



OPERATION PACIFIC EAGLE-PHILIPPINES

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



JANUARY 1, 2020–MARCH 31, 2020

ABOUT THIS REPORT

A 2013 amendment to the Inspector General Act established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations. This legislation requires the Inspectors General of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of State (DoS), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide quarterly reports to Congress on active overseas contingency operations.

The DoD Inspector General (IG) is designated as the Lead IG for Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P). The DoS IG is the Associate IG for OPE-P. The USAID IG participates in oversight of the operation.

The Offices of Inspector General of the DoD, DoS, and USAID are referred to in this report as the Lead IG agencies. Other partner agencies also contribute to oversight of OPE-P.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out their statutory missions to:

- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the contingency operation.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the contingency operation through either joint or individual audits, inspections, and evaluations.
- Report quarterly to Congress and the public on the contingency operation and activities of the Lead IG agencies.

METHODOLOGY

To produce this quarterly report, the Lead IG agencies submit requests for information to the DoD, DoS, and USAID about OPE-P and related programs. The Lead IG agencies also gather data and information from open sources, including congressional testimony, policy research organizations, press conferences, think tanks, and media reports.

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the data and information provided by the agencies. For further details on the methodology for this report, see Appendix B.

CLASSIFIED APPENDIX

Due to limitations imposed by the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, this quarterly report does not include a classified appendix.

FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report to the U.S. Congress on Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P). This report discharges our individual and collective agency oversight responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978.

The United States launched OPE-P in 2017 to support the Philippine government in its effort to counter Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) affiliates and other violent extremist organizations in the Philippines. In coordination with other U.S. Government agencies, the Department of Defense (DoD) conducts counterterrorism operations under OPE-P by, with, and through its Philippine partners.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of OPE-P, as well as the work of the DoD, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to promote the U.S. Government’s policy goals in the Philippines during the period January 1 to March 31, 2020.

This report also discusses the planned, ongoing, and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies and our partner oversight agencies during the quarter.

This report usually includes an appendix containing classified information about OPE-P. This quarter, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related workforce protection requirements, the Lead IG agencies did not produce the classified appendix.

Working in close collaboration, we remain committed to providing comprehensive oversight and timely reporting on OPE-P.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sean W. O'Donnell".

Sean W. O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steve A. Linick".

Steve A. Linick
Inspector General
U.S. Department of State



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ann Calvaresi Barr".

Ann Calvaresi Barr
Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International
Development



On the Cover

(Top row): A U.S. Marine shares his knowledge of the M40A6 sniper rifle with a Philippine Marine at Fort Magsaysay, Philippines (U.S. Marine Corps photo); Marines on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS America in the Philippine Sea (U.S. Navy photo). (Bottom row): An assault amphibious vehicle disembarks the dock transport ship USS Green Bay in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Marine Corps photo).

MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL



Sean W. O'Donnell

I am pleased to present this Lead IG quarterly report on Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P).

This quarter, the Philippine government initiated the process of withdrawing from the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States effective August 9, 2020. This agreement facilitates the entry of U.S. military personnel and materiel into the Philippines. According to senior DoD officials, termination of the agreement would complicate future military cooperation between the two countries, including OPE-P. As discussed in this report, it is unclear if the agreement will ultimately be terminated and how the termination would affect OPE-P.

The Philippines, like many other countries, struggled with the COVID-19 pandemic this quarter. Efforts to combat the outbreak have consumed limited Philippine government resources, prompting the government to declare a ceasefire with certain local militant groups in order to focus on the public health crisis.

This quarter, there was no significant change in the reported strength, capabilities, territory, or leadership of the Philippine ISIS affiliates. Philippine military forces engaged in minor clashes with the terrorist groups, which have an estimated 300 to 500 members in the southern Philippines. According to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. military advisors continue to advise and assist their Philippine partners in counterterrorism operations, including casualty evacuation assistance.

The Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development reported that they provided assistance to the Philippine government this quarter, both to support the COVID-19 response and to assist the 70,000 residents of the city of Marawi who have been displaced since the 2017 siege by ISIS affiliates. This quarter, the Philippine government closed the last remaining tent camps for former Marawi residents, who have since been moved to temporary shelters.

With my appointment as Acting IG on April 6, 2020, I look forward to working with my Lead IG colleagues to report and provide oversight on OPE-P and related U.S. Government activity, as required by the IG Act.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean W O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sean W. O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense





An assault amphibious vehicle disembarks the dock transport ship USS Green Bay in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This quarter, the Philippine government notified the U.S. Embassy in Manila of its intention to withdraw from the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). This announcement triggered the start of a 180-day waiting period, after which the agreement would be terminated, absent any action by the Philippine government in the interim to reverse its decision.¹ Since its inception in 1999, the VFA has established the rules by which U.S. military personnel, vessels, and aircraft may enter the Philippines. The VFA also delineates whether certain criminal offenses committed by U.S. military personnel are subject to U.S. or Philippine legal systems.²

According to media reports, the full consequences of ending the VFA are unknown, and the Philippine Secretary of Justice recommended that the Philippine government conduct a study on possible security implications of ending the agreement.³ Prior to the withdrawal announcement, the Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Secretary of National Defense both publicly expressed concerns that terminating the VFA could undermine Philippine national security.⁴

U.S. Government leaders had mixed reactions to the announcement. Some Department of Defense (DoD) officials publicly described the announcement as “unfortunate” and a challenge for future counterterrorism operations.⁵ Other officials expressed optimism that the U.S. and Philippine governments would resolve their differences over the VFA.⁶

Although the DoD had planned to continue military exercises with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during the intervening 180 days, many of the planned activities have been canceled due to the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.⁷ According to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the Philippines had 2,048 confirmed cases of the disease as of the end of the quarter, with most cases located in and around Manila.⁸ On March 16, the Philippine government instituted quarantine measures in response to the outbreak on the island of Luzon, where Manila is located, while many other local governments across the country have instituted their own travel and business restrictions.⁹

