



Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Abu Sayyaf Group

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aka al Harakat al Islamiyya (the Islamic Movement)

Description: The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1997. The ASG split from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the early 1990s and is one of the most violent terrorist groups in the Philippines. The group claims to promote an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

Activities: The ASG has committed kidnappings-for-ransom, bombings, ambushes of security personnel, public beheadings, assassinations, and extortion. In April 2000, an ASG faction kidnapped 21 people, including 10 Western tourists, from a resort in Malaysia. In May 2001, the group kidnapped three U.S. citizens and 17 Philippine citizens from a tourist resort in Palawan, Philippines; several hostages were murdered, including U.S. citizen Guillermo Sobero. A hostage rescue operation in June 2002 freed U.S. hostage Gracia Burnham; her husband, U.S. national Martin Burnham was killed during the operation. In February 2004, the ASG bombed SuperFerry 14 in Manila Bay, killing 116 people, and in July of the same year, ASG militants killed 21 people, including six children, celebrating the end of Ramadan.

In a July 2014 video, senior ASG leader and U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation most-wanted terrorist Isnilon Hapilon swore allegiance to ISIS and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Hapilon was considered the leader of all ISIS-affiliated groups in the Philippines.

Throughout 2015, the ASG was responsible for multiple attacks, kidnappings, and the killing of hostages. In September 2016, the ASG abducted two Canadians, a Norwegian, and a Philippine woman from a resort on Samal Island. The ASG set ransom at US \$60 million. The ASG beheaded the two Canadian citizens later that year, and in early 2017, the ASG beheaded German citizen Jürgen Kantner when ransom deadlines were not met. The group continued its kidnapping-for-ransom operations in 2017, after collecting approximately US \$7.3 million during the first six months of 2016. In August 2017, ASG members killed nine people and injured others in an attack on Basilan Island.

On May 23, 2017, Philippine forces launched an operation attempting to capture Hapilon in the city of Marawi. ASG fighters opened fire on security forces and called on support from the pro-ISIS Maute Group. Together, the ASG and Maute Group militants laid siege over Marawi and clashed with government forces until October, resulting in the deaths of over 150 security forces, more than 800 militants, and 47 civilians. Over 400,000 residents of Marawi were displaced due to the fighting. Hapilon was killed by government forces in the last days of his group's attempted siege of Marawi.

Strength: The ASG is estimated to have 400 members.

Location/Area of Operation: The group is located mainly in the Philippine provinces of the Sulu Archipelago – namely Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, the Zamboanga Peninsula, and Mindanao – but has also conducted cross-border operations into eastern Malaysia.

Funding and External Aid: The ASG is funded primarily through kidnapping-for-ransom operations and extortion. It may receive funding from external sources, including remittances from overseas Philippine workers and Middle East-based sympathizers. In the past, the ASG has also received training and other assistance from regional terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiya.

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