing adopted in 1904. The law was in several respects disadvantageous to the native population of Sulu and this – together with the high-handed behaviour of the local officers in charge of the Sulu district from 1906 – fuelled widespread discontent with colonial rule and led several of the leading headmen of Sulu covertly to sympathize with, and protect, Jikiri and his followers. This sponsorship combined with the general reluctance of the population to cooperate with the US military explains why Jikiri was able to defy the vastly superior US forces for so long. American officers at the time tended to attribute the depredations to the allegedly piratical nature of the Sulus, but this article argues that the so-called ‘decay theory’, first proposed by Raffles a century earlier, is a more appropriate explanation of this surge in piracy.

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From November 1907 until mid-1909 a series of pirate attacks and coastal raids in the southern Philippines struck fear into the hearts and minds of pearl fishers, Chinese merchants and American and European settlers in the region. The leader of the outlaws was a renegade subject of the Sultan of Sulu, a Moro (Muslim of the southern Philippines) by the name of Jikiri. Close to 100 murders were attributed to Jikiri and his followers, at least 40 of which can be corroborated in contemporary sources. The depredations almost brought commercial fishing and maritime trade in the Sulu Archipelago to a halt, and as Jikiri gathered an ever-larger group of outlaws around him, his band began, in the first half of 1909, to develop into a serious challenge to the American military administration that governed the Moro Province. He was finally defeated and killed in a battle on the island of Patian on 4 July 1909, after a manhunt that had lasted more than 18 months, involving thousands of followers of the Sultan of Sulu and his headmen, hundreds of US Cavalry and Infantry troops supported by artillery units and naval gunboats, and a contingent of the Philippine Constabulary, as well as private bounty hunters.

The purpose of this article is to sketch, based on contemporary sources – official reports, local newspapers, unpublished correspondence and other archival sources – the main outlines of Jikiri’s depredations, from the first known attack in November 1907 until his final defeat in July 1909. Relatively little has been written about Jikiri, the main account to date being a short chapter in a popular book, Swish of the Kris, written by an amateur historian of the Philippines, Vic Hurley, which first appeared in 1936. For all its qualities as a good read, Hurley’s book is not a scholarly work and his account is largely descriptive and almost exclusively based on the uncritical rendering of contemporary newspaper reports. The aim of the present article is to present a more balanced and historically reliable account of Jikiri’s depredations and their effects on maritime security and commerce in the Sulu Archipelago and, above all, to provide a plausible explanation as to why he was able to defy the vastly superior military force of the United States for so long. In so doing, the emphasis is not only on Jikiri’s personal motives, but also on the historical context and the economic and political transformations set in motion by American colonial policy in the Sulu Archipelago and the Philippines more broadly.

1. Vic Hurley, Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros (Salem, OR, 2010 [1936]), 198–208; see also Vic Hurley, Jungle Patrol: The Story of the Philippine Constabulary 1901–1936 (Salem, OR, 2011 [1938]), 301–10. Peter Gowing, ‘Mandate in Moroland: The American Government of Muslim Filipinos 1899–1920’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Syracuse University, 1968), 520–2, largely bases his account on Hurley, Swish, as does James R. Arnold, The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1902–1913 (New York, 2011), 182–7. The account by Robert A. Fulton, Moroland: The History of Uncle Sam and the Moros 1899–1920 (Bend, OR, 2009), 343–53, is mainly based on archival sources but is incomplete and not altogether accurate.
More specifically, it will be argued that the surge in piracy must be understood in relation to the increased exploitation of the marine resources of the Moro Province, particularly commercial pearl fishing.

The rise of Jikiri

Little is known about Jikiri’s background and life before he rose to fame as a pirate and outlaw. According to Vic Hurley, he was the son of a Samal fisherman from Pata, a relatively large island to the south of Jolo, but US investigations revealed that he was a native of Patian, a much smaller island to the south of Jolo. He was described as tall and broad-shouldered and had a hooked nose, allegedly a sign of Arab blood on his mother’s side. Before taking to piracy he was a follower of the Sultan of Sulu, Jamalul Kiram II, and worked, according to Hurley, as the Sultan’s betel nut bearer.2

The first attack that can be positively attributed to Jikiri took place on the night of 1 November 1907, when a vinta (small double outrigger sailing canoe) owned by a petty Chinese trader, Quek Toow Tech, was attacked off Lumapid on the south coast of Jolo. Jikiri and his followers boarded the boat from another vinta and killed the Chinese trader and two Moro crew members. A third crew member managed to escape by jumping into the sea and swimming to the shore. The pirates looted the vinta of its cargo of cloth and other merchandise worth 1200 Philippine peso (PHP) (equivalent to $600) before returning to Patian, which served as the base of their initial operations.3

Shortly after the attack a member of the band was dispatched to Basilan to sell some of the loot. He raised suspicion, however, and was arrested by a local headman (maha-raja) loyal to the Americans, who turned him over to the authorities. Jikiri with his remaining four followers set out to take their revenge on the headman, but, the latter, having been warned, had gone to Jolo. Waiting for him to return, Jikiri and his band installed themselves in one of the headman’s houses on the island of Lanhil, off the northeast coast of Basilan, where one of his two wives lived. The outlaws, according to her testimony, were very threatening and prowled about the house and asked her for money. They found a dagger in the house; one of them tried it on his thumb nail and said it was a very good knife and that if he were to stick it into a man, his intestines would all drop out.4

While staying on Lanhil, Jikiri and his band began to plan an attack on Kopagu, a nearby logging camp located on the east coast of Basilan and owned by George Case, an American, and his Dutch partner, J. H. Vermont.5 The camp consisted of two temporary huts where the owners of the camp lived with their wives. A Chinese associate of Case

2. Hurley, Swish, 198; see also Hurley, Jungle Patrol, 301–2. For the US investigations, see Washington, DC, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (MDLC), Tasker Howard Bliss Papers (THBP), Memorandum for Major Finley and Captain Muir, 3 January 1908, 88.
3. MDLC, THBP, Chinese Merchants of Jolo to Col. Alexander Rogers [sic], 5 May 1908, 92; Mindanao Herald (Zamboanga), 25 January 1908. The latter calls Quek Toow Tech ‘Tao Tila’.
4. MDLC, THBP, Memorandum for Major Finley and Captain Muir, 3 January 1908, 88.
5. MDLC, THBP, Memorandum for Major Finley and Captain Muir; Mindanao Herald, 25 January 1908.
and Vermont, Wee Kaoha, also lived in the camp with his family, in addition to about ten local workers. Jikiri and his band landed on the beach near Kopagu on Christmas Eve 1907. They waited until dusk, when Case, Vermont and Wee were in different places in the camp, and attacked them almost simultaneously. The three men were instantly and brutally murdered with *barongs* (thick, leaf-shaped, single-edged swords) and Mrs. Vermont received a deep cut across her back from which she only barely survived. Mrs. Case and about ten Moro loggers employed by Case and Vermont, meanwhile, managed to escape into the jungle, whereas two Moro women – the wife and mother-in-law of Wee – were left unharmed. Having thus taken control of the camp the raiders carried off everything of value and then left in their *vinta*. On their way back, they stopped in the nearby village of Ucbung, the home of a Muslim community leader named Salip Aguil who was hostile to the American authorities and suspected of protecting Joloano pirates operating around Basilan. There, Jikiri and his band saw a Moro woman from whom they bought a Remington rifle, the property of her deceased husband. According to the woman and another witness, they took out a roll of bills ‘as big as a man’s thigh’ – presumably part of the booty from the raid on Kopagu – to pay for the gun.

The news of the murders caused great commotion in the small colonial community of the Moro Province. Two well-attended public meetings were held in the provincial capital of Zamboanga, Mindanao, and money for the issue of a reward and for helping the widows of the slain men was collected. The province’s governor and commander of the Department of Mindanao, General Tasker Howard Bliss, dispatched four infantry companies to Basilan with orders to arrest the murderers and to disarm hostile natives. The troops occupied Ucbung, but failed to catch any of the perpetrators. Jikiri and his followers, meanwhile, kept away out of sight in Lanhil before returning to Patian a week after the raid.