According to the Department of State (DoS), the U.S. Government had committed \$4 million to support the Philippine Department of Health’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak as of March 31.¹⁰ The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) stated that, as of the end of the quarter, it planned to collaborate with the Philippine government to develop strategies to combat infectious disease, including enhanced COVID-19 testing.¹¹

The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported in a diplomatic cable that COVID-19 had placed significant operational constraints on the AFP, which would limit its ability to deter terrorist operations as the AFP shifts its limited resources to supporting public health efforts.¹²



Marines on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS America in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Navy photo)



On March 18, President Rodrigo Duterte declared a temporary ceasefire with the communist New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas in order to focus Philippine government resources on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, and the NPA agreed to reciprocate.¹³

Earlier in the quarter, the AFP engaged in a week-long offensive against ISIS-East Asia (ISIS-EA) in Maguindanao province that resulted in the deaths of 14 militants and 4 Philippine soldiers, according to media reports. Following the clash, the AFP seized firearms, ammunition, and explosives from the overrun militant camp.¹⁴ According to the DoD, in general, ISIS-EA's posture in the Philippines was unchanged from previous quarters, with an estimated 300 to 500 members divided among several factions and lacking an overall leader.¹⁵



Buildings destroyed by fighting in Marawi. (DoD photo)

ABOUT OPERATION PACIFIC EAGLE–PHILIPPINES

MISSION

On September 1, 2017, the Secretary of Defense designated Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P) an overseas contingency operation. OPE-P is a counterterrorism campaign conducted by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), in coordination with other U.S. Government agencies, to support the Philippine government and its military forces in their efforts to counter Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) affiliates and other priority violent extremist organizations in the Philippines.

HISTORY

The Philippines, an island nation with a predominantly Roman Catholic population, has struggled for decades with violent extremist separatist groups in the Muslim-populated regions of the country's south. Many of these extremist groups, operating in the most impoverished parts of the country, have affiliations with international terrorist organizations.

The Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 forms the foundation of the bilateral security relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Additionally, the Visiting Forces Agreement of 1998 provides for the expedited entry of U.S. military personnel and materiel into the Philippines and establishes criminal jurisdictions for U.S. service members accused of criminal acts in country. A supplemental agreement, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement of 2014, allows for an increased rotational presence of U.S. troops and for the U.S. Government to build and operate facilities located on Philippine military bases.

The U.S. military conducted counterterrorism operations in the Philippines under Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines from 2002 until that operation concluded in 2015. In 2014, many of the Philippines' local jihadist groups declared allegiance to ISIS. The international leadership of ISIS supported its Philippine branch with financing, media, foreign fighters, and recognition of its leader, Isnilon Hapilon, as the “emir” of ISIS in the Philippines. In May 2017, a force of approximately 1,000 ISIS-affiliated militants led by Hapilon seized the city of Marawi, a provincial capital with 200,000 residents, and held it for 5 months.

In September 2017, the DoD designated OPE-P as a contingency operation. U.S. forces provided advice and assistance to Philippine security forces as they liberated Marawi in October 2017. Philippine forces prevailed but suffered heavy casualties, including more than 160 dead. The fighting devastated the city's infrastructure and displaced 353,000 residents of the city and surrounding area. Most of the ISIS-aligned fighters in the city, including Hapilon and his top lieutenants, were killed in the fighting.

Since then, while Hatib Sawadjaan is believed to be the acting leader, the ISIS-aligned jihadist groups in the Philippines operate largely independently of each other. International ISIS leadership continues to track and claim attacks in the Philippines. The 300 to 500 remaining extremists who profess allegiance to ISIS continue to commit acts of violence to undermine peace and reconciliation in the southern Philippines.

According to USAID, the Philippine government closed the last remaining tent camps for Marawi IDPs and relocated the families from those camps to a transitional shelter site.

This quarter, the DoS reported that it provided assistance to Philippine partners countering violent extremism, including courses and counseling through the DoS Antiterrorism Training Assistance program on digital forensics, investigating foreign terrorist fighters, crisis management, protecting soft targets, and other capabilities.¹⁶ The DoS also provided support to local governments in the Muslim-majority provinces of the southern Philippines with the goal of enhancing their ability to identify and address drivers of violent extremism.¹⁷

This quarter, USAID again reported that it provided assistance, including cash grants, hygiene supplies, and emergency relief kits, to internally displaced persons (IDP) in the southern Philippines. USAID reported that approximately 66,000 people remain displaced from the 2017 siege of Marawi this quarter.¹⁸ An additional 52,000 people from other areas of the island of Mindanao were displaced this quarter due to insecurity and violent conflict.¹⁹ USAID reported to the USAID OIG that AFP military operations against ISIS-affiliated militants in Maguindanao province resulted in the displacement of 356 households.²⁰ Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, further contributed to the number of IDPs in the region.²¹

According to USAID, the Philippine government closed the last remaining tent camps for Marawi IDPs and relocated the families from those camps to a transitional shelter site. USAID reported that it provided rent subsidies or transitional shelters to 470 displaced households.²² The Philippines government's Task Force Bangon Marawi reported this quarter that more than 1,000 homeowners had received permits to rebuild in the areas of Marawi that were completely devastated by the fighting in 2017.²³ The Philippine government's Marawi reconstruction task force stated that work on major infrastructure and roads was ongoing this quarter. However, the timeline for reconstruction in Marawi and the return of IDPs remains unclear, according to USAID.²⁴

Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Government Accountability Office completed one report on oversight of DoD acquisition procedures related to OPE-P. As of March 31, 2020, nine oversight projects related to the Philippines were ongoing, and six were planned.

