

The Philippines: Extremism and Terrorism

On December 3, 2023, two suspected Daulah Islamiyah (DI) members detonated a bomb at a gymnasium inside Mindanao State University in Marawi City, southern Philippines. The explosion, which targeted a Catholic mass service, killed at least four and wounded more than 40 others. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. blamed “foreign terrorists” and Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro claimed there were “strong indications of a foreign element” in the bombing. ISIS, who had laid siege to Marawi City for five months in 2017, claimed responsibility for the blast. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#))

The attack occurred amidst an intensified military campaign targeting local pro-ISIS groups in the southern Philippines, including operations that killed several DI members. Authorities suggested a potentially retaliatory motive for the attack. In June 2023, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) announced it had killed Abu Zacharia, the leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia as well as Daulah Islamiyah, in a military operation in Marawi City. Zacharia was reportedly succeeded in his role by Esmael Abdulmalik, also known as Abu Turaife, who had been a leader of a pro-ISIS faction within the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). (Sources: [Reuters](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [The Diplomat](#))

A February 2022 U.N. Security Council report noted that the Philippines, along with Indonesia, “reported significant gains in countering threats from ISIL and Al-Qaida affiliates in the South-East Asia region, leading to an overall decline in terrorist activity and some optimism that the operational capability of the groups may be significantly degraded.” Singapore’s Ministry of Home Affairs in July 2022 reported that ISIS affiliates are the primary driver of terrorism in Southeast Asia and pose the most immediate threat due to their ability to launch ISIS-inspired attacks. The report also noted that pro-ISIS militants in the southern Philippines continued to clash with security forces and warned that—though communication between Southeast Asian supporters and ISIS core appears to be informal and sporadic—the regional online ecosystem could help develop the operational capability of pro-ISIS groups in the Philippines and Indonesia, including in directing and funding attacks. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team](#), [Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs](#))

Overview

Both Communist nationalist rebels and Islamic separatist insurgencies have wreaked havoc on the Philippines, especially on the southern island of Mindanao. As a result, several thousands of Filipinos have been murdered in bombings, assassinations, kidnapping attempts, and executions.

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Some of the more high-profile attacks in the Philippines involved the kidnapping and execution of foreigners, including Western missionaries and tourists. For example, in May 2001 the Islamic separatist [Abu Sayyaf Group \(ASG\)](#) beheaded an American hostage after the demanded ransom payment was not delivered. In April and June 2016, ASG militants beheaded Canadian hostages John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, respectively. In September 2014, ASG kidnapped a German doctor and his companion who were traveling on a yacht between Malaysia and the Philippines. ASG threatened to execute the hostages unless Germany paid a ransom and ceased supporting U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS. The two hostages were eventually [released](#). (Sources: [Guardian](#), [BBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [Asian Journal](#))

The Philippine government considers the Communist People’s Party (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA), to be one of the most significant internal security threats. Unlike the Islamic extremists who are concentrated primarily in Mindanao, the NPA has members throughout the country including in the capital city of Manila. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace’s [Global Terrorism Index 2014](#), the NPA was the “largest individual group” suspected to be behind terrorist attacks in the Philippines. Both the CPP and NPA were designated foreign terrorist organizations by the United States on August 9, 2002. (Sources: [Stratfor](#), [Combatting Terrorism Center](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Philippine military and police forces have struggled in dealing with extremist groups. The struggles stem from a lack of capacity, poor coordination, and geographical obstacles. However, the government has made efforts to restructure and strengthen its counterterrorism measures in cooperation with the United States and its Southeast Asian neighbors. Through military and economic initiatives, the Philippines has increased its capability to constrain violent activity and reduce financing for extremist groups like the NPA, ASG, and Jemaah Islamiyah. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Financial Action Task Force](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Communist People’s Party

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The Philippines' longest-running extremist conflict is with the Communist People's Party (CPP) and its military wing the New People's Army (NPA). Jose Maria Sison, a student activist in Manila, established the CPP in 1968 after being expelled from the existing Communist party, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). The CPP's ideology is based heavily on Maoist thought and singled out U.S. imperialism, capitalism, and feudalism as issues to be confronted via revolution or a "protracted people's war," rooted in the peasantry. Unlike Islamist groups that are located primarily in the southern Philippines, the CPP has a presence in Manila and is active throughout the country. On August 9, 2002, the U.S. Department of State designated the "Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA)" as a Foreign Terrorist Organization at the request of then-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. (Sources: [CTC Sentinel](#), [International Crisis Group](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

During then-President Rodrigo Duterte's first month in office in July 2016, he took action to establish peaceful relations with the Communists. Duterte made promises to release political prisoners and issued offers for positions in his administration for those who are willing to join peace talks. On August 25, 2016, Duterte declared a ceasefire with the CPP and NPA, and ordered the Philippine military and police forces to abide by the declaration. The first round of formal peace talks between the Communists and the Duterte administration were held in Oslo, Norway from August 22-28, 2016. However, in July 2017, following attacks by the NPA on government forces in Mindanao, Duterte declared that he will no longer be negotiating a peace deal with the Communists. In August 2017, CPP announced that it would no longer cooperate with Duterte and declared that "the people have no other recourse but to tread the path of militant struggle," responding to the extension of martial law in Mindanao. (Sources: [GMA News](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Inquirer](#), [Rappler](#), [PhilStar](#))

Due to its organized structure and presence beyond the restive southern region of the Philippines, the CPP and NPA has been considered more of a threat to the country's stability as a whole than Islamic rebels. In 2017, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana estimated that the NPA had upwards of 5,000 members. According to terrorism researcher Luke Lischin, there has been a surge in the communists' violent activities, with the NPA launching 260 attacks in 2017, up from 60 attacks in 2016. In October 2020, Lorenzana stated that the communist insurgency posed one of the biggest threats to the Philippines. In February 2021, then-AFP chief Cirilito Sobejana said he considered the communist rebels and other terrorist groups a real threat and would work to destroy them by his retirement on July 31, 2021. Sobejana was replaced by Lieutenant General Jose Faustino as head of the AFP. (Sources: [Asia Times](#), [Channel NewsAsia](#), [Rappler](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Philippine News Agency](#))

In December 2017, after officially terminating peace talks with the communist rebels, Duterte issued a proclamation designating the CPP and NPA as terrorist organizations. The country's Department of Justice also moved to file a petition to label more than 600 people, considered CPP or NPA members and sympathizers, as terrorists. The latter move was criticized by human rights groups for its sweeping nature. Under Philippine law at the time, the president's terrorist designation required approval from a Regional Trial Court, prompting the government to file a petition with the Manila Regional Trial Court in February 2018. The case remained pending through July 2020, when it was set to be transferred to the Court of Appeals under the new Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. On December 9, 2020, the newly created Anti-Terrorism Council approved a resolution to designate the CPP and NPA as terrorist organizations. However, only the Court of Appeals can approve the designation, according to CNN Philippines. In July 2021, the Office of the Solicitor General, an independent body of the Philippine Department of Justice, concluded that the terror designation would remain in place even if the Court of Appeals disagreed with the proscription. The government froze the assets of proscribed individuals and those associated with the organizations. (Sources: [Channel NewsAsia](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Philippine News Agency](#), [Manila Bulletin](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Rappler](#))

In July 2021, the Anti-Terrorism Council formerly designated the National Democratic Front (NDF) as a terrorist organization. According to the council, the NDF is "an integral and separate part" of the CPP/NPA. Created in April 1973, the NDF is accused of playing a direct and indispensable role in armed operations. In October 2021, a leading commander of the communist rebels Jorge Madlos was killed by government troops. The 72-year-old Madlos, nom de guerre Ka Oris, was killed alongside his medical aide in a remote village in the southern Philippines' mountainous region. Military officials said Madlos and his forces were responsible for years of deadly assaults against security forces, attacks on extractive and agricultural operations, and extortion. According to the military, there are approximately 3,500 to 4,000 communist fighters remaining despite surrenders and factionalism within the movement. (Sources: [Philippines News Agency](#), [Rappler](#), [Associated Press](#))

Moro National Liberation Front and Moro Islamic Liberation Front

Established in 1971 to fight for an independent Moro (Islamic) state in Mindanao, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was the first Islamic extremist group in the Philippines. Filipino Muslims refer to themselves as Moro, which is a derivation of the word 'Moor,' a derogatory term used by Spanish colonialists to refer to Islamic North Africans. The term was then adopted by the Christian majority of the Philippines to describe their Muslim neighbors in the southern islands of the country. After over a decade of fighting and negotiations between the Philippine government and MNLF leaders, then-President Corazon Aquino signed a law in 1989 that established the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), allowing for self-rule of predominately Muslim areas. Nonetheless, violent conflict continued until 1996, when the MNLF and the Philippine

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government ultimately reached a final peace agreement, effectively ending the group's armed struggle. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [CNN Philippines](#))

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) split from the MNLF in 1978 over leadership and strategic conflicts. Salamat Hashim, a member of the MNLF, was unhappy with the group's [agreement](#) with the Philippine government, which allowed for an autonomous but not independent region in Mindanao. Hashim rallied more radical elements to breakaway and form the MILF. The MILF has been in negotiations with the Philippine government for over 18 years and has since denounced violence and terrorist acts. In March 2014, the MILF and the government of then-President Benigno Aquino III signed a peace agreement, known as the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). The CAB laid a foundation for a legislative framework that would replace the ARMM and grant greater autonomy. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [The Economist](#), [Reuters](#), [The Diplomat](#))