By the beginning of January, the authorities had found out the identity and suspected whereabouts of the raiders. An expedition of 100 men was dispatched from Jolo to Patian, which measured only about three square kilometres, but Jikiri and his gang were not encountered. The search continued throughout the Sulu district in the following months, but failed to yield any results, and in spite of the massive manhunt, Jikiri was able occasionally to venture out and conduct spectacular attacks. On 22 March 1908, he raided the sultan’s capital at Maimbung on the south coast of Jolo with four to seven followers, who

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6. MDLC, THBP, Memorandum for Major Finley and Captain Muir; *Mindanao Herald*, 28 December 1907.
7. *Mindanao Herald*, 4 January 1908.
8. *Mindanao Herald*, 28 December 1907; The Annual Report of the Governor of the Moro Province for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1908 (ARGMP) (Zamboanga, 1908), 25; ‘Report Department of Mindanao’, in Annual Reports of the War Department (ARWD) 1908 (Washington, DC, 1908), III, 271. Salip was captured later in 1908 and he was erroneously held responsible for the murder of Case and Vermont in the 1908 report of the Philippine Commission, whereas the trouble caused by Jikiri was downplayed; see Annual Report of the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War (ARPC) 1908, part 1 (Washington, DC, 1909), 44; also, see Annual Report of the Director of the Constabulary for the Fiscal Year 1908 (ARDC) (Manila, 1909), 6.
descended on the town from the sea in two vintas. They killed three Chinese shop-owners, wounded another three Chinese, including a small girl, and burned 15 houses, including every store in town, to the ground. According to the surviving victims, the losses due to theft and destruction amounted to more than 33,000 PHP ($16,500). The Chinese merchants also claimed that Jikiri had informed the deputy headman of Maimbung of the attack beforehand, but that he had failed to pass on the warning to them or to take any measures to protect the town. The deputy headman’s own house was also burnt to the ground, however, along with a house owned by the sultan and occupied by his sister.9

Following the raid on Maimbung, the authorities intensified their efforts to eliminate Jikiri. Over a thousand Moros, led by their headmen (datus), searched the area around Maimbung without result.10 A Filipino bounty hunter and former revolutionary leader, Vicente Alvarez, who claimed to have good local knowledge of Jolo, and personal relations with some of the headmen of the island, hoped to trick Jikiri into a trap and thus bring about his seizure. Although Governor Bliss did not trust Alvarez, he was becoming increasingly troubled over the army’s failure to put a stop to Jikiri’s depredations. In a letter to the governor of the Sulu district, Colonel Alexander Rodgers, Bliss wrote: ‘Alvarez is not what is here known as a good man, but that doesn’t affect the question. He is working for the reward, and for the purpose in view a bad man may possibly be better than a good man’.11

Alvarez, however, made little progress in his attempt to lure Jikiri into the trap. After more than a month of trying, he reported that it was very difficult to capture Jikiri because he enjoyed the protection of almost all Moros of the interior of Jolo. Alvarez also claimed that the headman of the Indanan district (Tribal Ward No. 2) in western Jolo, Panglima Indanan (Panlima Yndan), and another chief based in Lumapid on the south coast, Maharaja Unga (Ugna), together with German inhabitant Charles Schück, a long-term resident of Jolo and official interpreter, appeared to be colluding with the outlaws.12 Following Alvarez’s report, units from the Sixth Cavalry attacked and took Maharaja Unga’s stronghold in Lumapid where Jikiri was believed to be hiding. One Moro of unknown identity was killed, but Jikiri escaped.13

A few days after the skirmish in Lumapid, Jikiri struck again, this time off Parang on the west coast of Jolo. Hiding in a vinta anchored close to the shore, Jikiri and his followers attacked two vintas carrying five Chinese merchants on their way to Parang. Three of them were killed and 2450 PHP ($1225) worth of goods were taken. About 100 Moros reportedly watched the attack from the shore without attempting to intervene or offer any assistance to the victims.14

In early May 1909, 43 Chinese merchants from Jolo sent a letter to the district governor, Colonel Rodgers, in which they listed the attacks and losses of life and property

9. MDLC, THBP, Byram to Rodgers, 24 March 1908, 89; Chinese Merchants of Jolo to Rogers, 5 May 1908.
10. MDLC, THBP, Rodgers to Provsec, 2 April 1908, 90.
11. MDLC, THBP, Bliss to Rodgers, 4 March 1908, 89.
12. MDLC, THBP, Alvarez to Bliss, 13 April 1908, 90.
13. MDLC, THBP, Expeditions, 21–24 April 1908, 90.
14. MDLC, THBP, Chinese Merchants of Jolo to Rogers, 5 May 1908.
suffered to date by members of the Chinese community at the hands of Jikiri’s band. Apparently dissatisfied with the government’s handling of the problem, they respectfully petitioned the ‘Governor to interest himself in the protection’ of the Chinese in Jolo. Only two weeks later, however, another attack left two Chinese dead on Kabingaan Island. The merchants of Jolo also complained to the Chinese consul-general in Manila, who in turn wrote to the governor-general of the Philippines, James Francis Smith, asking for more adequate protection for the life and property of the Chinese in Sulu.

At the end of June, an American soldier, Private Albert L. Burleigh, who was detailed as a school teacher in Maimbung, was murdered on the trail between Jolo and Maimbung. It was Burleigh’s second encounter with Jikiri’s band, as he had been in Maimbung when the outlaws sacked the town three months earlier. According to Burleigh, Jikiri had on that occasion brushed against him with an up-raised barong in his right hand and a rifle in his left, but dropped the hand to his side when he saw that Burleigh was a white man. He subsequently paid no further attention to the soldier, continuing instead to loot and burn the Chinese stores. The second time, however, Burleigh was less fortunate. He was attacked by four of Jikiri’s followers and shot and stabbed to death. A witness who survived the attack said that he did not recognize the four men, whose faces were covered with handkerchiefs, but that all were young men and none of them were tall. Afterwards they ran away in the direction of the house of Panglima Indanan, which was located close to the place of the attack.

Piracy, pearling and maritime trade

Jikiri’s success in evading capture seemed to strengthen his standing among the Moros of Jolo and he was able to expand his operations and recruit more followers. By August 1908, his band probably consisted of more than a dozen armed men and he now turned to larger targets, particularly pearling luggers. On the morning of 12 August, he led a party of armed men in four vinta in an attack on a pearler in the Bulan–Tongkil group of islands, between Jolo and Basilan. They killed a Japanese pearl diver and three crew members (two Moros and one Filipino) and made off with half a ton of pearl shell, including several valuable blisters, and a supply of provisions.

Following the attack on the pearler, Bliss decided to ask the Philippine Constabulary, a paramilitary police force consisting of Philippine troops commanded by US officers, for assistance. A small detachment of the constabulary, commanded by Captain F. S. DeWitt – who, in contrast to most US Army officers in the province, spoke the Joloano dialect fluently – was deployed to trace Jikiri. DeWitt hoped to get information from the local population in order to catch Jikiri off guard, and in November he managed to corner
him near Dandulit in western Jolo. Four outlaws were killed in the shoot-out, but Jikiri himself escaped once again. Two days later, Jikiri attacked a Chinese store on South Ubian, killing one and wounding one Chinese, and about a month later he killed at least three Moros in Jolo. It was rumoured that Jikiri had gone to Borneo following his brush with the constabulary, but there are no reports of pirate attacks or coastal raids in British North Borneo at the time. British patrols off the east coast of North Borneo probably acted as a deterrent, not only on Jikiri and his band but on other Sulu raiders as well.

On 19 January 1909, Jikiri launched an attack on two pearling luggers, *Ida* and *Nancy*, off Parang. The crews tried to fight off the attack, but they eventually ran out of ammunition. Most of the crew members managed to escape by swimming to the shore, but a Japanese diver and three of *Nancy*’s crew members were killed. Both vessels were then looted of everything of value and *Ida* was sunk whereas *Nancy* was set on fire and badly damaged. The booty consisted of a great amount of pearl shell, firearms and provisions, all of which was taken to the shore at Parang and hidden.