During the quarter, the investigative components of the Lead IG and partner agencies coordinated on four open investigations related to OPE-P. These investigations involve procurement and grant fraud, theft, and corruption.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. This quarter, the investigator did not receive any complaints related to OPE-P.

■ THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

This quarter's report on Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P) contains limited information from official Department of Defense (DoD) sources. Each quarter, the DoD Office of Inspector General (OIG) submits questions to DoD components and offices in order to obtain data and information for this report. Over the course of the last year, the DoD has been reducing the amount of publicly releasable information it provides to the DoD OIG regarding OPE-P.

In particular, the DoD declined to respond to most questions regarding the potential effects of the Philippine government terminating the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). The DoD stated that any information on this topic would be pre-decisional. Therefore, this report's analysis of the VFA, and the Philippine government's decision to withdraw from it, is based on Department of State (DoS) responses to the DoS OIG and open source reporting.

STATUS OF THE CONFLICT

Philippine Government Moves to Terminate Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States

On February 11, the Philippine government informed the U.S. Embassy in Manila of its intent to terminate the VFA, effective August 9, 180 days from the date of notification.²⁵ According to media reports, President Rodrigo Duterte, who has long been critical of the United States, made this decision unilaterally after the DoS canceled the visa of one of his political allies.²⁶

The VFA, which was signed in 1998 and entered into force in 1999, governs the legal status of U.S. military forces operating in the Philippines and establishes rules by which U.S. troops, vessels, and aircraft may enter the country. Notably, it exempts U.S. military personnel from visa requirements when entering and departing the Philippines. The agreement requires U.S. military personnel to respect Philippine laws and delineates the circumstances in which violations of law are subject to the jurisdiction of Philippine civil authorities or U.S. military authorities.²⁷

The VFA, and all other bilateral military agreements and activities between the United States and the Philippines, are supplemental to the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951, which serves as the foundation for the bilateral security relationship between the two countries and requires each to come to the other's aid if attacked by a third party.²⁸

While the termination of the VFA would not abrogate the Mutual Defense Treaty, it would complicate the DoD's ability to fulfill its obligations under the treaty, according to the Congressional Research Service.²⁹ According to media reports, the full consequences of ending the VFA are unknown. Philippine Secretary of Justice Menardo Guevarra recommended that the Philippine Department of National Defense and Department of Foreign Affairs conduct a study on possible implications for the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. This is a separate but complementary agreement, under which the U.S. Government is currently constructing military facilities on Philippine military bases to be jointly operated by both countries.³⁰

On February 11, the Philippine government informed the U.S. Embassy in Manila of its intent to terminate the VFA, effective August 9, 180 days from the date of notification.



A U.S. Marine shares his knowledge of the M40A6 sniper rifle with a Philippine Marine at Fort Magsaysay, Philippines. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

In a late January cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that it was unclear whether President Duterte could unilaterally void the VFA. On March 3, the Philippine Senate passed a resolution calling on the Philippine Supreme Court to rule on whether the president could terminate a Senate-ratified agreement without Senate consent. The cable added that as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), President Duterte could order a halt to bilateral military cooperation activities.³¹

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) stated to the DoD OIG that it plans to continue partner force development efforts in the Philippines, which began long before OPE-P. However, according to USINDOPACOM, the termination of the VFA would create challenges to the type and amount of aid that the DoD would be able to offer. USINDOPACOM said that it plans to continue providing assistance in line with mutual security priorities to the extent allowed by the Philippine government. USINDOPACOM also stated that partner force development this quarter was ongoing, and any interruptions were due entirely to the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. However, USINDOPACOM added that “the larger impact of the VFA cancellation has not yet been determined.”³²

SENIOR PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INITIALLY OPPOSED VFA TERMINATION

Prior to President Duterte’s announcement, during a Philippine Senate hearing on February 6, Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin Jr. called for a “vigorous review” of the VFA rather than termination. According to a DoS cable, Secretary Locsin stated that pulling out of the VFA would negatively affect the Philippines’ defense relations with Australia, Japan, South Korea, and other U.S. allies, as U.S. training and interoperability are

integral to military cooperation with these countries.³³ The Congressional Research Service reported that Secretary Locsin estimated the Philippines received approximately \$268 million in total military financing and procurement from the United States from 2016 to 2019.³⁴ However, he believes it is within Duterte’s constitutional power and authority to abrogate the VFA for any reason.³⁵

A DoS cable distributed within the U.S. Embassy in Manila indicated that Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana agreed that abrogating the VFA would diminish the AFP’s capacity and cited U.S. security assistance figures to demonstrate the benefits of the VFA.³⁶ According to a news report, former Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario told reporters in January that after Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, the VFA facilitated U.S. disaster relief efforts, while “other countries wanted to respond immediately but were constrained by the lack of a legal arrangement for their troops to enter the Philippines.”³⁷

U.S. GOVERNMENT LEADERS SHARE MIXED REACTIONS TO DUTERTE’S ANNOUNCEMENT

In February, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper described Duterte’s decision to end the VFA as “unfortunate” and a “move in the wrong direction.” However, President Trump said that he does not oppose the decision and sees it as a potential cost savings for the United States.³⁸ U.S. National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien expressed skepticism that the Philippine government would ultimately sever the VFA and stated he was optimistic that the U.S. and Philippine governments would ultimately resolve their differences concerning the VFA.³⁹

Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander of USINDOPACOM, told reporters in February that without the VFA, the United States’ “ability to help the Philippines and their counter-violent extremist fight in the south [and] our ability to train and operate within the Philippines and with Filipino armed forces would be challenged.”⁴⁰

U.S. EMBASSY IN MANILA AIMS TO SHOW FILIPINOS THE BENEFITS OF THE VFA

In a March cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that it used media campaigns to highlight the benefits of military-to-military engagements and implicitly demonstrate the consequences of President Duterte’s decision to abrogate the VFA. According to the cable, this media campaign described several U.S. military community engagements, including construction of a two-classroom schoolhouse, a U.S.–Philippine joint special forces training in Palawan, and an education outreach visit to a Palawan daycare center by a U.S. Army civil affairs team and the Philippine Coast Guard.⁴¹

