Terrorists Conduct Coordinated Attacks and Combat the AFP  

Terroists 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.

Failed Marawi Reconstruction Stokes Public Anger  

- 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.

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

- 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.

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

- 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  

- 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.

Philippine Government Allows Martial Law to Expire  

- 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.”