When US troops arrived on the scene shortly afterwards, the perpetrators were nowhere to be found. Troops landed in Parang and searched the store of a Chinese merchant who was said to be on friendly terms with Jikiri, but without result. The villagers were very uncooperative and reportedly only refrained from outright hostilities because the Americans had taken the precaution of retaining the local headman aboard one of their vessels offshore. An attempt to investigate the nearby village of Lagasan, where...
eyewitnesses claimed that part of the loot had been taken, was met with even more hostility and the local headman invited the Americans to come and fight.24

The attack off Parang was followed a week later by an attempted attack on another pearler, the *Nautilus*, on her passage from Jolo to Zamboanga. The lugger managed to get away, however, by steering out to sea. Two days later, at least seven members of Jikiri’s band – possibly the same as those who tried to attack the *Nautilus* – raided Lampingigan, a small village off the north coast of Basilan. Jikiri seems not to have taken part in the raid, however, which was reportedly led by Barra, one of his lieutenants. They killed a Chinese shop-owner and looted his store of all goods and PHP 4000 ($2000) in cash.25

Jikiri’s depredations were now beginning to have significant effects on the region’s economy. Pearlers had difficulties recruiting crew members, who feared for their lives at sea, and the owners of the luggers feared that the whole business would be ruined unless the government was able to protect them.26 Inter-island trade and exports from the southern Philippines were also affected, and July 1908 to April 1909, which largely coincided with Jikiri’s worst depredations, showed a two-third decrease in customs returns at Jolo. The decline was in sharp contrast to the previous years, when the figures had shown a ‘steady substantial and healthful increase each year in the value of both imports and exports’.27 According to the collector of customs in Jolo, the decrease was due to the insecurity of life and property throughout the Sulu district owing to the depredations of Jikiri and other Moro outlaws. Chinese businesses were particularly affected, and all but two Chinese merchants – one of whom most probably was Jikiri’s suspected accomplice in Parang – had stopped doing business in the area outside the garrisoned towns of Jolo, Siasi, Sitankai, Bongao and Jurata.28 In February 1909, a German businessman and long-time resident of Jolo, Eddy (Edward) Schück (brother of the interpreter, Charles Schück), wrote to the former governor of the district of Jolo, Colonel Hugh L. Scott:

There is a pirate now at large; he and his gang have killed three white men and more than thirty Chinos, Filipinos and Moros; they have destroyed more than one hundred thousand pesos’

24. *Mindanao Herald*, 30 January 1909.
25. ARWD 1909, III, 225; *Mindanao Herald*, 30 January 1909. The raid was initially blamed on Jikiri, but suspicions were subsequently directed towards a group of seven Moros and two Chinese, all residents of the village. After the death of Jikiri, however, three of his followers confessed to taking part in the raid and named four other perpetrators, all members of Jikiri’s band; *Mindanao Herald*, 6 March 1909, 21 August 1909.
26. *Mindanao Herald*, 30 January 1909; MDLC, THBP, Tidwell to Colton, 24–24 January 1909, 100.
27. *Straits Times* (Singapore), 29 May 1909; MDLC, THBP, Hord to Bliss, 9 July 1908, 94.
28. *Straits Times*, 29 May 1909. By contrast, in his annual report for the Moro Province in the fiscal year 1908–1909, Governor Bliss did not cite Jikiri’s depredations as a reason for the decline in trade but wrote that the decrease of c.12 per cent in total exports from the province compared with the year before was ‘largely due to the fall in market value of the principal articles of export’; ARGMP 1909, 8. The fiscal year 1909–1910, the start of which coincided with the elimination of Jikiri and his last followers, showed an increase in exports of around 50 per cent and a large increase in customs receipts at Jolo. The export of pearl shells, which had been most directly affected by Jikiri’s attacks, increased by more than 80 per cent. ARGMP 1910, 6–7.
worth of property; they have been at it for over 18 months. Their gang started with four men and numbers now twenty-three. They are at it still and the Government seems powerless.29

The inability of the authorities to protect merchants, pearlers and other seafarers in the Sulu Archipelago was increasingly embarrassing for the provincial government. Throughout 1908 the authorities, on several occasions, informed the owners of pearling boats and other people engaged in ‘various kinds of hazardous business’ (such as commerce) that if they operated beyond the reach of the government they did so at their own peril. The district governor of Sulu, Alexander Rodgers – whose efforts to protect Chinese commerce in Jolo, as we have seen, were deemed insufficient – was of the opinion that some Chinese seemed ‘absolutely reckless, coming and going by land or sea from Maibun [Maimbung], Parang and other points on Jolo Island, and by water from all parts of the District, as freely as if the country were thoroughly civilized and no trouble existed’.30

**Gunboats and the suppression of piracy**

The Chinese merchants were not the only ones who acted recklessly and failed to implement appropriate security measures. For example, the owner of one of the pearlers attacked off Parang in January, a Briton named Heaton Ellis, afterwards told Bliss that he had been warned twice by Moros of an impending attack on his vessel, and Bliss noted that Ellis had neither reported the warnings to the authorities nor asked them for protection.31

Even if he had done so, however, it was far from certain that the authorities would have been able to provide adequate protection in view of the army’s acutely felt lack of water transportation. For most of the first years of American rule in the southern Philippines, there were between three and five small gunboats and two coast-guard cutters constantly on the move in the region. In mid-1907, however, these vessels were withdrawn, in part because of the rising tensions between the United States and Japan at the time, but also because their presence was reportedly deemed unnecessary due to the improved security conditions in the Moro Province. Left to uphold maritime security in the vast archipelago were a dispatch boat and seven small launches operated by the army (one of which was not seaworthy).32 In addition, after the surge in piratical activity, Bliss, in mid-1908, chartered a steamship capable of transporting 200 men. Apart from using the vessel for the transportation of troops, the intention was for the steamer to demonstrate the superior force of the US military in the Sulu Archipelago, and Bliss instructed the district governor of Sulu to make an inspection tour to all principal places in the archipelago and to make it look as imposing as possible.33 The reinforcement, however,
proved to be inadequate and the noisy and slow-moving steamer was not well suited for the purpose of pirate chasing in the Sulu Archipelago.

Throughout 1908, Governor Bliss emphatically argued in his annual reports and in correspondence with Manila that maritime security could only be maintained if the naval gunboats were returned to the province. By the end of the year, he had still not been able to secure the assistance of the navy but hoped that a show of force in the form of a naval visit to the Moro Province – or even better, a naval division undertaking target practice off the coast of Jolo – would help to quell the ‘very nasty spirit’ that he believed had grown up among the Joloano Moros. His calls continued to go unheeded, however, and it was only in February 1909, after the attack on the pearlimg fleet off Parang, that two naval gunboats, the Arayat and the Paragua, were dispatched to the Sulu Archipelago with the task of supporting the army to hunt down Jikiri and his band.

The campaign against Jikiri intensified with the arrival of the gunboats and the patrols were, at least initially, successful in keeping Sulu waters free from piracy. Attacks were still anticipated at any moment, however, as indicated by the daily telegrams throughout February and early March from the district commander (and governor) in Jolo to the headquarters in Zamboanga with the laconic message ‘No piracy’. Jikiri, nonetheless, still eluded capture. In early March, he was believed to have taken refuge with his followers on Mount Igon in southeast Jolo, but as the gunboats, accompanied by two army launches, approached the coast the band reportedly scattered through the hills and disappeared.

On 12 March 1909, Jikiri made a surprise attack on the constabulary barracks at Siasi, about 20 nautical miles south of Jolo, where 22 troops were stationed under the command of Captain DeWitt. Jikiri landed his party some distance from the barracks at night and opened fire from both sides, apparently intent on securing arms and ammunition. Over 600 bullets were fired into the barracks, but the constabulary managed to fight off the outlaws, who were forced to retreat. On the way back to their boats, they attacked the nearby house of an American planter, who was fortunately not at home. The pirates left before the troops could reach them, reportedly carrying off four dead bodies and a number of wounded.

Four days later, after an unsuccessful attack on a Greek sponge fisher on the island of Latuan, Jikiri and his band landed on Tugig Indagan on Simunul (Simonore) in Tawi-Tawi, where an English trader, Henry R. Wolf, and his American partner, T. S. Cornell, were murdered. The body of Wolf was found 50 metres from his house, hacked into 32 pieces that were scattered over an area of several metres. Cornell’s body was found in his bed, his body cut across the abdomen in two.