In the cable, the embassy reported that this media campaign generated significant local coverage, and Philippine media made the connection between U.S. military assistance and Philippine security, commenting on what the Philippines stands to lose without the VFA. However, the embassy reported in the cable that the Philippine Department of National Defense prohibited media coverage of future bilateral activities and commemoration events, including the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. In the cable, the embassy reported that the prohibition of media coverage of these events was done to avoid appearing out of line with Duterte’s directive to reduce bilateral military engagement even before the VFA withdrawal takes effect.⁴²

As of the end of the quarter, COVID-19 was spreading rapidly across the Philippines, with the epicenter of the outbreak and half of all reported cases in the capital region around Manila.

AFP Activity Limited by COVID-19 Pandemic

As of the end of the quarter, COVID-19 was spreading rapidly across the Philippines, with the epicenter of the outbreak and half of all reported cases in the capital region around Manila.⁴³ USAID reported to USAID OIG that only one hospital in Marawi was servicing the entire Lanao del Sur province. USAID added that there were gaps in personal protective equipment and COVID-19 response requirements in the country's south.⁴⁴

According to media reports, the Philippines confirmed its first case of COVID-19 on January 30, a traveler from Wuhan, China, who arrived in country on January 21.⁴⁵ The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that as of March 31, there were 2,048 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 88 deaths attributed to the disease in the Philippines, a country of approximately 109 million people.⁴⁶

On March 16, the Philippine government instituted quarantine measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, these national quarantine measures primarily apply to the island of Luzon, where Manila is located.⁴⁷ These restrictions included shutting down transportation networks and orders for many businesses either to close or operate remotely. According to media reports, President Duterte encouraged mayors to enforce the orders strictly and said that violators of the stay-at-home order would face potential arrest and jail.⁴⁸ Many local governments outside of the federal quarantine area, including some in the southern Philippines, have instituted their own restrictions.⁴⁹

On April 1, Secretary of National Defense Lorenzana referred to COVID-19 and internal security threats as “enemies on two fronts” and welcomed the recent surrenders of 29 jihadist militants and 40 communist insurgents. Lorenzana stated that the AFP was continuing to conduct security operations but, in a cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila expressed the view that the AFP lacked the capacity to conduct sustained counterterrorism operations while also combating COVID-19. According to the cable, military aircraft, such as the Philippine Air Force's C-130 cargo plane, which normally provides logistical support to AFP operations on Mindanao, had instead been flying to and from Fuzhou, China, to retrieve medical supplies. Similarly, the cable reported, the Philippine Navy had dispatched some of its ships to deliver relief goods to remote island communities in Tawi-Tawi province.⁵⁰

In the cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that Philippine military commanders had suspended large formations, and that several troops, including some senior officers, had contracted the virus. The cable stated that, although the Philippine forces were able to recover a hostage from an ISIS-affiliated kidnap-for-ransom group on March 24, COVID-19 had placed significant operational constraints on the AFP, which would limit their ability to deter terrorist operations.⁵¹

COVID-19 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS LIMIT USE OF VFA IN THE POTENTIAL FINAL MONTHS OF THE AGREEMENT

In a March cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila identified some of the impacts it expects the Philippine government's COVID-19-related travel restrictions to have on U.S. Government operations in the Philippines. The COVID-19-related travel restrictions included the suspension of visa-free entry into the country for those otherwise eligible, including U.S.

military personnel under the VFA. The cable stated that “as written, the announcement means that military personnel who entered the Philippines with visa-free privileges under the VFA, including the U.S. special operations forces stationed on Mindanao, will be unable to extend their stay and that follow-on units will be unable to enter the country.”⁵² The cable stated that planned military activities, such as subject matter expert exchanges, which rely on visa-free entry under the VFA would not be able to proceed.⁵³

PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT DECLARES CEASEFIRE WITH INSURGENTS TO FOCUS ON FIGHTING COVID-19

On March 18, President Duterte declared a unilateral ceasefire with the communist New People’s Army (NPA) guerrillas in order to focus the Philippine government’s resources on fighting the COVID-19 outbreak. Under the ceasefire, President Duterte directed the AFP and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to stop all offensive operations against the NPA through April 15. Philippine Interior Secretary Eduardo Año ordered the PNP to shift to a defensive posture, and he urged the NPA to respond with their own ceasefire. Secretary Año told reporters, “We call on [the NPA] to be a part of the solution in fighting our common enemy, the COVID-19.”⁵⁴ On March 31, Secretary Año, who also serves as vice chair of the Philippine government’s COVID-19 task force, informed reporters that he had tested positive for the virus and stated that he intended to continue performing his duties remotely.⁵⁵

In an early April cable, the U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that the Philippine government’s reaction to COVID-19 had reshaped the country’s ongoing violent conflicts with local insurgents. The embassy reported that since Duterte’s March 16 announcement of “enhanced quarantine” on the island of Luzon, and locally imposed restrictions in other areas, including Basilan, violence had decreased significantly. On March 25, a week after Duterte announced a unilateral cease-fire to enable security forces to focus on the pandemic, the NPA announced that it too would suspend combat operations. Similarly, the cable reported that clashes with terrorist groups had nearly halted as the AFP had shifted its resources to supporting public health efforts.⁵⁶ According to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the ceasefire expired on April 15, but talks continued between the two sides.⁵⁷

The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported in a cable that Joma Sison, the exiled founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the political wing of the NPA, announced that the NPA would reciprocate President Duterte’s March 18 unilateral ceasefire. The cable reported that Sison added, however, that if attacked, the NPA would defend itself and blamed the Duterte government for allowing the virus to enter and spread in the Philippines.”⁵⁸

According to another cable sent by the U.S. Embassy in Manila, there were approximately 12 incidents of violence nationwide between the Philippine government and insurgent groups during the last 2 weeks of March, after the public health restrictions came into effect, compared to 57 engagements resulting in 70 deaths during the corresponding 2-week period in 2019 and 67 incidents and 70 deaths in the 2 weeks prior to the quarantine.⁵⁹

On March 18, President Duterte declared a unilateral ceasefire with the communist New People’s Army guerrillas in order to focus the Philippine government’s resources on fighting the COVID-19 outbreak.