On July 26, 2018, Duterte signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), which would create a new autonomous region, to be called the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The BOL adds more territories to the pre-existing autonomous region, subject to a plebiscite wherein locals voted on inclusion. The law allows for the BARMM to have a parliament and more autonomy over issues such as budgeting, the judicial system, indigenous rights, and natural resources. Both MNLF and MILF support the law, which has received praise from the United Nations and countries with ties to the peace efforts in Mindanao. Both separatist groups pledged to fight violent extremism and promised to work with the government for peace. On January 21, 2019, a majority of voters in the ARMM approved the BOL and it was officially deemed ratified on January 25. (Sources: [The Diplomat](#), [Rappler](#))

Abu Sayyaf Group

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The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is the smallest, though most radical of the separatist groups in Mindanao. ASG split from the MNLF in 1991, like the MILF, amidst criticism that the parent organization was weakening due to its willingness to enter into peace talks with the Philippine government. ASG is the most violent of the groups and is of most concern to Australia and United States, due to its historical ties to al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah. From 2006 to 2017, the group was divided into two main factions: the Sulu-based faction led by Radulan Sahiron, one of the United States' most-wanted terrorists; and the Basilan-based faction, which was led by Isnilon Totoni Hapilon until his death in October 2017. In a video posted on January 2016, a band of ASG members, using the group's alternative name Harakatul Islamiyah (Islamic Movement), pledged allegiance to ISIS and named Hapilon their new leader. Hapilon was on the FBI's list of [Most Wanted Terrorists](#) for his involvement with ASG. In May 2023, the AFP announced it was verifying reports that Sahiron, who is the subject of a \$1 million U.S. bounty, had died of natural causes in Sulu. He had reportedly been suffering from age-related illnesses since 2017. (Sources: [Stanford University](#), [BBC News](#), [Manila Time](#), [Benar News](#))

Two major ASG factions pledged allegiance to ISIS: a Sulu-based faction led by [Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan](#) and a Basilan-based faction led by Furuji Indama. [Furuji Indama](#) has been implicated in several terrorist attacks since Hapilon's death and is considered to have been the closest to Hapilon. Following an attack at a cathedral in Jolo, Sulu on January 27, 2019, the Philippine military revealed that there was an active ASG sub-group called Ajang-Ajang. The group, previously focused on kidnap-for-ransom activity, is comprised of a younger generation of members who are brothers and sons of deceased ASG members. In July 2020, Sawadjaan sustained serious injuries during a clash with government forces, which was followed by conflicting reports of his death. In August 2020, an army chief stated that Sawadjaan likely died, though troops have yet to recover his remains to confirm. [In October 2020, the Philippine military announced that it believed Indama had been fatally wounded during a September 2020 clash with the armed forces. The military is still working to locate his remains, which would be subject to testing in order to confirm his death.](#) (Sources: [Eurasia Review](#), [Rappler](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Associated Press](#), [Rappler](#))

Sawadjaan's nephew, [Mudzrimar "Mundi" Sawadjaan](#), is also a unit sub-leader and bombmaker of ASG. He is the suspected mastermind of the August 2020 twin blasts in Jolo, Sulu, which killed at least 14 people and wounded dozens of others. A Philippine army official alleged that the attack was likely in response to the suspected death of the senior ASG leader, Sawadjaan. (Sources: [Rappler](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Associated Press](#))

Duterte promised to crackdown on extremist groups operating in the country, but stated that he would uphold existing peace processes with the MNLF and MILF. Duterte explicitly refused to negotiate with the more violent ASG, and on August 1, 2016, effectively shut the door on peace talks with the terror group. Duterte stated, "I will not deal with persons with extreme brutality. There is no... reason for me to sit down and talk with criminals." In February 2019, there were an estimated 300 to 400 ASG members. Nearly two years later, that number has dropped significantly to 171 ASG fighters as of January 2021, according to Philippine government-owned media. The decrease in ASG manpower and weaponry is reportedly a result of intensified military and police operations. (Sources: [GMA News](#), [Associated Press](#), [PTV News](#))

ISIS

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ASG and the closely aligned Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) pledged allegiance to ISIS, according to videos uploaded to YouTube on July 23, 2014. Then in late 2015, other Islamist militant groups operating in Mindanao, including the Maute Group and Ansar Khalifah Philippines (AKP), pledged allegiance to ISIS and formed a loose alliance known as Daulah Islamiyah Wilayahul Mashriq (Islamic State-Eastern Region). In a [video](#) posted in January 2016, a group of ASG members issued another formal pledge of allegiance to the terror group and named Isnilon Hapilon as ASG's leader and emir of ISIS in the Philippines. A January 2016 video released by ISIS suggested that the group's leadership in Syria had confirmed Hapilon as the leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia. (Sources: [GMA News](#), [National Defense College of the Philippines](#), [Manila Times](#), [Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict](#))

In a November 28, 2016 statement, Duterte said that intelligence services confirmed that ISIS had connected with the Maute Group. The group, also known as the Islamic State in Lanao, was responsible for several terrorist incidents in Mindanao in 2016. On November 28, police discovered a bomb near the U.S. Embassy in a trash bin, believed to be planted by Maute militants. Four members were arrested the same day and were found to be carrying video clips of themselves pledging allegiance to ISIS. According to media reports, the Maute group is also responsible for the December 28, 2016, explosions on a town celebration in Leyte, an island in the middle of the country. Two bombs were reportedly detonated using a mobile phone, injuring 23 revelers. According to the defense secretary, ISIS contacted Hapilon in December 2016 and encouraged him to identify a location for an ISIS base in the Philippines. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Associated Press](#), [NBC News](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [GMA News](#), [Rappler](#))

Initially, various pro-ISIS groups in the country operated independently from one another, and many lacked internal cohesion and a command structure. However, this changed in May 2017, when the Maute Group led a five-month-long siege of Marawi, which became a rallying point for fighters from the fragmented groups, who coalesced under the Daulah Islamiyah umbrella. During the government's effort to regain control of Marawi, the AFP killed much of the umbrella group's leadership, including Hapilon and the Maute Group leaders. Nonetheless, various ISIS-affiliates in the Philippines continued to use the "Daulah Islamiyah" name. Some groups have sought to localize the label, such as the Daulah Islamiyah Maguindanao, which operates in the southern province of Maguindanao. Others are known to authorities by their leaders' names, such as in the case of Daulah Islamiyah Salahuddin, named after its first leader Salahuddin Hassan. (Sources: [Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict](#), [International Crisis Group](#), [Eurasia Review](#))

ISIS affiliates in the Philippines reportedly have received funding from ISIS core. In January 2017, ISIS's central command in Syria funneled tens of thousands of dollars to the Maute Group. ISIS affiliates have also secured millions of dollars through robbing banks, looting homes, and other criminal activities. Remnants of the Maute Group, who were led by Abu Dar until his death in March 2019, in the southern province of Lanao del Sur, are reportedly engaged in the illegal drug trade. ISIS-linked groups have used the funds to lure would-be fighters to join their ranks, in some instances paying new recruits \$300 to \$400 and providing firearms. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [Channel NewsAsia](#), [United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team](#), [Guardian](#))

On February 27, 2018, the U.S. Department of State designated ISIS-Philippines and the Maute Group as a Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) and Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). In November 2018, the *Guardian* reported that upwards of 100 ISIS foreign fighters were in Mindanao, some of whom chose to remain there after traveling to the Philippines to join the siege of Marawi. Approximately 80 foreign fighters were believed to have participated in the siege. The ISIS foreign fighters are primarily from Indonesia and Malaysia, but others came from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Middle East. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Guardian](#))

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan was the "acting emir" of ISIS in the Philippines from May 2018 until his suspected death in July 2020. A Philippine official confirmed this, stating that Sawadjaan, a Jolo-based commander of ASG, was promoted to the position in 2018. Sawadjaan began his militant career with the MNLF. He left the group alongside Radulan Sahiron to join ASG in 1992, but later departed Sahiron's command due to a dispute over accommodating foreign militants. Sawadjaan has been connected to several hostage executions and, according to Philippine police, planned and financed the January 2019 cathedral attack that killed at least 23 people. As of August 2020, ISIS's core leadership has not publicly acknowledged a leader of what the Pentagon calls "ISIS-East Asia (ISIS-EA)." However, international ISIS affiliates regarded Sawadjaan as the de facto leader of ISIS-EA in the Philippines, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency. In July 2020, local Philippine media reported that Sawadjaan had died days after he was injured in a clash with government forces, though the military later claimed he survived. In August 2020, a military official claimed Sawadjaan was likely killed, but troops were working to recover his remains to confirm his death. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Associated Press](#), [U.S. Department of Defense](#), [Arab News](#), [Associated Press](#))

On June 22, 2019, ISIS released a video from its so-called East Asia province, showing fighters in the Philippines. The video was part of ISIS's "And the Best Outcome is for the Righteous" series, in which jihadists around the world re-committed their allegiance to ISIS emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group in the video is led by a man known as Abu Abdallah. (Source: [Long War Journal](#))

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On October 29, 2021, government forces raided a Daulah Islamiyah hideout in the remote town of Talayan and killed its leader, Salahuddin Hassan, and his wife. Hassan was one of the country's most-wanted Muslim militant leaders, who allegedly masterminded deadly bombings, killings, and extortion in the provinces of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat. His wife Jehana Minbida was suspected of serving as the finance officer of the group. His group's most prominent attack was the 2016 bombing of a night market that killed 15 people and injured several others in Davao, Duterte's hometown. After Hassan's death, ranking member Asim Karinda assumed leadership of Daulah Islamiyah. However, on December 2, 2021, Philippine security forces killed Karinda and at least five of his followers in a series of gun battles in Maguindanao. Later that day, gunmen on motorbikes killed an off-duty policeman in the province and investigators suspected it was a reprisal by Daulah Islamiyah. In June 2023, the AFP announced it had killed Abu Zacharia, the leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia as well as Daulah Islamiyah, in a military operation in Marawi City. He was reportedly succeeded in his role as leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia by Esmael Abdulmalik, also known as Abu Turaife, a leader of a faction of BIFF. (Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Rappler](#), [Rappler](#), [PhilStar](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [The Diplomat](#))