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34. For example, MDLC, THBP, Bliss to Director of Constabulary, Manila, 7 April 1908, 90; Bliss to A. G., Philippine Division, 24 May 1908; ARWD 1908, III, 294; ARGMP 1908, 23.
35. MDLC, THBP, Bliss to Sperry, 10 October 1908, 96.
36. Straits Times, 26 February 1909; Mindanao Herald, 27 February 1909.
37. MDLC, THBP, Several telegrams, 101.
38. MDLC, THBP, Rodgers to A. G. Dept., 3 March 1909, 101.
39. Mindanao Herald, 27 March 1909.
40. MDLC, THBP, Bliss to Smith, 22–23 March 1909, 101; Mindanao Herald, 27 March 1909.
The killing of Wolf and Cornell was the last of Jikiri’s spectacular attacks. The massive campaign against him and his followers – who by now were believed to number more than 100, most of whom were well armed – now began to bear fruit. The Arayat and the Paragua relentlessly pursued Jikiri and his band throughout the Sulu Archipelago and in a series of brushes with the outlaws in May and June, military and constabulary troops killed dozens of members of Jikiri’s band, including several of his closest lieutenants, and captured seven suspects. Finally, in early July, Jikiri himself was cornered on Patian, where he took refuge in a cave with six followers and three women. The outlaws were besieged by troops from the Sixth Cavalry, supported by the navy and artillery, for two days. Running short of food and water, they made a deliberately suicidal attempt to break out, and Jikiri and all of his followers, including the three women, were killed in the mayhem that ensued. Four American troops were killed and 20 seriously wounded in the encounter.

In the months following Jikiri’s death, the remaining members of his band were rounded up and put on trial. On 1 November 1909, 40 of his followers were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six years to life imprisonment. Occasional pirate attacks and raids continued to occur in and around the Sulu Sea in the following years, but none of them attained anything near the impact on the region’s maritime security and commerce that Jikiri’s depredations had done.

The pirates’ motives

To date, there have been few serious attempts to explain the rise of Jikiri, or his motives for turning to piracy. According to Hurley, Jikiri’s otherwise striking appearance was marred by one eye being considerably larger than the other, and he allegedly took to

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41. Mindanao Herald, 27 March 1909. The estimation is probably reasonable: In all, 64 of Jikiri’s followers were known to have been killed during the long campaign against him and another 40 were subsequently sentenced to prison; see Woods, ‘Looking Back’, 191; Straits Times, 30 November 1909.
42. ARWD 1909, III, 208; see also Straits Times, 4 May 1909; Mindanao Herald, 29 May 1909, 19 June 1909.
43. Straits Times, 19 July 1909; Washington, DC, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record of events, Post return: Post of of Jolo Pl, July 1909. Returns from US Military Posts, 1800–1916, Microfilm M617, Roll 53. There were initially 19 wounded officers and soldiers belonging to the Sixth Cavalry, two of whom subsequently died from their wounds. For a detailed account of the battle, which involved a great degree of incompetence on the part of the US officers in command, leading to unnecessarily high casualties on the US side, see Fulton, Moroland, 353–60, and for an eyewitness account, see W. H. Davidson, ‘Jikiri’s Last Stand’, Quartermaster Review, July–August (1935), 14–16 and 71–2. According to Fulton, Moroland, 357 (but not Davidson), there was also a baby, presumably Jikiri’s son, in the cave, who was the only survivor of Jikiri’s group.
44. Mindanao Herald, 17 July 1909, 11 September 1909; Straits Times, 30 November 1909.
45. For occasional reports of subsequent pirate attacks and coastal raids carried out by Moros, see Straits Times, 15 October 1909; ARGMP 1910, 19–20; ‘People v. Lol-Lo and Saraw’, 27 February 1922, Annual Digest of Public International Law Cases, 1919–1922, 1 (1932), 164–5.
piracy and banditry because of the constant ridicule of his looks that he experienced as a youth and in order to prove his worth. What is remarkable about this obviously fanciful explanation is that it is cited uncritically in much of the literature on the US colonial period in the southern Philippines. The force of the explanation is weak in itself, even had it been true. There is no mention in the contemporary sources that have been consulted of any distinctive physical trait of the outlaw. On the contrary, an editorial in the *Mindanao Herald* in May 1909 claimed that there ‘isn’t an American in the Islands who knows Jikiri from a thousand other Moros’, which indicates that there was nothing particularly striking about his appearance.

Governor Bliss, as we have seen, was convinced that the withdrawal of the naval gunboats and coastguard cutters from the province’s waters was the reason for the rise of Jikiri and the surge in piracy. Events seemed to prove him right insofar as the two gunboats that were dispatched to the Sulu district in February 1909 were instrumental in supporting the army in the final campaign to eliminate Jikiri and his followers. However, the link between the withdrawal of the patrol vessels in mid-1907 and the surge in piracy was not as straightforward as Bliss depicted it, and his claim that until they were withdrawn their ‘constant movement among the islands preserved the peace’ was not quite accurate. Piratical raids by Joloano Moros around Basilan and the Pilas group of islands had begun already in 1904, following the death of the strong local Basilan leader Pedro Cuevas (known locally as Datu Kalun). During the first half of 1907, attacks were frequent and had spread beyond the coast and waters around Basilan to parts of the Zamboanga Peninsula. Against that background, the raid on the Kopagu logging camp in December 1907 and Jikiri’s subsequent depredations should not have come as a surprise to the authorities, given that Joloano pirates had been allowed for several years to attack native vessels with apparent impunity.

In addition, there was a deeper racist angle to Bliss’s argument. The explanation rested on the manifest assumption that the Moro – particularly the Joloano Moro – were pirate by nature and that the American and earlier Spanish attempts to make them change their ways and give up piracy for peaceful pursuits, such as agriculture, fishing or trading, had been largely unsuccessful, at least with regard to a substantial number of outlaw elements. According to Bliss, the ‘Joloano Moro is now just what he has always been – a warrior and a pirate’.

The explanation is in effect a variant of what Anne Lindsay Reber has termed the ‘innate’ theory of piracy, the origins of which can be traced to the writings of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in the early nineteenth century and which assumed that the propensity to carry out piratical depredations was an integral part of the behaviour of the Malay, if

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46. Hurley, *Swish*, 198. The explanation was probably based on local folklore.
47. Gowing, ‘Mandate in Moroland’, 520; Arnold, *Moro War*, 183; Fulton, *Moroland*, 343.
48. Mindanao Herald, 1 May 1909.
49. ARWD 1908, III, 294.
50. THBP, Finley to Provsec, 2 May 1908, 91.
51. ARGMP 1908, 23; see also ARWD 1908, III, 294. Similar views were expressed by other American officers and seem to have been widespread and generally accepted; for example ARWD 1900, part 3, 257 and 266; ARPC 1903, 490 and 496.
not an inherent defect in his character.52 This type of explanations seems to have been commonplace among contemporary American and European colonizers in the southern Philippines. An editorial in the Mindanao Herald, for example, contended that the raid on the Kopagu logging camp revealed the ‘Moro again in all the savage cruelty and treachery of his nature’ and that the murders had ‘stirred this community to a sense of the dangers which attend the isolated Americans and Europeans who are facing the wilderness with the spirit of the Western pioneers in an effort to push a little farther the bounds of our civilization’. The remedy, according to the newspaper, was prompt and resolute action by the government, including a ‘salutary lesson’ to be taught to the ‘murderous bands of vagabond Moros’ who terrorized the Basilan coast. The military operation on Bud Dajo in Jolo in March 1906 – when American troops, led by Bliss’s predecessor General Leonard Wood, killed 600 Moros including many women and children – was held up as a model for such prompt and resolute action.53

The unbridled violence and hideous mutilations, combined with the swift and unexpected character of Jikiri’s attacks at sea or from the sea, were obviously designed to strike fear into the hearts and minds of the white and Chinese settlers in the Sulu Archipelago. As such, his terrorist tactics were successful; not only did maritime trade and pearl fishing in the archipelago come to an almost complete stop for fear of Jikiri and his band, but the killings also created a feeling of great insecurity among white planters and Chinese traders in the region.54 This fear drew on a long-established image of the Moro as a violent and brutal savage driven by religious hatred of Christians.55 In particular, the long-standing practice of running juramentado – that is, suicide attackers armed with a dagger, sword or spear, who ventured to kill as many Spaniards and other Christians as possible before they were killed themselves – contributed to the fearful image of the Moro as a fanatical jihadist.56 In March 1908, Jikiri reportedly threatened to run juramentado on the streets of Jolo and to kill as many Americans as possible, and although rumours of such an attack continued to flourish until Jikiri’s final defeat, it did not materialize.57

Apart from this rumour, however, there is nothing to indicate that Jikiri and his followers were particularly religious, or that Islam would have provided an ideological justification for the piratical activity. Jikiri seems to have been more motivated by the wealth and social status that his depredations conferred on him, combined with his apparent hatred of outsiders such as American and European colonizers, foreign pearl fishers and Chinese merchants.

