



OPE-P IN BRIEF

This report submitted by the Lead Inspector General for Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines (OPE-P) summarizes the quarter's key events and oversight of the U.S. mission to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in their fight against ISIS-East Asia (ISIS-EA) and other violent extremist organizations (VEO).

Terrorists Conduct Coordinated Attacks and Combat the AFP

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- Terrorists coordinated **explosive attacks** in Cotabato City and 2 nearby towns, **wounding 17 people**, the day before Philippine **President Duterte's visit** to the area.
- The AFP engaged in **heavy fighting** with VEOs on Mindanao in November and December.
- AFP operations overran **12 terrorist camps**, **killed 7** terrorist fighters, and **recovered caches of weapons**.
- The AFP stopped an **attempted suicide bombing** in Indanan, Sulu, killing 3 fighters, including **2 Egyptians**.

U.S. Support to the AFP Includes ISR, Casualty Evacuation, and Training

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- **U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)** assistance helped the Philippine security forces neutralize **2 "significant targets."**
- U.S. advisors trained the AFP on analysis, reporting, and production of video ISR from **unmanned aircraft systems**.
- DoD-contracted casualty evacuation teams **rescued AFP troops** wounded fighting ISIS-EA in a remote part of Sulu province.

Philippine Government Allows Martial Law to Expire

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- The Philippine government allowed martial law to **expire** in the southern Philippines at the **end of 2019**.
- Martial law had been in place since ISIS-EA's attack on Marawi in **May 2017**.
- Martial law imposed **curfews** and gave security forces enhanced authorities, including **warrantless searches**.
- The AFP will retain an active counterterrorism mission in the southern Philippines, which remains under a **"state of emergency."**

Failed Marawi Reconstruction Stokes Public Anger

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- Many areas of Marawi have been **uninhabitable since the 2017** attack by ISIS-EA.
- Reconstruction has been delayed by multiple government **corruption scandals**.
- Government requirements have delayed returns to cleared areas of the city, and only **20% of building permit applications** have been approved.
- The U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that these delays have fueled popular **anti-government sentiments** and contributed to **terrorist recruitment**.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and Causes in the Southern Philippines

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- 2017 Marawi conflict: **70,000 IDPs**
- Conflict between AFP and VEOs this quarter: **49,150 IDPs**
- Earthquakes this quarter: **182,750 IDPs**

USAID Shifts Strategy to Focus on Broader Development Goals

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- USAID announced it will **wind down** the Marawi Response Project, a grant aimed at addressing the **post-siege recovery needs** of Marawi residents.
- USAID plans to refocus programming on strengthening **governance** and **civic engagement** to address drivers of extremism rather than mitigating terrorist recruitment directly.

Lead IG Oversight Activity

pp. 17-19, 22-23

- Lead IG and partner agencies had **10** ongoing oversight projects this quarter, including an evaluation of **security controls for ISR supply chains** and an inspection of the **DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism**.
- Lead IG and partner agencies closed **1** investigation and coordinated on **3** open investigations involving **conflict of interest, fraud, and bribery**.