BEFORE THE COVID-19 CRISIS, AFP BATTLED ISIS-EA CELLS IN MAGUINDANAO

According to media reports, in early March, a week-long AFP offensive in Maguindanao province (see map below) resulted in the deaths of at least 14 militants aligned with ISIS-EA. Four Philippine soldiers were also killed in the fighting. An AFP spokesperson told reporters that Philippine forces launched air strikes and artillery fire on an ISIS-EA encampment in the town of Ampatuan on southern Mindanao, after receiving intelligence that the militants were plotting attacks. These strikes were followed by an AFP assault on a second militant camp in another neighborhood of Ampatuan, in which soldiers seized firearms, ammunition, and improvised explosive devices.⁶⁰

This quarter, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that it did not observe any significant clashes between ISIS-EA and the AFP.⁶¹ USINDOPACOM stated that it considers the fighting in Ampatuan this quarter to be a low-level incident, given the number of individuals, level of firearms, and casualties involved.⁶²

Figure 1.

Map of Maguindanao Province



ISIS-EA Remains a Local Threat

This quarter, the DIA provided no estimates on ISIS-EA force strength, territory, financing, or recruitment. In previous quarters, USINDOPACOM reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS-EA had an estimated 300 to 500 members in the Philippines divided among several factions, including ISIS-aligned Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) elements, the Esmael faction of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Maute Group, and Ansar Khalifah Philippines. USINDOPACOM stated that it relies on the AFP's estimates of the different factions that comprise ISIS-EA.⁶³

This quarter, the DIA reported that the various ISIS-EA factions operating in the Philippines remained geographically separated and likely had minimal direct contact with one another.⁶⁴ Last quarter, USINDOPACOM cited publicly available information indicating that ISIS-EA was incapable of carrying out large-scale attacks, which it has defined in previous quarters as having a casualty toll of greater than 100.⁶⁵

According to the DIA, ISIS-EA continued to operate this quarter without an internationally recognized leader, although some ISIS leaders regard Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, an ASG faction leader, as the de facto “emir” of ISIS in the Philippines. A *shura* of ISIS-aligned ASG leaders appointed Sawadjaan as ISIS-EA's overall emir in May 2018 following the death of former leader Isnilon Hapilon in 2017, according to the DIA.⁶⁶ USINDOPACOM reported to the DoD OIG in previous quarters that the leaders of some ISIS-EA factions do not support Sawadjaan.⁶⁷

Amphibious dock landing ship USS Germantown sails behind amphibious assault ship USS America in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Navy photo)



According to U.S. Special Operations Command–Pacific, U.S. special operations forces provided casualty triage and evacuation assistance when AFP assets were unavailable on three occasions this quarter.

U.S. Special Operations Forces Assist AFP with Casualty Evacuation

According to U.S. Special Operations Command–Pacific (SOCPAC), U.S. special operations forces provided casualty triage and evacuation assistance when AFP assets were unavailable on three occasions this quarter. SOCPAC reported that, during these three instances, it assisted five AFP soldiers who were wounded while conducting operations in southern and central Mindanao. Additionally, SOCPAC reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. special operations forces partnered with the AFP and the PNP-Special Action Force, the special operations component of the PNP, to conduct a week-long combat casualty care training with the goal of building the independent casualty evacuation capabilities of the Philippine forces.⁶⁸

BUILDING PARTNER DEVELOPMENT

USINDOPACOM Report Outlines 5-Year Plan, Including Building Partner Capacity

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 required the Commander of USINDOPACOM to submit a report assessing the resourcing requirements for implementing the National Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.⁶⁹ USINDOPACOM issued the required report this quarter. It identified 4 focus areas for USINDOPACOM’s investments in the Indo-Pacific region over the next 5 years:

- Joint Force Lethality;
- Force Design and Posture;
- Strengthen Allies and Partners; and
- Exercises, Experimentation, and Innovation.⁷⁰

While the USINDOPACOM report did not specifically address OPE-P, the latter two focus areas directly relate to the U.S.-Philippine bilateral security relationship. USINDOPACOM’s report emphasizes the importance of alliances and partnerships in establishing and maintaining a “rules-based international order” in the Indo-Pacific region.⁷¹

The USINDOPACOM report stated that an interoperable security architecture between allies in the region is necessary to deter aggression, maintain stability, respond to man-made and natural disasters, and ensure freedom of navigation. USINDOPACOM also stated in the report that over the next 5 years, it plans to make investments in regional allies’ security infrastructure with the goal of enhancing their capability and interoperability. This includes the development of intelligence sharing to counter transnational terrorist threats.⁷²

According to the USINDOPACOM report, the DoD normally holds approximately 90 named military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region each year, such as the annual Balikatan exercise between U.S. and Philippine troops. In the report, USINDOPACOM identified these exercises as a key deterrent to possible aggression by China in what the Chinese government refers to as the “First Island Chain,” which includes the Philippines and the waters of the South China Sea. The report did not address how termination of the VFA would alter future military exercises in the Philippines.⁷³