52. Anne Lyndsey Reber, ‘The Sulu World in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries: A Historiographical Problem in British Writings on Malay Piracy’ (Unpublished MA thesis, Cornell University, 1966), 2. Reber termed the other, more prolific, theory proposed by Raffles the ‘decay’ theory; see Reber, ‘The Sulu World’, 4ff.
53. Mindanao Herald, 4 January 1908.
54. Mindanao Herald, 27 March 1909.
55. For example, ARGMP 1908, 24.
56. For the institution of juramentado, see J. Franklin Ewing, ‘Juramentado: Institutionalized Suicide among the Moros of the Philippines’, Anthropological Quarterly, 28, No. 4 (1955), 148–55; Cesar Adib Majul, Muslims in the Philippines (Quezon City, 1973), 353–60.
57. MDLC, THBP, Memorandum for the District Governor, District of Sulu, and the Commanding Officer, Post of Jolo, 20 March 1908, 89; Mindanao Herald, 22 August 1908.
Local support

Contemporary military reports testify to the difficulties that the American authorities had in securing the cooperation of the local population in Jolo, and this problem clearly hampered the campaign against Jikiri. The hostility with which the Americans were met in Parang and Lagasan in the wake of the attacks on the *Ida* and the *Nancy* in January 1909 is a case in point, but US officers stationed in Jolo also believed that the Moros in general assisted and sympathized with Jikiri and his band.58 Colonel Ralph W. Hoyt, who replaced Bliss as the commander of the Department of Mindanao in February 1909, complained about the ‘utter impossibility of obtaining from the natives any information concerning the whereabouts of [Jikiri’s] band’.59 The lack of cooperation on the part of the local population was presumably the reason that the strategy of Captain DeWitt and the Philippine Constabulary, to seek information from the Moros in order to catch Jikiri off guard, largely failed.60

Apart from the sympathy that Jikiri seemed to command in the Sulu district he also enjoyed the support of some of the leading headmen of Jolo, at least up until the final months of his depredations. In particular, it seems that Panglima Indanan – one of the principal chiefs of Jolo who controlled the west coast and much of interior of the island – colluded with Jikiri. Indanan’s, and possibly other headmen’s, support was probably essential for Jikiri’s operations and for his success in evading capture or destruction. There are several indications of Indanan’s complicity. Vicente Alvarez, as we have seen, reported that he already suspected as much in April 1908. Moreover, on at least three occasions, Jikiri and his band launched their attacks from Indanan’s district where they also took refuge after the attacks: the killing of three Chinese in front of the market in Parang, the murder of Private Burleigh, and the attack on the pearling fleet off Parang in January 1909.

To the extent that the US officers in charge of the campaign against Jikiri at all suspected that Indanan was involved, this realization seems to have come only towards the end of the campaign.61 The lack of suspicion against Indanan is especially remarkable against the background of the assessments of his character made by US officials in Jolo a few years earlier. He was then described as a thoroughly bad character who was responsible for stealing cattle and horses and for slave raiding and trafficking.62 Starting in 1905, however, Indanan appeared to have changed his attitude and behaviour, and in the following year General Bliss, in his annual report as governor of the Moro Province, described him as ‘perhaps the most progressive of all the Moro chiefs’ and as someone ‘who appears to be working in good faith for the furtherance of the government’s

58. MDLC, Hugh Lenox Scott Papers (HLSP), Rhodes to Scott, 30 May 1909, 12.
59. ARWD 1909, III, 208.
60. The Philippine Constabulary played but a minor role in the campaign against Jikiri and none in the final campaign to exterminate him; see George Yarrington Coats, ‘The Philippine Constabulary, 1901–1917’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Ohio State University, 1968), 388; see also G. Y. Coats, ‘The Philippine Constabulary in Mindanao and Sulu, 1903–1917’, *Bulletin of American Historical Collection*, 8 (1975), 24–5.
61. For example, MDLC, THBP, Rhodes to Scott, 30 May 1909.
62. ARPC 1903, 498, 499, 501 and 520.
Indanan, however, obviously played a double game and in chasing after Jikiri did ‘a lot of talking without material results’, according to one of the US officers in the field.64 After Jikiri was killed, moreover, it transpired that Indanan (and other headmen of Sulu) had shielded some of the members of his band, including one of the suspected murderers of Burleigh. Four years later, in a separate development, Indanan was arrested, along with his brother and two of his sons, for ‘high crimes’ and he was subsequently sentenced to death for the instigation of a murder.65

The rise of Jikiri also followed a period of more than a year of deteriorating personal relations between the Moro population of Jolo and the local US authorities. Between 1903 and 1906, the district governor of Sulu, Major Hugh L. Scott, managed to establish good relations with the Sultan and the leading headmen of Jolo. Scott had been selected to govern the unruly district because of his exceptional record and capability in dealing with Geronimo’s band of Chiricahua Apache in Oklahoma in the 1890s.66 He was a reputed negotiator and peacemaker who had displayed remarkable tact and patience in dealing with native Americans on a number of occasions. As the district governor of Sulu, he applied these skills, for the most part successfully, and managed to win the confidence of the Sultan and his followers, all of whom regarded Scott not only as someone they trusted and respected but also as someone who was deeply interested in their welfare. When Scott left the district in mid-1906, it was reportedly more peaceful and prosperous than ever, and the expressions of sadness that his departure caused among the local population were no doubt genuine.67

Good relations, however, deteriorated under Scott’s successors, who, according to Scott, ‘did not want to be bothered with the “dirty natives” and would not listen to their little complaints’.68 The result, according to Scott, was that when the authorities needed the help of the population to chase down Jikiri, it was not forthcoming. This explanation, which Scott put forward in his autobiography in 1928, may to some extent have been influenced by a tendency towards self-aggrandizement, but it is corroborated by contemporary reports. For example, in a private letter to Scott in February 1907, the district

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63. ARGMP 1906, 95. It is unclear where this obviously mistaken claim came from. It appears under the heading ‘Local conditions as reported by district governors’in Bliss’s annual report, but the outgoing governor of the Sulu District, Major Scott, did not mention Indanan in his (unpublished) annual report for 1905–1906. By contrast, he commended several of the other headmen of Sulu and wrote that Hadji Butu, the Sultan’s former prime minister and the assistant to the governor, was the ‘most learned and progressive’ of all the Moros in the archipelago; MDLC, HLSP, Reeves to Scott, 20 February 1907, 57.
64. MDLC, HLSP, Rhodes to Scott, 30 May 1909.
65. Mindanao Herald, 30 October 1909; ARGMP 1913, 62.
66. ARPC 1904, Part 1, 12.
67. MDLC, HLSP, Wood to Scott, 2 May 1906, 57; Scott to Provsec, 30 June 1906; Frederick Palmer, Bliss, Peacemaker: The Life and Letters of General Tasker Howard Bliss (New York, 1934), 86–8.
68. Scott, Some Memories of a Soldier, 322; see Eddy Schück to Scott, 6 February 1909, printed in Scott, Some Memories of a Soldier, 401–2; MDLC, HLSP, Reeves to Scott, 20 February 1907, 57. The impression of Scott’s good standing among the Moros of Sulu was also corroborated by Bliss; see Palmer, Bliss, 87.
secretary, Captain James N. Reeves, described Scott’s successor District Governor Colonel E. Z. Steever, as ‘cold and unresponsive to the Moros’ and more interested in paperwork than in having personal dealings with the local population. The result was that the governor failed to gain the confidence and sympathy of the population, which was ‘gradually getting weaned from the office’ of the district governor.69 The local government’s relations with the population apparently did not improve after Steever resigned in October 1907. In 1908, the Chinese merchants of Jolo, as we have seen, were disappointed that the governor at the time, Colonel Alexander Rodgers, failed to take their plight seriously, and around the same time Vicente Alvarez reported that many datus of Jolo were resentful of ‘some employees’ (algunos empleados) of the district governor, who, they said, did nothing but cheat them continuously.70 Against that background, some of the headmen apparently chose to give Jikiri their covert support and protection.