According to a report by the Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs, ISIS affiliates are the primary driver of terrorism within Southeast Asia and pose the most immediate threat due to their ability to launch ISIS-inspired attacks. The report also noted that pro-ISIS groups in the southern Philippines continued to clash with security forces and warned that—though communication between Southeast Asian supporters and ISIS core appears to be informal and sporadic—the regional online ecosystem could help develop the operational capability of pro-ISIS groups in the Philippines and Indonesia, including in directing and funding attacks. (Source: [Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs](#))

Foreign Fighters

In March 2014, former Philippine President Aquino received [reports](#) that two Filipino Muslims died in Syria in late 2013. They were reportedly fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his regime. The specific opposition group remains unclear. In December 2013, an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) working in Syria saw two dead anti-Assad fighters in the streets. A Syrian government soldier informed the OFW that the dead fighters were members of the Abu Sayyaf Group. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Rappler](#), [FARS News Agency](#), [Asian Pacific Post](#))

A Filipino ISIS member is believed to have taken part in ISIS' beheading of 18 Syrian Air Force pilots and American citizen Peter Kassig.

In September 2014, a Philippine intelligence official [revealed](#) that the government began investigating the involvement of Filipinos Islamists in Syria, possibly fighting for ISIS. Young Filipino Muslims may also have returned from Syria and Iraq to radicalize others in the Philippines. The leaked [government report](#) said that 100 Filipinos went to Iran to undergo military training and were later deployed to Syria. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [Rappler](#), [FARS News Agency](#), [Asian Pacific Post](#))

A Filipino ISIS member is believed to have taken part in ISIS' beheading of 18 Syrian Air Force pilots and American citizen Peter Kassig. The executions were captured on a November 2014 video. [Reports](#) cited an unnamed [Kurdish source](#) confirming the participation of a Filipino ISIS member. In a May 2015 video produced by al-Hayat Media Center and published by ISIS supporters on Twitter, the same ISIS fighter is [shown](#) sitting in a military vehicle sporting an ISIS flag. In the 30-second video, he encourages his fellow Filipino jihadists to immigrate and join ISIS in Iraq and Syria. (Sources: [PhilStar](#), [Daily Mail](#), [IraqiNews](#))

In August 2016, a Filipina woman was arrested in Kuwait who was suspected of having ties to ISIS's affiliate in Libya. Kuwaiti security forces purportedly found email messages where she pledged allegiance to the terror group. The suspect also allegedly communicated with her husband in Libya via the Telegram encrypted messaging app. The unidentified woman, who moved to Kuwait in June to work as a house maid, reportedly admitted she planned to launch an attack. (Sources: [Al-Arabiya](#), [Associated Press](#), [ABS-CBN News](#))

In November 2018, Malaysian police said they arrested eight extremists in Putarajaya near Malaysia's capital and in Sabah, the northern most region of the country closest to the southern Philippines. Seven of the suspects were Philippine nationals, one was a Filipino ASG member who had been charged with recruiting children for use as "human shields" in battles with authorities. (Source: [Straits Times](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Since the 1970s, Islamists and Communist separatists have planned and executed numerous attacks throughout the Philippines, although the most deadly incidents have been concentrated on the southern island of Mindanao.

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According to the [Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents](#), the Philippines has suffered more than 593 attacks of varying degrees based on data collected between 1969 and 2010. From 2000 to 2007 alone, Islamic extremists carried out bomb attacks that killed over 400 Filipino civilians and injured over a thousand more. (Source: [Human Rights Watch](#))

Leftist extremists, primarily associated with the Communist People's Party (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA), have claimed an estimated 120,000 lives in more than 40 years of conflict with the government. The NPA reportedly had 3,800 guerillas active in the first half of 2016, according to a November 2016 estimate by the Associated Press. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Associated Press](#))

The "Bojinka" Plot

During the summer of 1994, 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) and Ramzi Yousef began planning the Manila Air or "Bojinka" plot, a nonsense name [KSM adopted](#) after hearing it while in battle in Afghanistan. Part of the Bojinka plot was to bomb 12 U.S. commercial passenger planes over the Pacific Ocean in the span of two days. The two terrorists also planned to assassinate then-U.S. President Bill Clinton during his November 1994 trip to Manila and to bomb U.S.-bound cargo carriers by smuggling jackets with explosives on board.

In their shared Manila apartment, KSM and Yousef experimented with liquid explosives and invented remote trigger devices. The plot was ultimately foiled when Philippine authorities discovered the bomb-making endeavor on January 6, 1995. Yousef accidentally caused a fire to the makeshift laboratory in the apartment, which brought police to the scene. Authorities uncovered a laptop with detailed plans of the Bojinka plot. According to Michael Garcia, the former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York and prosecutor in Yousef's case, KSM and Yousef were mere weeks from executing the plan.

Yousef was able to escape to Islamabad, Pakistan. He was later captured by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in February 1995 and extradited to the United States. He was indicted for the Bojinka plot, along with accomplices Abdul Hakim Murad and Wali Khan Amin Shah. They were charged in a New York federal court with seven counts of attempting to bomb 12 passenger planes. (Sources: [9/11 Commission Report](#), [New York Times](#), [CNN](#))

Abu Sayyaf Group Terror Activities

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is known for its brutality and targeting of civilians. ASG has also received global attention for its [kidnap-for-ransom](#) schemes targeting Westerners. On September 21, 2015, ASG militants abducted four hostages—Canadians Robert Hall and John Ridsdel, Norwegian Kjartan Sekkingstad, and Filipina Marites "Tess" Flor—from a resort on Samal Island in the south of the Philippines. ASG militants reportedly beheaded Ridsdel in April 2016 and Hall in June 2016 when their ransom demands were not met. The terror group freed Flor on June 24, 2016, as well as Sekkingstad on September 17, 2016, after a \$630,000 ransom from an unidentified source was paid. (Sources: [CNN](#), [New York Times](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [BBC News](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [New York Times](#))

In 2002, ASG's relationship with al-Qaeda brought additional attention to the Philippines as a battleground for the [Global War on Terror](#). The United States provided training and military assistance to the Philippine military and national police, taking out top ASG leaders such as [Khadaffy Janjalani](#). In the summer of 2014, ASG leaders pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS, drawing focus back to the group's presence in the southern Philippines and potential threat to the region. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#), [PhilStar](#))

Siege of Marawi

On May 23, 2017, Maute rebels took siege of Marawi, following gunfight with the Philippine army and national police. According to authorities, the Maute Group was believed to be harboring Hapilon, who was then-ISIS's leader in Southeast Asia and allegedly working to unite ISIS-supporters in the Philippines, including the Maute Group. Philippine intelligence reported that some of the ISIS-linked fighters in Marawi traveled from abroad, including from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East. The presence of foreign fighters raised concerns that the Philippines could become an ISIS hub. (Sources: [Standard](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Reuters](#), [Reuters](#), [ABS-CBN](#))

The Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict reported that ISIS funneled tens of thousands of dollars from Syria to militants in the Philippines in January 2017 in advance of the siege of Marawi. According to an October 2017 interview with the Philippine military chief, ISIS sent at least \$1.5 million to finance the siege, and fighters used the 2014 ISIS capture of Mosul, Iraq as a blueprint. (Sources: [Rappler](#), [New York Times](#), [Benar News](#), [New York Times](#), [Associated Press](#))

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On October 16, 2017, Philippine government forces launched an offensive to recapture the last areas of Marawi held by militants, killing leaders Hapilon and Omarkhayam Maute. The following day, Duterte declared the city liberated. On October 23, after 154 days of the siege, Defense Secretary Lorenzana declared that the military had ceased combat operations in the city. The five-month siege reportedly left more than 1,100 fighters and civilians dead, including more than 900 militants, and has displaced at least 400,000 residents. The Philippine Congress voted on December 13, 2017 to grant then-President Duterte's request to extend martial law on the southern island of Mindanao through the end of December 2018. On December 12, 2018, the government again extended martial law through the end of 2019. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [Rappler](#), [Voice of America News](#))

