



# OPE-P IN BRIEF

The 10th 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).

## Philippine Government Moves to Withdraw from Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)

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- The U.S.-Philippine VFA is scheduled to terminate on **August 9**, 180 days after the announcement on February 11.
- Since 1999, the VFA has provided **expedited entry** of U.S. military **personnel and equipment** into the Philippines for combined activities.
- The VFA also governs **jurisdiction for crimes** committed by U.S. military personnel in country.
- Senior DoD officials said that losing the VFA would make it **more challenging to support counterterrorism** activities in the Philippines.
- The Philippine government **could still reverse** its decision before August 9.

## AFP Engages in Minor Clashes With ISIS-EA

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- A week-long offensive in Maguindanao province resulted in the **deaths of 14 terrorists** and 4 AFP soldiers.
- The AFP **seized firearms, ammunition, and explosives** in a raid on an ISIS-EA camp in early March.
- U.S. special operations forces provided **casualty evacuation** assistance to **5 AFP troops** wounded fighting ISIS-EA on Mindanao.

## USAID Programs Focus on Economic Recovery and COVID-19

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- USAID’s Marawi Response Project provided **1,133 micro-grants** to displaced individuals.
- The Project also provided **2,273 grants** for community improvement to repair **water systems, solar dryers, and streetlights**.
- As of March 31, the U.S. Government committed **\$4 million** to support the Philippine government’s **COVID-19 response** efforts.
- USAID plans to collaborate with the Philippine government to support **COVID-19 testing** and **medical supply delivery**.

## COVID-19 Pandemic Limits AFP Counterterrorism Activity

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- The U.S. Embassy assessed that the AFP **lacked the capacity** to conduct sustained **counterterrorism** and **pandemic response** operations simultaneously.
- On March 18, the Philippine government declared a **ceasefire with communist rebels** to focus on combating COVID-19.
- AFP **resources**, including heavy airlift capacity, have been **diverted** to pandemic response.
- The AFP **suspended large military formations** after several troops contracted the disease.
- COVID-19-related travel restrictions have **limited the use of the VFA** in the agreement’s final months.

## DoS Programs Target Violent Extremism

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- DoS programs **trained 213 Philippine security officials** in digital forensics, crisis management, identifying foreign terrorists, and other skills.
- The DoS engaged with regional government leaders in the southern Philippines to identify and counter **drivers of violent extremism**.

## Martial Law Ends, but Violence Continues

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- The AFP continued to maintain an **active counterterrorism** presence in the southern Philippines after martial law ended on January 1.
- Mindanao **business leaders’** hopes that the end of martial law would bring investment have been tempered by **continued violence** and **COVID-19**.

## Oversight

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- Lead IG and partner agencies had **9** ongoing oversight projects this quarter, including an audit of DoD **mobile medical teams’** readiness and an inspection of the DoS **Bureau of Counterterrorism**.
- Lead IG and partner agencies coordinated on **4** open investigations involving **fraud, theft, and corruption**.