Pearl fishing

A final reason for Jikiri’s depredations has so far only been mentioned briefly in the literature and deserves to be investigated in greater detail. According to this explanation, Jikiri took to banditry because of the failure to respect the traditional rights of his people with regard to the pearl beds of Sulu. This explanation, moreover, has in recent years led some observers to argue that Jikiri was fighting for a cause, and that his motives were political rather than pecuniary.71

The link between pearl fishing and the rise of Jikiri was advanced by Sultan Jamalul Kiram II, when he visited the United States and met with President William Howard Taft in 1910, the year after Jikiri’s defeat. After the visit, Colonel Frank McIntyre, who discussed the issue with the Sultan, wrote to Bliss’s successor as governor of the Moro Province, John J. Pershing:

The Sultan had only good words to say of the American government in the Philippine Islands but he did recite one grievance which I promised to write to you about. He said that the settlement with the Moros under Section 11 of Act. No. 51 of the Moro council had never been made. He said that this had been the cause of the Jikiri outbreak; that while he, the Sultan, had been able to restrain the older and cooler heads, Jikiri had become impatient at the nonpayment of the allowance provided and the constant fishing in the pearl beds belonging to his people by outsiders with licenses of the Moro government.72

69. MDLC, HLSP, Reeves to Scott, 20 February 1907.
70. MDLC, HLSP, Alvarez to Bliss, 13 April 1908.
71. Jaynul V. Uckung, ‘From Jikiri to Abu Sayyaf’, Philippine Inquirer, 9 June 2001. Uckung’s argument is also referred to in scholarly works; for example Graham H. Turbiville Jr, ‘Future Trends in Low Intensity Conflict’, in Robert J. Bunker, ed., Networks, Terrorism and Global Insurgency (London, 2005), xvii.
72. MDLC, John J. Pershing Papers, McIntyre to Pershing, 1 October 1910, 128. A copy of the same document is found in College Park, MD, NARA, RG350, Enc. 9, file 21887, gen. cl. ser., to which references are made in Gowing, ‘Mandate in Moroland’, 520; W. W. Thompson, ‘Governors of the Moro Province: Wood, Bliss, and Pershing in the Southern Philippines, 1903–1913’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego, 1975), 157–8.
The Sultan also brought the matter to the attention of Hugh Scott, who greeted the Sultan on his arrival in New York in September 1910.73 In his memoirs, Scott wrote about his tenure as district governor of Sulu between 1903 and 1906:

There were several laws emanating from Manila, against which I protested in vain, that caused a vast amount of trouble and even bloodshed in Sulu. One was the confiscation of the pearl-beds by the government without compensation to the owners. Those pearl-beds had been owned by families for more than a hundred years, and were as much personal property as the oyster-beds of New Jersey or Virginia. This brought on the war of Jikiri that culminated after I left.74

The pearl beds of the Sulu Archipelago were among the richest in southeast Asia and pearls and pearl shells had been exported from the region to the outside world for hundreds of years. The pearling grounds seemed inexhaustible, both to early modern visitors and to twentieth-century scientists, although local depletion of pearl beds did take place, particularly in well-known locations.75 According to Moro tradition, all of the land and sea in the Sulu Archipelago belonged to the Sultan, who granted his subjects the exclusive and hereditary rights to the pearling grounds that they found. In exchange for these privileges – or, in effect, as a form of tax – the Sultan and other headmen were to receive the largest pearls, although pearl fishers frequently tried to evade this obligation.76

According to the Sultan, only Sulu Moros were traditionally (until the last decade of the nineteenth century) allowed to fish in the Archipelago. The pearl shells ‘are like the property in our boxes and given to us by God’, according to the Sultan, who also called the pearl beds ‘our heritage from our forefathers’.77 Sulu pearl fishing was traditionally done by skin diving or dredging. Individual catches were often small, and a single pair of shells could represent an entire week’s work for a boat. However, practically the entire population of some parts of the Sulu Archipelago was engaged in pearl fishing to a greater or lesser extent. The combined amount of pearls fished by traditional means was thus considerable and the income was important for many Moros as it allowed them to buy or trade the shells for manufactured goods, tobacco

73. New York Times, 10 September 1910.
74. Scott, Some Memories of a Soldier, 370.
75. Alvin Seale, ‘The Fishery Resources of the Philippine Islands: Part III, Pearls and Pearl Fisheries’, Philippine Journal of Science, 5, No. 2 (1910), 90; Florencio Talavera, ‘Pearl Fisheries of Sulu’, Philippine Journal of Science, 34, No. 4 (1930), 485; John G. Butcher, The Closing of the Frontier: A History of the Marine Fisheries of Southeast Asia c.1850–2000 (Singapore, 2004), 134–5.
76. Alexander Dalrymple, ‘Account of Some Natural Curiosities at Sooloo’, in Alexander Dalrymple, ed., An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean (London, 1770), I, 11; ‘Statement Made by the Sultan of Sulu Relative to the Pearl Fisheries’, in ARPC 1908: Appendix: Notes and Reports on Mineral Resources, Mines and Mining, Pearl, Shell, and Sponge Fisheries, 529; cf. ‘Statement Made’, ARPC 1908, 533.
77. ARPC 1908, Appendix, 530.
and other imported articles. The pearl shells were sold to Chinese merchants based in the region, who in 1900 paid between 40 and 60 Mexican cents ($0.15–0.23) per pound for them.\textsuperscript{78}

This traditional system came under pressure as pearl luggers equipped with diving suits and air pumps began to operate in the Sulu Archipelago towards the end of the Spanish colonial period. In 1892, a firm owned by two Chinese businessmen, Leopoldo Canizato Tiana and Tan Benga, was established at Jolo, which was then in Spanish hands, and began to fish for pearls with six fully equipped boats of about 10 tons each. Referring to a protocol from 1885 between Britain, Germany and Spain, according to which fishing in the Sulu Archipelago was declared to be free for all, the Chinese partners did not feel obliged to ask the Sultan for permission to fish for pearls. The luggers were instead protected by the Spanish fleet and only fished in the vicinity of Jolo, literally under the Spanish guns. In the wake of the Spanish–American War in 1898, however, the Spanish garrison at Jolo was greatly reduced and the Spanish gunboats were no longer able to protect the firm’s operations. The Chinese pearl fishers were therefore forced to make terms with the Sultan and pay him 100 MXN (Mexican dollars) – the equivalent of $38 – per month for the privilege of fishing. Two other firms, one based in London and the other in Singapore, also began pearling in Sulu towards the end of the Spanish period, but in contrast to the Chinese firm they made terms with the Sultan from the start and did not fish under the protection of the Spanish fleet.\textsuperscript{79} In 1899, moreover, the Philippine Pearling and Trading Company, owned by Charlie and Eddy Schück, signed an agreement with the Sultan, which gave them the exclusive rights to fish for pearls using boats with diving equipment around Jolo, a privilege for which they agreed to pay the Sultan MXN 200 ($77) per month. The agreement also stipulated that owners of pearling grounds could not forbid the company to fish in their grounds but ‘must come to terms with them satisfactory to both parties’. It is not clear what these terms looked like in practice, but presumably they comprised some form of material compensation to the owners of the pearling grounds, in addition to the monthly tribute paid to the Sultan.\textsuperscript{80}