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

DoS Programs Target Violent Extremism in the Philippines

In response to a the DoS OIG request for information, the DoS Bureau of Diplomatic Security reported that it provided nine courses and two consultations to Philippine security forces during the quarter through the DoS Antiterrorism Training Assistance program. According to the DoS, these engagements covered topics including digital forensics, social media investigations, investigating foreign terrorist fighters, crisis management, identifying and developing investigative information, protecting soft targets, and first response to terrorist incidents.⁷⁴ The DoS reported that these engagements trained 213 students from the PNP and other Philippine government agencies, including the Bureaus of Investigation, Immigration, and Customs; the Office of Transportation Security; Manila Airport Authority; Civil Aviation Authority; Port Authority; and Coast Guard. The DoS reported that members of a variety of PNP units participated in these engagements, including the Special Action Force, explosive ordnance disposal, anti-cybercrime, anti-kidnapping, aviation security, intelligence, and security and protection. Separate from these engagements, the DoS reported that it continued making plans to build a Regional Counterterrorism Training Center in the Philippines for regional partner nations. The Philippine government agreed to a memorandum of understanding for the regional training center in August 2019, but the PNP later suspended the project for reasons it did not make clear to the DoS.⁷⁵

The DoS Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations reported to the DoS OIG that activities this quarter continued under a \$1.7 million program to counter violent extremism. The DoS reported that its implementing partners met with local officials in several areas of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), including Basilan, Maguindanao, and Zamboanga city. The DoS reported that these local governments are eager to work with civil society and research institutions to identify and address drivers of violent extremism, which local officials described as critical to maintaining peace in the BARMM.⁷⁶

The DoS Global Engagement Center reported to the DoS OIG that the Center, the U.S. Embassy in Manila, and the DoD Military Information Support Team based in the Philippines coordinated on a youth summit in January hosted by a DoS implementing partner. The Center stated that the 4-day event featured peace activists and Philippine law enforcement officials discussing themes such as transforming violent extremism, youth empowerment, and positive alternative messages.⁷⁷

End of Martial Law Brings Little Change to Mindanao

On December 31, 2019, the Philippine government allowed martial law to end on Mindanao for the first time since May 2017. According to media reports, however, the checkpoints and curfews many residents associated with martial law remained in place this quarter, with no significant change in the AFP's military presence in the region. Although martial law was formally lifted, a "state of emergency," instituted in September 2016, remains in effect. According to media reports, the state of emergency, while less restrictive than martial law, still permits the military and the police to collaborate in security operations, and a Mindanao lawmaker said the AFP and PNP would maintain or increase their presence on the island.⁷⁸

On December 31, 2019, the Philippine government allowed martial law to end on Mindanao for the first time since May 2017.

In February, a whistleblower at the Philippine Bureau of Immigration reported a ring of corrupt officials selling illicit, un-scrutinized country entry to Chinese nationals, including some with criminal records.

Mindanao business leaders, such as the Davao City Chamber of Commerce and Industry, were quoted in media reports (before the COVID-19 pandemic) setting expectations that the end of martial law would bring investment and tourism that would lead to economic growth on the island. However, ISIS-EA maintains a persistent presence in the southern Philippines, despite 31 months of martial law, and continues to engage in combat with the AFP and PNP.⁷⁹

Visa Corruption Scandal Highlights Immigration Vulnerability in the Philippines

In February, a whistleblower at the Philippine Bureau of Immigration reported a ring of corrupt officials selling illicit, un-scrutinized country entry to Chinese nationals, including some with criminal records. According to media reports, the whistleblower testified at a Philippine Senate hearing that 90 percent of the bureau's staff were involved in the illegal enterprise. The hearing featured video and photographs of Philippine immigration agents escorting Chinese nationals, who had paid bribes equivalent to approximately \$200, past immigration counter lines at the airport in Manila. The whistleblower described the system as providing a "package" deal, which would also include the foreigner's departure from the Philippines, with additional fees for high-profile individuals or those with criminal records that might make legal entry impossible.⁸⁰

The DIA reported that it had not observed a significant influx of foreign terrorists moving into the Philippines this quarter, although Indonesian and Malaysian terrorists likely continue to view the southern Philippines as an attractive destination to escape counterterrorism pressure in their respective home countries.⁸¹

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

U.S. Government and International Organizations Assist Philippines with COVID-19 Response

At the end of the quarter, the World Health Organization reported that the Philippine government's Regional Interagency Task Forces were finalizing their COVID-19 plans, including plans for the BARMM. The World Health Organization reported that the BARMM Ministry of Health was also coordinating with healthcare partners active in the region, including the United Nations and various nongovernmental organizations. The UN Children's Fund provided support to frontline healthcare workers in the BARMM with deliveries of personal protective equipment, cleaning kits, and translation services.⁸²

USAID announced on March 17 that the U.S. Government committed \$2.7 million to support the Philippine Department of Health in its response to the COVID-19 outbreak. USAID stated that it planned to collaborate with the Philippine government to establish and implement infectious disease prevention and response strategies. Additionally, USAID reported that it planned to facilitate COVID-19 testing by supporting specimen transportation and laboratory capacity. USAID reported that it also planned to assist with the delivery and management of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment. USAID added that U.S. Government-supported programs in the Philippines were also

intended to expand disease preparedness and access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services and commodities.⁸³ On March 31, the DoS reported that the total amount of U.S. Government health assistance in response to the outbreak in the Philippines had increased to nearly \$4 million.⁸⁴

Conflict and Natural Disasters Contribute to Continued Displacement of Southern Philippine Residents

USAID reported to the USAID OIG that the number of IDPs resulting from the 2017 siege of Marawi remained unchanged this quarter at approximately 66,000, with the majority of these being former residents from the area of Marawi that was destroyed during the conflict.⁸⁵