- **December 3, 2023:** Two suspected Daulah Islamiyah members detonate a bomb at a gym inside Mindanao State University in Marawi City, southern Philippines. The explosion, which targeted a Catholic mass service, kills at least four and wounds more than 40 others. The Philippine president blames "foreign terrorists." ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Reuters](#), [New York Times](#), [Reuters](#)
- **April 17, 2023:** A bomb explodes on a bus in Isulan in southern Philippines, injuring seven passengers. Among the wounded are minors and elderly individuals. Military officials blame the pro-ISIS network Daulah Islamiyah for the attack. Source: [Rappler](#)
- **August 10, 2022:** Rogue elements of MILF equipped with small arms carry out an attack in Cotabato, Mindanao, killing four civilians. The intended target is unknown. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
- **November 6, 2022:** An improvised explosive device (IED) detonates on a passenger bus in Tacurong City, killing a 56-year-old man and wounding 11 others, including a five-year-old. According to a military official, a female is suspected of planting the bomb, which bears the hallmarks of the Daulah Islamiyah group. Source: [Inquirer](#)
- **July 30, 2022:** 100 former ASG members pledge allegiance to the Philippine government. The former members previously surrendered at different times to law enforcement in Sulu and went on to enroll in the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP). As part of the program, former combatants receive government support, including financial benefits, educational assistance, and other interventions to aid in their reintegration into their respective communities. Sources: [PhilStar](#), [Manila Times](#)
- **June 17, 2022:** Two ASG commanders, wanted for the beheading of two kidnapped Canadian tourists, surrender to Philippine authorities. Almujeer Yadah and Bensito Quitino turn themselves in to military officials in Jolo, Sulu. The suspects face multiple murder and other criminal charges, including those stemming from the September 2015 abduction of Robert Hall and John Ridsdel, who were later beheaded when their ransoms were not paid. The militants are also accused of involvement in other ransom kidnappings and bomb attacks. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **June 6, 2022:** Philippine soldiers kill the alleged spokesperson of the so-called ISIS-East Asia. The military claims that the slain militant, Abdulfatah Omar Alimuden a.k.a. Abu Huzaifah, also managed financial transactions of Daulah Islamiyah to ISIS core. Source: [Philippine News Agency](#)
- **March 1, 2022:** Philippine ground troops and fighter jets target a Daulah Islamiyah base in a predawn raid, leaving two militants and one soldier dead. Two soldiers are also wounded in the assault, which targets a camp of approximately 50 members of the ISIS-linked group. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **February 15, 2022:** The Philippine National Police (PNP) uncover a plot by Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, to establish a foothold and incite violence against Israelis in the Philippines. From 2016 to 2018, Hamas operative Fares al-Shikli traveled to meet with a Filipino source in Malaysia. Al-Shikli reportedly discussed offering financial support to local extremist groups in exchange for killing Israeli nationals in the Philippines, holding rallies at embassies, and spreading propaganda. According to the PNP, al-Shikli is the alleged head of Hamas's Foreign Liaison section and the subject of an Interpol red notice. According to the Hamas-affiliated Shehab news agency, an anonymous Hamas source denies the PNP's claims, stating that Hamas is committed to its declared policy of restricting its conflict with Israel to the Palestinian territories. Sources: [PhilStar](#), [Al-Monitor](#)
- **January 15, 2022:** Soldiers kill Norodin Hassan, a suspected leader of an ISIS-inspired group and the alleged mastermind of the January 11, 2022, bus bombing. The military says it had identified Hassan and his group as the perpetrators of the attack aboard the passenger bus, prompting the manhunt. Three of Hassan's followers are also killed in the encounter with the Philippine Army. Source: [Rappler](#)
- **January 11, 2022:** A bomb explodes on a public bus traveling along a highway from Davao to Cotabato City in Mindanao, killing a child and wounding six other people. Source: [Al Jazeera](#)
- **December 2, 2021:** Soldiers kill Daulah Islamiyah leader Asim Karinda and four of his followers in an early dawn firefight in Mamasapano, Maguindanao. Another member is killed in another town in the province. Later that day, gunmen on motorbikes kill an off-duty policeman. Investigators suspect the killing is a retaliatory attack by Daulah Islamiyah. Sources: [Rappler](#), [PhilStar](#)
- **October 30, 2021:** Philippine forces kill Jorge Madlos, a leading figure in the country's long-running communist insurgency. The 72-year-old Madlos, nom de guerre Ka Oris, is killed alongside his medical aide in a remote village in the southern Philippines' mountainous region. Military officials accuse Madlos and his forces of being behind years of deadly assaults against security forces, attacks on extractive and agricultural operations, and extortion. Source: [Associated Press](#)

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- **October 29, 2021:** Government forces raid a Daulah Islamiyah hideout in the remote town of Talayan, killing its leader Salahuddin Hassan and his wife Jehana Minbida, who was suspected of serving as the finance officer of the group.
Source: [Associated Press](#), [Rappler](#)
- **October 15, 2021:** Authorities arrest a suspected ASG member, 30-year-old Adzrimar Sali Ammat, also known as Abu Omar. There are two outstanding warrants for his arrest, one for two counts of kidnap with homicide and another for kidnapping with ransom. Ammat is known for his involvement in the kidnap of four individuals from a resort in the southern Philippines in September 2015. Two of the hostages were released after a year in captivity, but two Canadian nationals were later beheaded. Sources: [Eurasia Review](#), [Philippines News Agency](#)
- **July 4, 2021:** A Philippine Air Force plane crashes in while trying to land at Jolo airport with 96 people on board bound for a counterterrorism mission against ASG.
The crash injures 49 passengers and 53 civilians on the ground. At least 50 people are killed, making it the military’s worst air disaster, according to Philippine officials. Sources: [New York Times](#), [Associated Press](#)
- **June 23, 2021:** Philippine security forces rescue a young girl from ASG in Patikul, Sulu.
The girl, aged between 10 and 13, is the daughter of Indonesian nationals suspected of carrying out the January 2019 cathedral bombing in Jolo, which left more than 20 dead and at least 100 injured. According to authorities, the minor was married off to an ASG member and had been indoctrinated into becoming a suicide bomber. Source: [Arab News](#)
- **June 5, 2021:** An alleged ASG bombmaker, Arroy Ittot a.k.a. Oroy, dies during a clash with the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Basilan. The suspected militant opens fire on officers as the authorities attempt to serve a warrant for his arrest. Ittot is believed to have worked with late ASG faction leader Furuji Indama and has been implicated in a bombing incident, according to the PNP. Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **May 29, 2021:** Philippine security forces capture nine suspected members of a local ISIS-linked militant group known as Daulah Islamiyah (DI).
Authorities launch a dawn raid on the town of Tuburan in the southern Lanao del Sur province and exchange firefight with the extremists. Days later on June 3, a senior member of another DI faction, Maguid Group, surrenders to the military in Sulita Kudara province. Sources: [Benar News](#), [Benar News](#)
- In the early morning of May 8, ISIS-linked BIFF members occupy the town market in Datu Paglas, Maguindanao, forcing families to flee their homes.
An initial report claims that 100 fighters are involved, but a local official later clarifies 20 militants stormed the area. Despite a short exchange in gunfire, there are no casualties or property damage. A Philippine military unit drives the BIFF militants from the municipality. On May 11, government forces intercept the group in nearby Buluan and kill five BIFF militants in an ensuing clash. Sources: [Rappler](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Inquirer](#)
- **May 8, 2021:** Philippine forces aid Malaysian authorities in arresting eight suspected ASG members in Sabah, on the Malaysian island of Borneo.
The militants are suspected of planning to use Sabah as a base to launch kidnappings and facilitate the travel of foreign fighters to the southern Philippines, according to a Philippine military official. However, a Malaysian police commissioner claims the detained were not engaged in kidnap-for-ransom, but were in hiding after they escaped a military operation in the southern Philippines. Among the arrested are two sub-leaders of the Sulu-based ASG, Sansibar Bensio and Mabarr Binda, who are suspected of involvement in past deadly clashes with the Philippine military and the kidnap of foreign citizens. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Rappler](#)
- **April 23, 2021:** Philippine troops clash with militants in Patikul, Sulu.
A military official later confirms the death of two ASG members, Muktihar Taha and Mujafal Sawadjaan, the eldest brother of ASG bombmaker Mudzrimar “Mundi” Sawadjaan. Mujafal Sawadjaan had been on the security forces’ ASG watchlist as of the end of 2020. Sources: [CNN Philippines](#), [Rappler](#)
- **April 17, 2021:** Philippine troops kill three suspected members of an ASG faction led by Mudzrimar “Mundi” Sawadjaan, near Patikul, Sulu. The military identifies two of the slain as an Egyptian national known only as Yusop and a suspected bombmaker named Abu Khattab Jundullah. Philippine Army Major General William Gonzales claims that Yusop’s death cuts off foreign financial support to ASG but does not provide additional details. Military officials claim the militants’ deaths are a setback for the group’s suicide bombing operations. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **April 12, 2021:** A roadside bomb injures one civilian and one soldier while a Philippine military unit conducts a mobile patrol in Basilan province.
The chief of the Western Mindanao Command blames ASG for planting the improvised explosive device. Sources: [Philippine News Agency](#), [Manila Times](#)
- Philippine troops rescue four Indonesian hostages held by ASG.
On March 18, after the militants’ boat capsizes near the province of Tawi-Tawi, the Philippine military successfully recaptures three hostages. However, the ASG fighters escape inland with the fourth captive, a 15-year-old Indonesian. After pursuing the fighters, on March 20, the Philippine engages in a gun battle and kills three ASG members, including commander Majan Sahidjuan, also known as Apo Mike, who had been involved in ransom kidnappings since 1990s. On March 21, government troops discover the remaining captive in the town where the gun battle took place, Languyan, Tawi-Tawi. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Reuters](#)
- **February 19, 2021:** Philippine forces raid several houses belonging to suspected militants in Jolo and detain nine women believed to be potential suicide bombers.
The military seizes bomb parts—including cords, suspected explosive powder and oil, and an iron pipe and nails—as well as a grenade, cellphones, backpacks, and a sketch of a suspected attack target. Most of the suspects are female relatives of slain ASG fighters, including three daughters of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Agence France-Presse](#)