Taken together, these arrangements provided the Sultan and several of his headmen with a considerable regular income. If the London and Singapore-based firms paid the same amount as Tiana and Tan, MXN 100 ($38) per month, the Sultan’s total revenues from pearl fishing licenses would have amounted to at least MXN 500 ($192) per month, in addition to the large pearls that the Sultan received from Moro pearl fishers. By comparison, the so-called Bates Agreement, which was in force between 1899 and 1904 and guaranteed considerable autonomy to the Sulu Moros, gave the Sultan a monthly salary of half of that amount.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} ARPC 1908, Appendix, 525, 533 and 537–8; George Frederick Kunz and Charles Hugh Stevenson, \textit{The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science, and Industry of the Queen of Gems} (London, 1908), 219; see Butcher, \textit{Closing}, 134.
\item \textsuperscript{79} ARPC 1908, Appendix, 524 and 526. The exchange rate of the Philippine peso to the Mexican dollar was about 1:1.30 and that of the peso to the US dollar 1:1.05; see ARGMP 1905, 13; A. P. Andrew, ‘The End of the Mexican Dollar’, \textit{The Quarterly Journal of Economics}, 18, No. 3 (1904), 334.
\item \textsuperscript{80} ARPC 1908, Appendix, 527.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Treaty with the Sultan of Sulu, US Congress 56:1, Doc S-136 (1900), 27; ARPC 1904, 13; Scott, \textit{Some Memories of a Soldier}, 371.
\end{itemize}
These arrangements seem to have worked reasonably well, at least from the point of view of the Sultan and other leading men of Jolo, during the first years of the American rule. The colonial government, however, saw the potential to develop the pearling industry and to increase the revenues of Moro Province by selling fishing licenses. Consequently, in 1904, the Philippine Commission in Manila approved Act 51, passed by the Moro Legislative Council, regulating the fishing for shells of marine molluscs, which opened up the Moro Province to commercial pearlers from outside the region. The passing of the law set off a great increase in the exploitation of the marine resources of the Sulu Archipelago (and other parts of the Moro Province) by Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, European, Australian and American pearl fishers.\(^{82}\) Licenses were issued by the treasurer of the Moro Province, who collected a fee of PHP 300 ($150) per year for each diver using submarine armour. In addition, there were second-class licenses for skin divers that cost PHP 5 ($2.50) per year, although Moros were exempt from paying such licenses during the first 18 months of the implementation of the law.\(^{83}\)

In spite of this temporary exemption, the new law was not advantageous to most of the Sulu Moros. The increased exploitation due to large-scale fishing exacerbated the ongoing depletion of the known pearl beds of the Sulu Archipelago, which meant that pearlers – both Moro skin divers and foreign, armoured divers – were forced to spend more time searching for new localities.\(^{84}\) Moreover, even if the license fee for skin diving was relatively modest, many Moro fishermen found it difficult to pay them, because currency was very scarce in Sulu and the law introduced a cost for the exercise of what was regarded as a traditional right among the Sulu Moros.\(^{85}\) The law also unintentionally imposed additional hardship on the Moros because it prevented them from trading their shells for food and clothing, which the larger boats easily could have carried, had they not been prohibited by the law from trading in pearl shells outside the ports of Jolo and Zamboanga.\(^{86}\)

Act 51 also abolished the right of the Sultan and his headmen to collect license fees and large pearls from fishermen, as well as all hereditary claims to pearl beds in the archipelago. In doing so, the law explicitly forbade the Moros or any other person to

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\(^{82}\) Initially, the law stipulated that only American and Filipino-owned vessels could be granted licences, but this section was amended in several stages and eventually abolished. In 1910, Seale, ‘Fishery Resources’, 89, reported that about 30 vessels of between five and fifteen tons were engaged in pearl fishing in the Sulu Archipelago, and in 1914 he compiled a list of 73 pearling vessels owned by Japanese, Chinese, Americans, Arabs and Moros; Alvin Seale, ‘Sea Products of Mindanao and Sulu II: Pearls, Pearl Shells, and Button Shells’, \textit{Philippine Journal of Science}, 11, No. 4 (1916), 255–6.

\(^{83}\) Act 51, Sec. 6, 7, 10, ARPC 1908, Appendix, 549–52.

\(^{84}\) Seale, ‘Fishery Resources’, 90.

\(^{85}\) Scott reported in 1905 that currency was very scarce and that the greater part of that in circulation was Spanish and Mexican money, which was no longer legal tender after the currency reform of 1903–1904. The shortage of currency made the collection of the \textit{cedula} (head tax) difficult as well; MDLC, HLSP, Scott to Provsec, 6 July 1905, 56.

\(^{86}\) ARPC 1908, Appendix, 544–5 and 551. The luggers were required to keep a log of their catches and testify to their accuracy before entering the port of Jolo or Zamboanga, thereby, in effect, prohibiting them from buying or selling pearl shells while operating in the archipelago.
intermeddle or try to exact any payment or tribute from the pearl fishers. Combined with the reduction in salaries and the freeing of all slaves, without compensation to the slave owners, due to the abrogation of the Bates Agreement in the same year, the implementation of the law therefore meant that the income of the Sultan, and the other leading men of Jolo, was drastically reduced. District Governor Scott protested and felt, in his own words, outraged at the injustice. He wrote in his memoirs:

[W]ith their income gone, and their slaves freed without compensation, they were totally unable to make a living unless they should take to robbery and murder, which none of them did. I do not know how they got enough food from day to day.

The American policies bred discontent among the Sulu Moros, however, that eventually was given vent to in the support for Jikiri. Not only did he enjoy the sympathy and protection of some of the leading headmen of Jolo, but it also transpired, at the trial following his elimination in July 1909, that many of his followers were relatives of the most influential men from around the Sulu Archipelago.

The pearl fishing law of 1904 did make a provision for the payment of monetary compensation to the Moros in Sulu for revoking their traditional rights to the pearl beds. Section 11 stipulated that the governor of the Sulu district (that is, Scott at the time) was to ‘investigate the alleged claims of certain Moros residing within his district to property rights in the shells of marine mollusca in the seas adjacent to their places of residence’. A sum equivalent to half of the proceeds of the license fees during the first one and half years of the implementation of the law (that is, during 1904 and 1905) was to be set aside for the compensation of such claims. The payment was to be ‘understood to be in full and final settlement of the supposed property rights of the Moros of the district of Sulu’.

This provision meant that the total compensation should have amounted to about PHP 2688 ($1344), which was about equivalent to what the Sultan alone in previous years had collected in license fees from commercial pearlers for seven months. However, as indicated both by Scott’s reference to the ‘confiscation of the pearl-beds by the government without compensation to the owners’, and by the financial statement of the Moro Province for the fiscal year 1906, even this relatively modest compensation was never distributed. In fact, the investigation set out in Section 11 of Act 51 was never carried out, but it is unclear why, particularly given Scott’s well-documented interest in the welfare of the Moro population.

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87. Act 51, Sec. 12, ARPC 1908, Appendix, 551.
88. Scott, Some Memories of a Soldier, 371. In his annual report for 1903–1904 Scott wrote that the sultan accepted loyally the loss of revenue due to the passing of Act 51 and relied upon the Philippine Commission to reimburse him for his loss; MDLC, HLSP, Scott to Provsec, 3 September 1904, 56.
89. Woods, ‘Looking Back’, 191.
90. Act 51, Sec. 11, ARPC 1908, Appendix, 551.
91. Revenues from fishing licences in the Sulu district amounted to PHP 3726.92 in the fiscal year 1 July 1904–30 June 1905 and to PHP 3300 in the following fiscal year; ARGMP 1905, 13; 1906, 47. It has been estimated that half of the latter amount was collected during the second half of 1905.
92. No documentation of any investigation has been found and there is no mention of such investigations in Scott’s annual reports as district governor in the years following the passing of the Act; see MDLC, HLSP, Scott to Provsec, 3 September 1904, 6 July 1905, 30 June 1906.
The only attempt to investigate the claims to the pearling grounds in accordance with Section 11 of Act 51 was undertaken by Scott’s successor, District Governor Colonel E. Z. Steever. In September 1907, he convened a board for the purpose of carrying out the investigation, but the move was rejected by his superior, Province Governor Bliss, who was of the firm opinion that because the investigations had not been carried out immediately after the law was passed, as stipulated by Section 11, the provisions therein had ‘expired by the limitation imposed by its own terms’.93 No compensation was thus to be paid to the Moros, according to Bliss, who also believed it was time that the Moros started paying for their fishing licenses. Steever apparently did not agree with this interpretation of the law, but as he could not disobey the orders of his superior the initiative came to nothing. Shortly afterwards Steever was replaced as district governor by General C. L. Hodges, who – like his successor, Alexander Rodgers – did not pursue the issue. The failure of Steever’s attempt to settle the question of the compensation occurred only about a month before the first known attack by Jikiri, on 1 November 1907, and most probably influenced his decision to take to piracy.