In addition to the IDPs from the Marawi siege, approximately 52,000 additional people from other areas of the island of Mindanao were displaced as of February 19 due to insecurity, conflict between the AFP and militant groups, and clan feuds.⁸⁶ USAID reported to the USAID OIG that, on March 2, the AFP began military operations against ISIS-affiliated militants in Maguindanao province. USAID reported that these military operations resulted in the displacement of 356 households.⁸⁷ Additionally, the WHO reported that nearly 215,000 residents remained displaced on Mindanao this quarter due to earthquakes in North Cotabato and Davao del Sur provinces in October 2019.⁸⁸

USAID reported that it provided assistance, including livelihood cash grants, hygiene supplies, and emergency relief kits to some of these IDPs in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao provinces. USAID added that when IDPs were displaced in mid-February by fighting between the AFP and ISIS-affiliated groups in the Piagapo municipality in Lanao del Sur, the local government provided assistance with food rations and did not allow nongovernmental organizations, including USAID implementers, to access IDP sites due to security concerns.⁸⁹

The DoS Supports Victims of Conflict Through International Organizations

In response to a DoS OIG request for information, the DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) reported that it partners with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of conflict in the Philippines. PRM reported that it provided a total of \$6.3 million to the UNHCR and ICRC for their East Asia operations. PRM reported that a portion of this funding could be used in the Philippines.⁹⁰

PRM reported to the DoS OIG that it provided \$3 million in regional funding to UNHCR, some of which could be used in the Philippines. UNHCR works with the Philippine government on assistance to IDPs in Marawi. PRM reported that UNHCR had conducted protection monitoring at 12 transitory sites this quarter, though, according to PRM, the COVID-19 outbreak and associated Philippine government measures had hampered this effort.⁹¹

In addition to the IDPs from the Marawi siege, approximately 52,000 people from other areas of the island of Mindanao were displaced as of February 19 due to insecurity, conflict between the AFP and militant groups, and clan feuds.

PRM reported that it provided \$3.3 million to the ICRC's East Asia operations, to provide food and other assistance, such as hygiene items, water and sanitation, medical care, and livelihood support to victims of conflicts in the Philippines. PRM reported that the ICRC also works with the Philippine government and nongovernmental armed groups on compliance with international humanitarian law and helps reunite families separated by conflict.⁹²

Long-Delayed Construction Begins in Most-Affected Area of Marawi

After years of delay, more than 1,000 homeowners received permits to rebuild in the areas of Marawi that were completely devastated by the fighting in 2017, according to media reports. USAID reported that according to the Philippine government, an estimated 130 homeowners had started building and repairing houses between late December 2019 and early March 2020.⁹³ According to USAID, the Philippine government's Task Force Bangon Marawi stated that the reconstruction of major infrastructure and roads was ongoing this quarter, including the completion of a bridge connecting the most affected areas in Marawi. However, the timeline for reconstruction in Marawi and the return of IDPs remains unclear, according to USAID, as it involves widespread land titling complications and because some homeowners continue to refuse demolition of buildings for fear of losing their claims to the land on which the remains of the buildings sit.⁹⁴

USAID reported that, as of March 18, living conditions for IDPs had improved during the quarter with increased access to temporary modular housing units known as "transitional shelters." USAID reported to USAID OIG that the Philippine government closed the last remaining tent camps for IDPs and relocated to a transitional shelter site the remaining 97 IDP families who had been residing in the tent camps. USAID reported that it provided rent subsidies or transitional shelters to 470 displaced households, while the Philippine government provided cash assistance to 393 household and business renters, focusing on 3,712 renter families from the destroyed areas of Marawi who are not eligible for government-built transitional shelters.⁹⁵



(Left) Marawi's commercial center of about 1 square mile, where more than 6,000 homes, buildings, schools, and mosques were destroyed. (Right) The skeletal remains of a mosque stand amid overgrown vegetation. (NPR photos)

While access to transitional shelters increased this quarter, USAID reported that construction of permanent housing had not yet met expectations. According to USAID, the Philippine government, a UN housing agency, and private sector donors planned to complete the construction of 4,030 permanent houses in 2020, but only 165 houses were occupied this quarter.⁹⁶

USAID reported to USAID OIG that several permanent water sources were rehabilitated and new boreholes drilled, resulting in increased water availability in Marawi and IDP transitional shelters. Because of the improvements, a USAID implementer decreased its truck deliveries of water by 70 percent from June 2019 to February 2020. A second USAID implementer upgraded 27 water sources and completed 23 water, sanitation, and hygiene centers with 48 latrines, 48 bathing cubicles, and 26 handwashing areas.⁹⁷

USAID Programs Provide Micro-Grants for IDPs

USAID stated to USAID OIG that its Marawi Response Project supports USAID’s recently released Country Development Cooperation Strategy for the Philippines and its development objective of strengthening environmental and community resilience.⁹⁸ The Marawi Response Project provided livelihood micro-grants to 1,133 IDPs and residents of host communities. It also provided 2,273 social cohesion grants that focus on community improvement activities, such as repairing shared water systems, solar dryers, and streetlights.⁹⁹

IDP entrepreneurs from Marawi’s most affected area that was destroyed during the siege were provided 102 micro-grants to restart their businesses and an additional 337 IDP entrepreneurs were trained in enterprise management.¹⁰⁰ The project also provided civic engagement training for 2,039 IDPs and persons in host communities.¹⁰¹ Another USAID project reported that 85 percent of the 4,832 individuals that they assisted had restored their livelihoods 3 to 6 months after receiving USAID assistance, and the new monthly household income for these beneficiaries met the national poverty threshold for basic food needs for a family of five.¹⁰²

USAID reported that it has committed nearly \$64 million for humanitarian and recovery work in and around the city of Marawi since the 2017 crisis and that it continues to partner with the Philippine government to restore public services, expand economic development, promote peaceful dialogue, and improve health and education systems.¹⁰³

Table 1.