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- **December 3, 2020:** An estimated 30 to 50 members of the ISIS-linked group BIFF attack and briefly occupy the town of Datu Piang in Maguindanao province.
An AFP company stationed nearby and the local police force repel the attack, forcing the militants to withdraw. There are no casualties, but the fighters burn a police vehicle. The incident sparked fears of an extremist occupation, like the siege of Marawi in 2017, during which ISIS-linked fighters held the city for five months. Sources: [Asia Times](#), [Associated Press](#)
- **November 25, 2020:** PNP officers kill three suspected ASG bombers on board a boat off the coast of Zamboanga City in Mindanao. The militants, Radi Nalul Tahirin, Hasan Alimin, and Abdilla Aspalin, are believed to be “on a bombing mission” when they are intercepted by Philippine authorities. Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **November 20, 2020:** AFP troops kill two ASG members during firefight with the extremist group in Sulu. The slain militants, identified as Hatib Munap Binda and Bensio Baraham, are believed to be ASG sub-leaders. Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **November 3, 2020:** Government troops kill seven alleged ASG members during clashes on the Sulu Sea, at the southwestern point of the Philippines.
Two of those killed are Madsmar Sawadjaan and Mannul Sawadjaan, brothers of ASG bombmaker Mundi Sawadjaan and nephews of local ISIS leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan. The military believes the group was engaged in kidnap-for-ransom activities under the leadership of the elder Sawadjaan and Radulan Sahiron. Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **October 10, 2020:** Philippine security forces arrest three female militants and seize a cache of improvised explosive devices during a pre-dawn raid on a house believed to be owned by an ASG leader on the island of Jolo.
One of the detained is identified as Indonesian national Rezky Fantasya Rullie, who is suspected of planning a suicide bomb attack. Rullie is the widow of an Indonesian fighter, who was killed in the Philippines in August, and is believed to be the daughter of the two perpetrators of the January 2019 cathedral bombing in Jolo. The other two women are married to ASG members. On October 14, Rullie, also known as Nana Isirani, becomes the first person to be tried under the Philippines’ new Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#), [Arab News](#)
- **September 30, 2020:** An Indonesian hostage is killed during firefight between ASG militants and Philippine security forces in Patikul, Sulu. The slain man, identified only as LB, was one of five Indonesian fisherman who were kidnapped by ASG in January 2020 and was being held for ransom. Source: [Jakarta Post](#)
- **August 24, 2020:** Two explosions kill 14 people and injure at least 75 soldiers, police officers, and civilians in Jolo, in the southern province of Sulu.
In the first attack, one bomb attached to a motorcycle explodes near two parked army trucks in front of a grocery store. An hour later, another suicide bomber, believed to be an Indonesian national, detonates her explosive as she approaches two soldiers standing guard at a Roman Catholic cathedral. The perpetrators of the two attacks are believed to be female and widows of ASG militants. The Philippine military immediately blames ASG, though ISIS issues a statement online claiming responsibility. Philippine military officials call it the worst extremist attack in the Philippines this year. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [Inquirer](#), [Agence France-Presse](#)
- **August 14, 2020:** ASG commander Anduljihad Susukan, who has been linked to the beheadings of several hostages, surrenders himself to Philippine National Police after being injured in battle.
Susukan has played a role in the kidnap and murder of two Canadians and one Malaysian national. Susukan is the highest-ranking ASG member to be taken into custody in 2020. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **July 30, 2020:** ISIS-linked fighters clash with Philippine government forces, killing two members of an army infantry force and injuring 13 others in the southern province of Maguindanao.
Troops leave 10 militants dead. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **June 26, 2020:** Philippine police and intelligence agents raid a suspected terrorist hideout in a gated community just outside of the capital Manila.
Officers kill four members of an alleged ISIS-linked sleeper cell, one of whom is identified as a woman in her 40s who served as a “group finance and logistics facilitator.” Authorities seize weapons, explosives components, money transfer records, and two black flags. Sources: [Straits Times](#), [ABC News](#)
- **June 22, 2020:** ASG members engage in firefight with Philippine Army troops in Sulu, killing one soldier and injuring nine others.
The commander of the AFP Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana notes that clashes between the military and the terrorist group persist. Source: [Rappler](#)
- **June 5, 2020:** Philippine Army forces carrying out combat operations in Sulu exchange gunfire with approximately 40 ASG members.
The firefight continues for less than an hour before the terrorist fighters flee, leaving four soldiers dead and 17 others wounded. Source: [Rappler](#)
- **April 17, 2020:** ASG members, led by both Radulan Sahiron and local ISIS leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, engage in an hour-long firefight with a Philippine military combat patrol pursuing Sawadjaan in Patikul, Sulu.
The clash leaves 11 Philippine soldiers killed and 14 paratroopers injured. Sources: [New York Times](#), [Rappler](#)
- **March 7, 2020:** Five members of the Philippine military and at least 14 Islamist insurgents are killed during clashes in the southern province of Maguindanao.
An unspecified number of militants are also injured, including members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- On March 6, a group of ASG militants surrender in Sulu, Philippines, and on March 9, another group who were also followers of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, a local leader of ISIS, surrender to the Philippine Army.
Overall, 10 militants surrender to army forces due to the lack of support from residents due to the repercussions of on-going counter-terror operations in the area. Source: [Philippine Star](#)
- **February 5, 2020 - March 20, 2020:** On February 5, ASG militants kidnap a Filipino doctor from his home in Jolo, Sulu.
On March 20, Philippine security forces rescue the doctor. Sources: [Benar News](#), [Benar News](#)

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- **January 18, 2020:** Five Indonesian fishermen are kidnapped in Lahad Datu, Philippines, by ASG militants. The men continue to be held hostage while ASG waits for a ransom payment from the Indonesian government, which has previously reportedly negotiated with and acquiesced to ransom demands from the militant group in the past. Source: [Daily Express](#)
- **January 17, 2020:** Regional police in Mindanao arrest Benhajar Salapuddin Alan, reportedly a prominent member in ASG, and charge the suspect for the murder of a civilian and the January 12 killing of the team leader of the provincial drug enforcement unit of Sulu Police Provincial office. Alan was allegedly one of the principal negotiators in Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping-for-ransom attacks. Source: [Inquirer](#)
- **November 22, 2019 - January 15, 2020:** On November 22, ASG militants kidnap three Indonesian fishermen in Sabah. The militants demand P30 million in exchange for the captives. On December 22, two of the three fishermen are rescued following a firefight between the captives and Philippine soldiers. The third fisherman is rescued by security forces on January 15, 2020 following an intensive combat operation against the militant group in Sulu. Sources: [Manila Times](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Benar News](#)
- **November 15, 2019:** ASG militants ambush Philippine government soldiers in Patikul, Sulu. The attack kills eight soldiers. Source: [Benar News](#)
- **October 31, 2019:** ASG militants open fire on Philippine soldiers in Patikul town, Sulu. The attack leaves seven soldiers wounded. Source: [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **October 16, 2019:** The Philippine army raids a terrorist hideout in Maluso, Basilan. During the raid, the army discover six improvised explosive devices. It is alleged the suspects in the hideout were planning a bomb attack on a major road in Basilan. Source: [Rappler](#)
- **October 10, 2019 - November 24, 2019:** On October 10, ASG gunmen kidnap a couple at a resort in Tukuran, Zamboanga del Sur Province. On November 24, Philippine Special Forces rescue the couple from Jolo, after days of clashes with the militants. Sources: [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#)
- **September 27, 2019:** Philippine government forces arrest Nasirin Balajadji in Naga, Zamboanga Sibugay. Balajadji was a high-ranking member of ASG and orchestrated the kidnapping of high-profile journalist Baker Atyani in 2012. Source: [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **September 22, 2019:** Three members of ASG, including local sub-leader Khadaffy Kalitut, surrender to Philippine authorities in Basilan. According to Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Western Mindanao Command, the suspects sought to return to the "mainstream of society." Source: [ABS-CBN News](#)
- Security forces capture two ASG militants who kidnapped a government teacher in Sulu province in September of 2019. The hostage is released in October when her sister reportedly paid P283,000 in ransom. Source: [Manila Times](#)
- **August 13, 2019:** Suspected ASG members open fire on a Philippine military motorcade during a festival celebrating Eid al-Adha in Sulu province. Two soldiers and a two-year-old girl are killed, an 11-year-old girl is wounded. Source: [Al Jazeera](#)
- **June 28, 2019:** Two suicide attackers bomb a temporary camp of the Philippine army's counterterrorism unit in Jolo, Sulu and kill five soldiers. ISIS claims responsibility, though a police official maintains the attack was planned locally and instead links it to ASG. DNA confirms the identity of one of the attackers as Sulu-born 23-year-old Norman Lasuca, making him the first known Filipino militant to carry out a suicide bombing. Sources: [Straits Times](#), [Associated Press](#)
- **May 26, 2019:** ISIS-linked militants attack Philippine soldiers on the southern island of Jolo. A gun battle ensues, leaving two children dead and several civilians wounded. Source: [New York Times](#)
- **February 2, 2019:** ISIS-linked ASG militants kill five members of the Philippine military during a gun battle on the island of Jolo. The soldiers were looking for those believed to be responsible for the January 27, 2019 cathedral attack. Source: [New York Times](#)
- **January 27, 2019:** Two bombs explode during Sunday mass at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu in the southern Philippines. The first explosion occurred inside the cathedral, which was followed by a second blast just outside as soldiers rushed to the scene. At least 23 people are killed and more than 100 are wounded. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack, which is later revealed to be carried out by an Indonesian couple. The couple was deported from Turkey in January 2017 while attempting to travel to join the terror group. Sources: [CBS News](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [BBC News](#), [Guardian](#), [New York Times](#)
- **December 31, 2018:** An IED explodes outside of the South Seas Mall in Cotabato City, on the island of Mindanao, killing at least two people and wounding 34 others. Authorities defuse a second smaller IED they find in the mall. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but the military believes the explosives are from an ISIS-linked group. Sources: [CNN](#), [Voice of America](#), [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **August 28, 2018:** An IED explodes in the midst of a harvest festival in the southern town of Isulan, killing three people and wounding at least 36 others. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Local police and army officials believe the ISIS-linked BIFF is responsible. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#), [PhilStar](#)
- **July 31, 2018:** A bomb explodes in a van at a security checkpoint on the southern island of Basilan, killing 10 and wounding eight. The driver of the van was reportedly on his way to carry out a suicide bombing at a large public gathering when his van broke down at the checkpoint. The suspected bomber asked local villagers to help push his van and his explosives went off shortly after. ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency but provides no specific evidence. ISIS claims the bomber was a Moroccan national but it also cites an inflated casualty figure for the attack. Authorities suspect the ISIS-linked Abu Sayyaf Group of responsibility. Witness accounts and forensic data confirm the bomber was a foreign national, according to police. The Philippine government condemns the attack as a "war crime." Sources:

