



Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Philippines

Publisher [United States Department of State](#)

Publication Date 19 September 2018

Cite as United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Philippines*, 19 September 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f88a.html> [accessed 6 February 2019]

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Overview: The Philippines improved its counterterrorism capabilities in the face of an evolving and increasingly robust terrorist threat. The Philippine government consistently acknowledged the dangers from ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups and welcomed assistance from the United States and a range of international partners. In addition to exchanges and U.S. materiel and advise-and-assist support, the September 2017 Tempest Wind drill showcased whole-of-government U.S.-Philippine cooperation with more than 1,200 civilian and military participants simulating a hostage rescue scenario.

From May to November, terrorist organizations pledging support to ISIS – including a faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Maute Group, and others – occupied and held Marawi City. When the siege began, President Duterte declared martial law over the entire Mindanao region – approximately one-third of the country's territory – and Congress granted an extension of martial law until the end of 2018. Security forces ultimately cleared the city and eliminated much of the terrorist leadership, but suffered many casualties during the siege.

Political settlements to long-running insurgencies remained elusive, thereby driving recruitment and fueling terrorist activities among certain groups. The Bangsamoro Basic Law, intended to implement the previous administration's 2014 peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), was awaiting action in Congress at the end of 2017. Delays in passing the Law have provided recruitment propaganda for former MILF fighters and commanders who formed more extreme breakaway groups, including the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Ansar al-Khalifa, and the Maute Group.

The Government of the Philippines and the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) ended their six-month unilateral ceasefires in February, and the CPP/NPA increased its attacks against security forces following the failure of the most recent round of peace talks in May. On December 5, President Duterte signed a presidential proclamation to formally designate the CPP/NPA a terrorist group, but the courts must still rule on the designation.

2017 Terrorist Incidents: During the Battle of Marawi City, radical groups aligned with ISIS attacked, occupied, and destroyed several key public buildings and held dozens of civilians hostage as human shields. They also reportedly massacred and beheaded captive civilians.

Beyond Marawi, Philippine media observed that kidnapping-for-ransom cases declined from previous years. Armed attacks against civilians and security forces continued, however. The press reported that on June 22, security forces rescued at least 60 civilians held hostage after a BIFF attack in North Cotabato. Suspected members of the Abu Sayyef Group attacked a village in Basilan on August 21, killing at least nine civilians and wounding a dozen more. The December 3 attack on a police station in Misamis Oriental by approximately 100 CPP/NPA members exemplified the group's frequent strikes at military, police, and local government official targets.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: President Duterte identified amending the Human Security Act of 2007, the country's principal counterterrorism legislation, as a priority in both of his state of the nation addresses. Efforts to revise the legislation, thereby enabling more effective investigation and prosecution of terrorism as a crime, were ongoing at the end of 2017.

Interagency information sharing continued to improve among Philippine law enforcement units, despite the country lacking a fully operational 24/7 joint fusion center to monitor and address terrorist threats and activities. The Joint Terrorist Financing Investigation Group is the only multi-agency "center" in Manila that routinely meets and exchanges counterterrorism intelligence.

The Philippines increased its aviation security capacity by procuring updated x-ray technology and more widely using explosive trace detection units, but it faced understaffing challenges at security checkpoints and lacked a comprehensive national aviation security strategy. Four Japanese-donated maritime rescue and response vessels allowed the Philippine Coast Guard to extend its maritime security capabilities in key areas of their Exclusive Economic Zone and the Sulu Sea. In the area of identity tracking, collection of high value target biometric attributes expanded to include the Philippines' largest prison.

Key counterterrorism law enforcement actions included the National Bureau of Investigation's October 2017 arrest of a woman suspected of using the internet to spread terrorist propaganda and recruit foreign terrorist fighters to the Philippines. The Philippine Department of Justice charged the Maute clan matriarch, the former Marawi mayor, and nine other individuals with rebellion in June. Additionally, the Philippines effectively exercised its capabilities to protect the 2017 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit and related events from terrorist attacks.

In 2017, the Philippine National Police participated in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program. It received training and equipment on crisis response, border security, and investigations – including cyber investigations.

The Philippine justice system made progress on past instances of terrorism, including the November 2017 conviction of a man responsible for the 2007 bombing of the Philippine House of Representatives. Meanwhile, hearings continued on the 2009 landmine attack that killed two U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers in Jolo Province.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: The Philippines is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. Its financial intelligence unit, the Anti-Money Laundering Council, is a member of the Egmont Group. The Philippines amended its Anti-Money Laundering Act to include gambling and casinos, a critical step to avoid placement on the FATF "grey" list. The Philippines continued to make efforts to bring its banking controls up to international standards.

The Joint Terrorist Financing Investigation Group continued to work with the United States to investigate suspected terrorist finance cases. Notably, the Philippines seized US \$1 million from the Maute family during the 2017 Marawi siege.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the [2018 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report \(INCSR\), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes](#).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): At year's end, the Anti-Terrorism Council was working to finalize a National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism that will outline a whole-of-government strategy.

International and Regional Cooperation: The Philippine Navy began joint patrols with its Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts under a June 2017 trilateral arrangement to combat piracy, terrorism, and the illegal drug trade. In November, regional partners also founded the Southeast Asia Counter Terrorism Financing working group, an information-sharing mechanism that comprises regional financial intelligence units co-led by Australia and the Philippines. As the 2017 chair of ASEAN, the Philippines hosted key leadership summits that facilitated dialogue and coordination on counterterrorism issues.

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