During Steever’s term as district governor, another controversy arose due to the provision of Act 51 that no Moro could exact payment or tribute on the pearl fishers. The matter resulted in a considerable loss of income and prestige for the Sultan and contributed to sour the relations between the Sultan and the district administration. In 1907, a Moro fisherman found what was said to be the greatest pearl ever found in the Sulu Archipelago. It was described as being ‘the size of a marble, perfectly round and of excellent color’ and was worth $30,000, a price for which it was marketed in Singapore in the same year. According to the Moro tradition – but in violation of Act 51 – such a large pearl was to be given to the Sultan, who in turn would give the finder a symbolic gift. When the Sultan seized the pearl, however, the fisherman complained to the governor, who brought the matter to court. The Sultan lost the case and was forced to give up the pearl, and Steever commissioned the company of Tiana and Tan to sell it for the finder, for which the company received 20 per cent of the proceeds, whereas the Sultan came away empty-handed.94

The changes in the pearling industry due to the implementation of Act 51 were considerable and had palpable negative effects for many of the leading headmen of Jolo, who had derived a considerable part of their income from licenses and tributes levied on the pearling industry. It also violated what was regarded as the traditional, God-given and exclusive right of the Sultan and his subjects to fish for pearls in the Sulu Archipelago. The effect of the law on Sulu pearl fishers in general is less clear, particularly in the long run.95 It is clear, however, that many Moros who had exclusive hereditary claims to pearl beds were deprived of these without compensation.
Although it might have been expected that the new order would create resentment among those who stood to lose from the implementation of Act 51, none of the US officers in command of the Moro Province at the time seems to have associated the rise of Jikiri with the changes in the pearling industry. Even in April 1908, when Jikiri’s depredations and the army’s failure to eliminate him, had become a matter of serious concern, Governor Bliss failed to connect the piratical activity to the discontent to which the new law had given rise. Only towards the end of the campaign against Jikiri, in April or May 1909 – after a futile attempt lasting several months by a small contingent of American soldiers to dress and live like Moros in order to set a trap for Jikiri – did the officers in Jolo learn that Jikiri’s chief complaint concerned the pearl fishing in the Sulu Archipelago, which Jikiri reportedly wanted for the Moros.

**Conclusion**

For more than one and a half years, from the end of 1907 until mid-1909, Jikiri eluded defeat in spite of a massive manhunt led by the US Army. During this time he assembled a band that in total probably numbered at least 100 men and was responsible for dozens of piratical attacks and coastal raids that left at least 40 people dead. The victims were of various nationalities – Moros, Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese, Europeans and Americans – but most of the known victims were Chinese shop-owners and merchants based in the region.

The governor of the Moro Province, Tasker Howard Bliss, was convinced that the surge in piracy was due to the withdrawal of the naval gunboats from the province in mid-1907, even though he was aware that piratical activity, particularly around Basilan, had begun as early as 1904. In early 1907, brutal raids by Joloano pirates against local fishermen and traders at sea had already become frequent, but seemed to be of little concern to the authorities. Only when Jikiri, in December 1907, attacked and murdered two white men in Basilan were the authorities stirred to action. Without the naval gunboats, however, the army lacked the necessary maritime capacity to undertake an effective campaign against the outlaws.

Besides lamenting the withdrawal of the gunboats, Bliss and the other US officers in charge in the Moro Province explained the surge in piracy in terms of race. The propensity to commit acts of piracy – and murder and brigandage in general – was seen as typical of the Moro, particularly the Joloano Moro, notwithstanding the fact that many of the victims were Moros and that most Moros in Sulu did not engage in murder or robbery. The lack of cooperation on the part of the local population – many of whom were suspected of more or less openly sympathizing with the outlaws – seemed to confirm the explanation in the eyes of the US officers in command. The explanation was similar to the so-called innate theory of piracy in the Malay world, proposed by Thomas Stamford Raffles in the early nineteenth century.

This article has argued for another explanation, however, according to which the increased exploitation of the marine resources, particularly pearls and pearl shells, of the

96. MDLC, THBP, Bliss to Rodgers, 13 April 1908.
97. Davidson, ‘Jikiri’s Last Stand’, 15.
Sulu Archipelago bred widespread resentment. Act 51 of 1904, which regulated pearl fishing in the Moro Province, mainly benefitted outsiders, including Americans, Europeans, Filipinos, Chinese and Japanese, at the expense of many Moros who engaged in small-scale pearl fishing. The failure of the colonial authorities to pay even the modest compensation to the Moros for the loss of their traditional claims to the pearling grounds, as stipulated by the law, became a major source of discontent in Sulu in 1907 and triggered Jikiri’s decision to take to piracy.

The crucial point, however, is not Jikiri’s personal motives or his apparent attempt to justify his depredations. The point is rather that the law and the failure to pay the compensation bred distrust and resentment among many Joloano Moros – especially many of the influential headmen and community leaders who probably could have contained Jikiri had they wished to do so – and contributed to the widespread unwillingness among the Moros to cooperate with the US authorities in their efforts to defeat the outlaws. The problem was exacerbated by the loss of mutual confidence and trust between, on the one hand, the district governor of Sulu and his staff, and on the other hand, the local population of Jolo following the resignation of the popular Hugh L. Scott as district governor in 1906. The result was that the Americans for the most part of the campaign were at a loss, not only as to the whereabouts of Jikiri and his followers, but also as to the sources of the discontent among the Moros of Sulu.

This explanation is closer to the other and more influential theory of piracy in the Malay world proposed by Raffles, the so-called ‘decay theory’. According to the theory, piracy ensued from the breakdown of central political order and the commercial marginalization of indigenous peoples due to the advances of the colonial powers in maritime Southeast Asia. In Sulu, the passing of the pearl fishing law in 1904, combined with the expansion of US colonial interests in the archipelago and the abolition of most privileges that the Sultan and the leading headmen of Sulu had enjoyed during the first years of American rule, brought about a decay for the Sulu Sultanate comparable to that which Raffles observed in other parts of the Malay world a century earlier. Whereas the Sultan and most of his followers, probably wisely, refrained from openly confronting the Americans or taking to robbery and piracy, Jikiri chose the path of the desperado, probably well knowing that his chances of defeating the Americans or asserting any form of political autonomy were extremely slight. In confronting the Americans he nonetheless became the rallying point for much of the discontent that the colonial and foreign penetration of the Sulu Archipelago had given rise to in previous years.

This argument (and the decay theory in general), however, should not be interpreted as a defence or justification of the brutality and violence unleashed by Jikiri and his followers. Nor should Jikiri’s alleged political motives be exaggerated. If he indeed can be said to have fought for a cause – that is, to assert the exclusive rights of the Moros of the Sulu Archipelago to the region’s pearl beds – he obviously failed to communicate this goal to the American authorities, at least until the last few months before he was killed. His terrorist tactics, moreover, were not only directed at foreigners but also many Moros who were natives of Sulu and for whose cause he allegedly fought.

Jikiri can lay no more claim to have been a freedom fighter or national hero of the Moros than a Somali pirate in the early twenty-first century can credibly claim the status of a coastguard defending the interests of local fishermen against the incursions
of foreign trawlers. Like so many other pirates throughout history, Jikiri was probably motivated more than anything else by personal gain and the social status that his exploits conferred upon him among his supporters.

**Author biography**

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