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[Reuters](#), [Associated Press](#), [ABC News](#), [Wall Street Journal](#)

- **January 31, 2018:** More than 50 members of the ISIS-linked group responsible for the siege in the city of Marawi are charged with, among other crimes, kidnapping and murder.
The charges are related to crimes allegedly committed a year before when the Maute Group gained prominence and attracted financial support from ISIS. One accused is a Filipino doctor sought by U.S. law enforcement for funding a failed terror plot to bomb New York City in 2016.
Source: [Wall Street Journal](#)
- **October 17, 2017:** After confirming the deaths of ISIS-linked leaders Hapilon and Omarkhayam Maute, Duterte announces that Marawi has been liberated from terrorists and that martial law will stay in place in order to combat remaining extremists.
Source: [New York Times](#)
- **August 21, 2017:** ASG militants attack a village in Basilan as locals gather for a festival, killing at least nine civilians and wounding dozens more.
The attackers are believed to be part of an ASG faction led by Furuji Indama. [Rappler](#)
- **May 23, 2017:** Philippine soldiers launch an operation in Marawi in search of Isnilon Hapilon.
Government troops reportedly act following reports that Hapilon was in the Marawi to potentially join forces with ISIS-linked Philippine rebels, the Maute Group. Soldiers clash with Maute militants as they take control over large parts of the city. According to local media reports, Maute militants burn the Marawi jail and Dansalan College and attack the Amai Pakpak Hospital. Duterte declares martial law on the entire island of Mindanao. Sources: [PhilStar](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Rappler](#)
- **March 25, 2017:** Philippine authorities, with the help of U.S. and Kuwaiti officials, arrest a Kuwaiti couple with suspected links to ISIS. Philippine authorities believe the couple had been plotting an attack within Kuwait and possibly the Philippines. Source: [Associated Press](#)
- **February 27, 2017:** German authorities confirm ASG militants beheaded German hostage Jürgen Kantner after the deadline for ransom payment passed. Kantner was kidnapped from his yacht in November 2016.
Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#), [Reuters](#)
- **January 4, 2017:** More than 150 inmates escape from the North Cotabato District Jail on Mindanao, after approximately 100 gunmen storm the jail and engage in a shoot-out with guards.
According to authorities, the attackers are linked to the BIFF and MILF. Sources: [BBC News](#), [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **November 28, 2016:** Philippine police discover and safely detonate a homemade bomb near the U.S. Embassy in Manila.
According to the national police chief, the bomb has components similar to the improvised explosive device used in the September 2, 2016 attack in Davao City. Sources: [Associated Press](#), [NBC News](#)
- **November 7, 2016:** Philippine soldiers find the body of a German woman on a yacht, in an attack believed to have been carried out by ASG rebels.
Source: [Reuters](#)
- **September 17, 2016:** ASG releases Norwegian hostage Kjartan Sekkingstad after receiving a \$630,000 ransom payment, according to the national police.
MNLF members reportedly facilitated his release. Source: [New York Times](#)
- **September 2, 2016:** An improvised explosive device (IED) explodes in a crowded market in Davao City, killing 14 people and injuring at least 71 others.
President Duterte calls the blast an act of terrorism. ASG claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [CNN](#), [New York Times](#), [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **August 30, 2016:** ASG militants kill 15 Philippine soldiers in a series of clashes on the southern island of Jolo.
The Philippine government announces that it plans to send thousands more soldiers to the island, an ASG stronghold. Source: [New York Times](#)
- **August 25, 2016:** ASG reportedly beheads 18-year-old Filipino hostage Patrick Almodovar.
Sources: [International Business Times](#), [Inquirer](#)
- **June 24, 2016:** ASG releases Marites Flor, a Filipina hostage who was kidnapped along with three westerners at a holiday resort in September 2015.
Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **June 13, 2016:** Philippine police report that a severed head was found in a plastic bag near a Roman Catholic Church in the southern Philippines.
DNA tests later confirm the head is that of Robert Hall, the second Canadian held hostage by ASG. Sources: [New York Times](#), [CNN Philippines](#)
- **May 1, 2016:** ASG releases ten Indonesian captives following 35 days of captivity.
The victims are from an Indonesian tugboat crew who were captured in March. Reports suggest that the hostages were released because of intensifying military operations against ASG. The lead Indonesian negotiator claims that the Indonesian government did not pay ransom for the hostages' release. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#), [Jakarta Post](#)
- **April 25, 2016:** The Philippines-based Abu Sayyaf Group beheads Canadian citizen John Ridsdel, reportedly hours after the deadline for his ransom expires.
Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau calls the incident an "act of cold blooded murder." Ridsdel had been held by the Abu Sayyaf Group since September 2015, when ASG kidnapped three westerners and one Filipino woman. The terror group demanded a \$6.5 million ransom for each of the hostages. Sources: [Toronto Star](#), [CBC News](#), [BBC News](#)
- **April 9, 2016:** ASG members ambush a unit of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).
The attack kills 18 soldiers, at least four of whom are beheaded, and injures more than 50 others. Four of the soldiers killed in action are former MNLF fighters who were integrated into the AFP. The Philippine military, however, succeeds in killing Ubaida Hapilon, son of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon, and reported bomb-making expert, Moroccan national Mohammad Khattab. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Philippine Government](#),

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- A band of ASG members, using the group's alternative name Harakatul Islamiyah (Islamic Movement), pledges allegiance to ISIS in a video posted online.
They also name the leader of their unit, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon, as the leader of ASG. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Manila Times](#)
- **December 24, 2015 - December 26, 2015:** Members of BIFF carry out a series of attacks over three days, killing eight. The attacks are reportedly in response to the military's hunt for ISIS-linked terrorists in the region. Source: [PhilStar](#)
- **November 18, 2015:** ASG beheads Malaysian hostage Bernard Then Ted Fen, who was kidnapped in May 2015. He is the first Malaysian to be killed by the group. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak condemns the killing, calling on Philippine authorities to take action against the perpetrators of the barbaric act. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [PhilStar](#)
- **September 21, 2015:** Eleven ASG gunmen storm the Holiday Ocean View Samal Resort in southeast of Mindanao, abducting a Norwegian resort manager, two Canadians, and one Filipina woman.
Source: [CNN Philippines](#)
- **September 18, 2015:** A bomb explodes under a bus in Zamboanga City in southern Philippines, killing an 11-year-old girl and injuring at least 32 others.
Local police blame ASG based on video evidence and extortion letters that were sent to the bus terminal management. Sources: [International Business Times](#), [ABS-CBN News](#)
- **August 11, 2015:** Members of the Philippine military find the beheaded body of a man identified as the barangay captain, Rodolfo Buligao. Buligao was kidnapped by ASG in May 2015.
Source: [Rappler](#)
- **February 5, 2015:** DNA tests indicate that Philippine police killed Jemaah Islamiyah's notorious bomb-maker, Marwan, in a January 25, 2015 raid.
However, the Philippine government is still on the hunt for 63 of Marwan's associates, all believed to be trained by another Jemaah Islamiyah bomb expert and senior figure, Dulmatin. Sources: [CNN](#), [Inquirer](#)
- **January 25, 2015:** Approximately 400 officers in the Philippines' counterterrorism police force conduct a raid in the village of Mamasapano in southern Philippines.
The police force's elite Special Action Force (SAF) receive intelligence that Zulkifli Abdhir a.k.a. Marwan, a Malaysian Jemaah Islamiyah member and wanted fugitive, is hiding in the village. At least 44 officers of the elite the SAF die in gun battle with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a MILF splinter group, making it the deadliest operation for the police force in over ten years. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#), [Christian Science Monitor](#)
- **May 21, 2014:** NPA Communist extremists attempt to take over a town hall in Cotabato, Mindanao.
Philippine police kill three of the 100 rebels and the remaining NPA assailants are forced to retreat. Source: [U.S. State Department](#)
- **September 3, 2013 - September 28, 2013:** A group of 200 MNLF extremists launch a deadly attack on Zamboanga city on the southern island of the Philippines.
The MNLF rebels storm the southern Philippines coast of Zamboanga, attempting to capture City Hall. The Philippine Armed Forces, many of them U.S.-trained commandos, encircle the extremist-held town. MNLF takes 200 hostages in the first four-days and uses human shields in fire-fight with the military. The standoff lasts for nearly three weeks, coming to an end on September 28. More than 150 people die in the fighting, with two-thirds of them being MNLF members. More than 10,000 homes are burned in the battle between the group and government military.
Source: [The Atlantic](#), [VOA News](#)
- **May 27, 2013:** NPA fighters detonate an explosive device on a roadside in the northern Philippine province of Cagayan.
Seven policemen, part of the elite SAF, are killed and seven others are wounded. The attack comes days after a clash between Filipino Marines and ASG militants in the southern Philippine province of Sulu. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [International Business Times](#)
- **October 3, 2011:** NPA conducts attacks against three large-scale mining corporations in Surigao del Norte, a province on the Mindanao island. The three companies—Taganito Mining Corp, 4K Mining, and THPAL Mining—are targeted because they refused to give into the group's extortion demands. No security personnel are injured. However, the group destroys machinery, a guest house and causes major damage to mining operations. Source: [GMA News](#)
- **February 27, 2004:** ASG militants set off a blast on the *Superferry 14*, a passenger ferry bound from the Philippines capital of Manila to the city of Bacolod in central Philippines.
The explosion and resulting fire spread through the ferry, killing 116 people, including 15 children. Tragically, 12 families lose multiple members and in one case, three generations perish. The Philippine government believe that senior ASG leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Abu Solaiman are the masterminds behind the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#), [Human Rights Watch](#)
- **April 2, 2003:** A food stand along the Sasa Wharf on the island of Mindanao is bombed, killing 17 and injuring 56.
Several purported MILF and ASG members are arrested in connection with the attacks. Philippine officials allege the attacks were carried out with the help of Jemaah Islamiyah, given the Indonesian nationality of a few suspects. Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [PhilStar](#)
- **March 4, 2003:** Amidst a surge in sectarian violence, a bomb detonates at Davao International Airport in the south.
Twenty-two people die in the attack, including an American missionary, and 170 others are wounded. An ASG member claims responsibility days after the attack, though government authorities initially blamed MILF. Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#), [New York Times](#)
- **January 15, 2002:** Philippine authorities arrest Jemaah Islamiyah's expert bomb-maker, Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi.
Al-Ghozi is responsible for training Jemaah Islamiyah members from Singapore and Malaysia and has ties to extremist groups in the Philippines, such as MILF. Al-Ghozi is also responsible for the Rizal Day bombings in December 2000. Source: [BBC News](#)
- **August 2, 2001:** ASG members attack a predominately Christian village in Basilan Province, Southern Philippines.

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The Islamic insurgents kidnap 32 villagers and later decapitate 11 of them. Source: [Human Rights Watch](#)

- **December 30, 2000:** Jemaah Islamiyah sets off five simultaneous blasts in the Metro Manila area in Philippines' capital city, killing 22. It occurs during Rizal Day, a national holiday commemorating the martyrdom of the nation's hero, José Rizal. According to Philippines police investigation, Jemaah Islamiyah member Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi was responsible for the bombing. He later confesses that the bombing assignment in the Philippines was funded by Jemaah Islamiyah. Sources: [GMA Network](#), [Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs](#)
- **April 22, 1989:** Members of the NPA shower gunfire on a vehicle carrying U.S. Colonel James N. Rowe, on its way to Quezon City, a Manila suburb. Colonel Rowe, the chief of ground forces of the Joint United States Military Assistance Group, is struck in the head and dies instantly, his Filipino driver is injured. The Communist rebels claim that they targeted the U.S. Army officer for his direct involvement in the Philippine government's counterinsurgency program. Source: [New York Times](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

On February 19, 2007, the Congress of the Philippines passed the [Republic Act No. 9372](#), also known as the “Act to Secure the State and Protect Our People from Terrorism,” or the “Human Security Act of 2007” for short. This is the main piece of counter-extremism legislation in the Philippines. The Act criminalizes and defines terrorism and other terms applicable under the law, such as accomplice or accessory. The Act also includes guidelines for surveillance and banking regulations to prevent terror funding. The Act also created the Anti-Terrorism Council the lead agency in implementing the Act. As of July 2018, both houses of the Philippine Congress are deliberating amendments to current legislation, including changing the title of “Human Security Act of 2007” to “Preventing Terrorism Act of 2018” and expanding the definition of terrorism and punishable acts. The current proposal in the House of Representatives also seeks to change the fixed penalty of “forty years of imprisonment” for such punishable acts to “life imprisonment to death.” Some human rights groups warn that proposed changes would remove important safeguards against abuse by law enforcement. (Sources: [Philippine Congress](#), [Inquirer](#), [U.N. Counter-Terrorism Committee](#), [Republic of the Philippines](#), [The Diplomat](#))

Then-Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo also created the National Counter-Terrorism Action Group (NACTAG), under the supervision of the Anti-Terrorism Council, to assist in enforcing the Council's regulations. Whereas the Anti-Terrorist Council oversees general implementation of the law, NACTAG is responsible for the actual investigation an evidence-finding for prosecutors in the event of a terrorist attack. (Sources: [Philippine Congress](#), [Inquirer](#), [U.N. Counter-Terrorism Committee](#))

In 2013, the Philippines passes the [Republic Act No. 10365](#) to amend the Anti-Money Laundering (AML) Act of 2001. It expanded the list of crimes under the Philippines AML regime to include financing terrorism. Financing terrorism is also a stand-alone crime under [Republic Act No. 10168](#), known as “The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012.” (Source: [U.S. State Department](#), [Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines](#))

On July 3, 2020, then-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte signed [Republic Act no. 11479](#), or the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, into law. The Act was approved by the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives in February and June 2020, respectively. The law expands government powers under the Human Security Act of 2007. The new legislation will create an antiterrorism council, to be appointed by the president, that will have the authority to designate individuals and organizations as terrorists. Any activity intended to cause death, injury, or property damage or use of weapons of mass destruction to cause fear or intimidate the government can be labeled as terrorism. Those labeled as terrorists or suspected of having ties to a designated group could be arrested without a warrant and held without charges for up to 24 days, which critics claim violates a three-day limit set by the Philippine constitution. Critics say that the bill's loose definition of terrorism gives authorities broad powers to criminalize dissent and opposition, posing a threat to freedom of expression and other fundamental rights. For example, those convicted of “incitement,” which is not specifically defined, could face up to 12 years in prison. (Sources: [Office of the Presidential Spokesperson](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Committee to Protect Journalists](#))

On December 9, 2021, the Supreme Court of the Philippines upheld most provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020. The high court struck down only two provisions of the law—one that gave authorities the ability to label protests as terrorism and another that allowed the Anti-Terrorism Council to designate an individual as a terrorist if asked to do so by another entity, such as another country or an international organization. The rest of the law remains in place. A total of 37 petitions had been filed against the law since it was passed in 2020. Some of the petitioners plan to challenge the Supreme Court's ruling and rights groups said they would refile bills that seek to amend the laws in the next Congress. (Sources: [Voice of America](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Associated Press](#))

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Security Agencies

According to the U.S. Department of State, Duterte had an Anti-Terrorism Council to provide guidance to counterterrorism agencies, but coordination between government agencies remains ineffective. Historically, the major counterterrorism security apparatus is the military, known as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). However, on January 1, 2011, the Philippines government created the 2011-2016 [Internal Peace and Security Plan](#). The AFP has begun to transition internal security functions, i.e. domestic terrorism, to the Philippine National Police (PNP) in order to increase the role and capability of the police in maintaining internal security enabling the AFP to shift its focus to maritime security and territorial defense. According to the U.S. State Department, Duterte's focus of resources on anti-narcotics and counterterrorism operations stymied progress. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

Within the PNP, there is an elite force called the Special Action Force (SAF). The SAF is the tactical support unit of the PNP that deals with more high-level issues such as hostage crises, commando-type unconventional warfare. The group is known primarily for its counterterrorism operations and most recently for the botched January 2015 raid during which 43 elite officers were killed. (Source: [Philippine National Police](#), [Wall Street Journal](#))

The AFP, however, has been able to degrade ASG's forces with the assistance of the U.S. Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P). Recent [estimates](#) show that that ASG has approximately 300 fighters, down from its peak of 1,250 in 2000. The JSOTF-P mission provided counterterrorism training to the AFP until 2014. The United States officially ended JSOTF-P activities in June 2015, but has retained some personnel in the Philippines to [provide](#) "operational advice and assistance to higher levels of command" within the AFP. (Sources: [Soufan Group](#), [U.S. State Department](#), [United States Naval Institute](#), [Soufan Group](#))

Counter Extremism Programs

In July 2019, the Philippines officially adopted the National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP PCVE), to be implemented by the Department of the Interior and Local Government. According to the Philippine national security adviser, the move was in response to the May 2017 siege of Marawi by pro-ISIS fighters. NAP PCVE will work with religious leaders to mainstream their teachings and help deradicalize youth who are ripe targets for recruitment. (Source: [Japan Times](#))

The Philippines also has a counter-radicalization program called Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA), or Resilient Communities in Conflict Affected Communities. PAMANA is the government's program on conflict resolution and development in conflict-affected areas throughout the Philippines. According to the organization's most recent [status report](#), PAMANA has launched programs that provide social protection for former combatants and their next-of-kin as well as support to indigenous people and other marginalized groups. For example, PAMANA sponsored a Health Insurance Program to cover former combatants from rebel groups that are included in peace agreements with the Philippine government. The Health Insurance Program was able to enroll 3,740 former militants in early 2015. For indigenous peoples, PAMANA has launched initiatives like the issuance of Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) to support indigenous land claims, and quick response programs during emergencies. These programs are intended to foster sustainable peace and encourage capacity-building. (Sources: [U.S. State Department](#), [PAMANA](#))

The Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) was established in 2018 initially as an effort to rehabilitate and reintegrate former members of communist militias. The program was expanded in March 2020 to include other rebels. As part of the program, former combatants receive government support, including financial benefits, educational assistance, and other interventions to aid in their reintegration into their respective communities. In July 2022, the Philippine government announced that 100 former ASG members in a ceremony pledged allegiance to the government. According to an official, it was not only the biggest group, but the first time a large group of ASG fighters were reintegrated. The former terrorists previously surrendered at different times to law enforcement in Sulu and went on to enroll in E-CLIP. (Sources: [Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines](#), [PhilStar](#), [Manila Times](#))

The New Bilibid Prison, a maximum security prison under review with the Philippine Bureau of Corrections (BuCor), hosts a number of inmates from ASG and BIFF. The prison is at 165 percent capacity, a record high, and authorities are concerned that extremist inmates may radicalize others. The country's Bureau of Jail Management and Penology tries to combat this threat by providing counter-radicalization programs in facilities where ASG members and other terror suspects are housed pending trial. (Sources: [Inquirer](#), [U.S. State Department](#))

Since at least January 2020, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have readjusted their timeline for dismantling ASG several times. On January 23, then-chief of Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana delayed the military campaign's deadline to eradicate ASG from December 31, 2019 to March 31, 2020. In September 2020, the then head of the AFP, Lieutenant General Gilbert

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Gapay, claimed that the military would be able to defeat ASG and other terrorist factions by 2022. Then in February 2021, then-head of the AFP, Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana, vowed to destroy communist terrorists and local terrorist groups by his retirement on July 31, 2021. A February 2022 U.N. Security Council report noted that the Philippines, along with Indonesia, “reported significant gains in countering threats from ISIL and Al-Qaida affiliates in the South-East Asia region, leading to an overall decline in terrorist activity and some optimism that the operational capability of the groups may be significantly degraded.” (Sources: [Philippine News Agency](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Manila Bulletin](#), [CNN Philippines](#), [Philippine News Agency](#), [Associated Press](#), [United Nations Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team](#))

International Counter-Extremism

The Philippines condemned the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States, offering its ports and airports for use by U.S. naval vessels and military aircraft. Then-Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and then-U.S. President George W. Bush agreed to dispatch of U.S. military personnel to train the Philippine military in counterterrorism efforts against ASG. Under the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) of 1999, the two countries had agreed that the United States would provide training and other assistance to the Philippine Armed Forces. (Sources: [Congressional Research Service](#), [NBC News](#))

In September 2016, then-Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte requested the complete removal of American troops from Mindanao and stated that the Philippines will review its policy of allowing American troops to combat terrorism in the country. Then-U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Philip Goldberg stated that the United States would like to remain involved in the Philippines’ campaign to combat Islamic militancy, expressing concern about any “new intrusion of ISIS or any other group that wants to take advantage of open space in the south of the Philippines.” In February 2020, Duterte gave formal notice to the United States of his intention to terminate the VFA, indicating a preference for relations with China and Russia. However, in July 2021, Duterte retracted the termination notice and moved instead to fully restore the VFA. (Sources: [Bloomberg](#), [ABS-CBN News](#), [Voice of America](#), [U.S. Department of Defense](#))

On July 16, 2019, the Philippines and the United States concluded bilateral talks on counterterrorism, which resulted in an agreement to increase efforts to counter violent extremism. As of April 2019, approximately 250 U.S. troops are stationed in the Philippines as part of a counterterrorism campaign that has existed at some level since 2002, but was officially restarted by the Pentagon in 2017 as Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines. Additionally, an American Special Operations civil affairs team is working with three nonprofits and a Philippine Army platoon on stabilization and infrastructure projects in areas ravaged by Islamist militants. The U.S. State Department also provides assistance to help community officials address issues linked to extremism among Muslims. (Sources: [Straits Times](#), [Japan Times](#), [New York Times](#))

An August 2020 assessment of Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines found that, despite U.S.-funded counterterrorism support, the Philippines’ efforts to eradicate ISIS have not achieved sustained success. U.S. Defense Department Acting Inspector General Sean O’Donnell stated that since reporting began on the operation in 2018, “we have seen little progress in improving the economic, social, and political conditions” in the southern Philippines. Regardless, the United States has continued to provide resources to the Philippines for its fight against terrorism, including a \$27 million counterterrorism aid package in 2018 and \$3.3 million in materiel in 2023. (Sources: [Voice of America](#), [U.S. Department of Defense](#), [PhilStar](#))

Anti-ISIS Coalition

Speaking before the 26th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi, Malaysia, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario expressed the government’s fear that Philippine security is under [real threat from ISIS](#). In the same speech, del Rosario pledged that the Philippines would:

contribute in the fight against extremism, terrorism and crimes against humanity by engaging or cooperating with other countries in the areas of information sharing, joint investigations, educational campaigns, humanitarian assistance to victims, restricting flow of funds intended to finance terrorism, supporting resolutions aimed at curbing terrorism and enhancing local legislation to address terrorism. (Source: [Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines](#))

The [Philippines cosponsored](#) United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters and [supported](#) the [ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Statement](#) on the Violence and Brutality Committed by Extremist Organizations in Iraq and Syria. As of December 2016, the Philippines has implemented the U.N. Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and al-Qa’ida sanctions regime and Taliban (1988) sanctions. (Sources: [PhilStar](#), [CNN](#),

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[ASEAN, U.S. Department of State](#))

Maritime Cooperation

On May 5, 2016, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia [agreed](#) to coordinate policing of Southeast Asia’s shipping lanes following an increase in kidnappings by Islamic extremists. Foreign ministers and military chiefs from each country met days after the May 1 release of [10 Indonesian](#) crewmen and a separate incident in which a Canadian hostage [John Ridsdel](#) was beheaded by ASG militants.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is working to enhance the country’s maritime security given recent attacks at sea by Islamic militants in southern Philippines. There have been several high-profile kidnappings of Western and local nationals from tourist locales and shipping and fishing boats. The attacks were perpetrated mainly by ASG terrorists. Philippine, Indonesian, and Malaysian militaries have stated that they will apply lessons learned from patrolling other shipping lanes, like the Malacca Strait, to prevent further armed robbery and kidnapping at sea. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

In January 2018, Duterte and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi agreed that the two countries would increase bilateral cooperation on maritime security and anti-terrorism operations. The agreement included strengthening trade between the Philippines and Indonesia and launching an education program to spread Islamic values in Southeast Asian nations and to counter extremism. (Source: [PhilStar](#))

From February 24, 2020 to March 24, 2020, INTERPOL led an operation called “Maharlika III” in cooperation with the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia. INTERPOL worked with the four countries to deploy law enforcement to strategic locations along known terrorist travel routes in Southeast Asia. According to media reports, national authorities worked with INTERPOL to launch simultaneous and coordinated enforcement actions—including sea patrols, passenger and vehicle checks, and secondary identity inspections—at ports and transit locations around the Celebes and Sulu Seas. Operation Maharlika III led to the arrest of more than 180 individuals on various charges, including one suspected ASG member. (Source: [Eurasia Review](#))

Diplomatic and Financial Endeavors

As a member of ASEAN, the Philippines adopted the [Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates](#) (GMM) on April 27, 2015. The Declaration promotes moderation as an ASEAN value and enhances cooperation within ASEAN-led bodies to counter extremism, among other mandates. (Source: [ASEAN](#))

In February 2015, key Filipino counterterrorism officials received advanced training on combatting terrorism financing from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC)’s Secretariat. (Source: [UNODC](#))

The Philippines is also a member of the Asia Pacific Group (APG) on Money Laundering, which is modeled after the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body promoting policies to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The Philippines has sought to improve its anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) regime. However, in June 2021, the FATF placed the Philippines on its list of “jurisdictions under increased monitoring,” also known as the “grey list.” Subsequently, the Philippines made a high-level commitment to work with the FATF and APG to address strategic deficiencies and strengthen the effectiveness of its AML/CFT regime. As of October 27, 2023, the Philippines remains on the “grey list.” (Sources: [Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering](#), [Financial Action Task Force](#), [Financial Action Task Force](#))

Public Opinion

In November 2018, the Merdeka Center, a Malaysia-based opinion research firm, released poll results on Muslim attitudes toward extremism in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Merdeka surveyed 5,000 Filipinos and found that they had the “highest tendency to dehumanize persons of other faiths,” compared to the other countries surveyed. More than half of the Filipinos polled also said they would justify attacks against the military, police, and civilians and agreed that waging war was the only way to conduct jihad. Fewer than two percent of Indonesians, Malaysians, and Thais said they would use violence or join a violent organization to defend their faith, whereas six percent of respondents in the Philippines said they would. (Source: [Straits Times](#))

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One major polling body in the Philippines, [Social Weather Stations](#) (SWS), has conducted surveys that measure public satisfaction with the government and public opinions on issues of national concern. In August 2018, SWS released a study on violent extremism, which surveyed residents of the Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur provinces, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the southern Philippines. When asked about suicide bombings, 85 percent of Maguindanao residents and 67 percent of Lanao del Sur residents responded that they were rarely/never justified. However, only 50 percent of Marawi City respondents and 36 percent of respondents in IDP camps believed that the act was rarely/never justified. In the fourth quarter of 2019, SWS conducted a survey that measured Filipinos' satisfaction with the government, including its performance on fighting terrorism. Those surveyed gave the government a rating of "very good." (Sources: [Social Weather Stations \(August 2018\)](#), [Social Weather Stations \(March 2020\)](#))

In August 2017, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey on top national security threats in the country. Approximately 70 percent of respondents in the Philippines believe that ISIS is a major threat to the country, making it the top threat concern compared to other issues such as climate change. (Source: [Pew Research Center](#))