USAID Funding in Philippines Related to Marawi Crisis, Disbursements in \$ Millions

	USAID/Philippines	Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance	Office of Food for Peace
FY 2018	4.6	11.4	1.9
FY 2019	14.5	10.2	1.0
TOTAL	19.1	21.6	2.9

Source: USAID

USAID FORWARD Bangsamoro Aims to Strengthen Local Governance

Last quarter, USAID awarded the contract for its FORWARD Bangsamoro activity, which is designed to provide support to the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority (BTA), the interim government of the BARMM. This quarter, USAID reported to USAID OIG that the program was still in the start-up phase. USAID reported that FORWARD Bangsamoro supports USAID's recently released strategy for the Philippines, the Country Development Cooperation Strategy, and USAID's development objective of strengthening democratic governance. The goal of FORWARD Bangsamoro is to bolster local governance through the development of more effective and accountable Bangsamoro government institutions. FORWARD Bangsamoro intends to meet this goal by accomplishing three objectives:¹⁰⁴

- Build the capacity of targeted regional government institutions, ministries, and the BTA to carry out essential governmental functions.
- Support the enactment of priority measures to complete the transition to the BARMM government.
- Increase citizen awareness of, and engagement in, the BTA and BARMM.¹⁰⁵

According to USAID, the initial phase of FORWARD Bangsamoro will use several metrics to identify the baseline in BARMM's executive and legislative capacities through surveys, focus group discussions, ethnographic research, and stakeholder workshops.¹⁰⁶

BUDGET AND EXECUTION

USINDOPACOM reported to the DoD OIG that it had committed \$47.5 million, obligated \$37.9 million, and disbursed \$6 million in base and OCO funding in support of OPE-P in FY 2020, as of March 17. USINDOPACOM stated that its FY 2020 OCO budget for OPE-P is approximately \$72.3 million, but this figure does not include U.S. Army-Pacific operations. While USINDOPACOM previously reported to the DoD OIG that all expenditures in support of OPE-P were from OCO funds, USINDOPACOM reported this quarter that airlift for U.S. Army advisors; counterintelligence; temporary duty personnel; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support were each paid for with base funding.¹⁰⁷

According to USINDOPACOM, U.S. Army-Pacific employed base funding to support OPE-P because it had exhausted all of its OCO funding, which will limit its resources available to conduct ISR operations. SOCPAC reported that it had requested an additional \$14 million for its casualty evacuation contract and \$20 million for contracted ISR for the U.S. Navy to meet anticipated requirements in FY 2020.¹⁰⁸

USINDOPACOM reported that it had not obligated any of the \$24.8 million it had budgeted for a casualty evacuation contract in FY 2020.¹⁰⁹ USINDOPACOM stated that the casualty evacuation assistance that U.S. military personnel provided to their AFP partners this quarter (see page 13) was part of the support to triage efforts and training that U.S. special operations forces provide at the request of AFP medical personnel. USINDOPACOM reported that it provides casualty evacuation assistance to the AFP based on the proximity of the incident and on the U.S. special operation forces' availability to respond to emergency requests.¹¹⁰

OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies’ strategic planning efforts; their ongoing audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations; and hotline activities from January 1 through March 31, 2020, related to OPE-P.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Pursuant to Section 8L of the Inspector General Act, the Lead IG develops and implements a joint strategic plan to guide comprehensive oversight of programs and operations for each overseas contingency operation. This effort includes reviewing and analyzing completed oversight, management, and other relevant reports to identify systemic problems, trends, lessons learned, and best practices to inform future oversight projects. The Lead IG agencies issue an annual joint strategic plan for each operation.

FY 2020 Joint Strategic Oversight Plan Activities

In 2018, upon designation of the DoD IG as the Lead IG for OPE-P, the three Lead IG agencies developed and implemented a joint strategic oversight plan for comprehensive oversight of OPE-P. That oversight plan is updated each year.

The FY 2020 *Joint Strategic Oversight Plan for Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines*, effective October 1, 2019, organized OPE-P-related oversight projects into three strategic oversight areas: 1) Military Operations and Security Cooperation; 2) Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development; and 3) Support to Mission. The strategic plan was included in the FY 2020 Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations.

The Overseas Contingency Operations Joint Planning Group serves as a primary venue to coordinate audits, inspections, and evaluations of U.S. Government-funded activities supporting overseas contingency operations. The Joint Planning Group meets quarterly to provide a forum for coordination of the broader Federal oversight community, and to learn from featured speakers.

The most recent meeting of the Joint Planning Group in February 2020 featured Christopher P. Maier, who leads the DoD’s Defeat ISIS Task Force. Mr. Maier spoke about the role of the Defeat-ISIS Task Force in the U.S. Government’s campaign to achieve an enduring defeat of ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Lead IG agencies use permanent and temporary employees, and USAID additionally uses contractors, to conduct oversight projects, investigate fraud and corruption, and provide strategic planning and reporting related to activities in the Philippines. Oversight teams travel to the Philippines and other locations in the region to conduct fieldwork for their oversight projects.



**FY 2020
Comprehensive
Oversight Plan
for Overseas
Contingency
Operations**

Lead IG Strategic Oversight Areas

MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Military Operations and Security Cooperation focuses on determining the degree to which the contingency operation is accomplishing its security mission. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Conducting unilateral and partnered counterterrorism operations
- Providing security assistance
- Training and equipping partner security forces
- Advising, assisting, and enabling partner security forces
- Advising and assisting ministry-level security officials

GOVERNANCE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, AND DEVELOPMENT

Governance, Humanitarian Assistance, and Development focuses on some of the root causes of violent extremism. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Countering and reducing corruption, social inequality, and extremism
- Promoting inclusive and effective democracy, civil participation, and empowerment of women
- Promoting reconciliation, peaceful conflict resolution, demobilization and reintegration of armed forces, and other rule of law efforts
- Providing food, water, medical care, emergency relief, and shelter to people affected by crisis
- Assisting and protecting internally displaced persons and refugees
- Building or enhancing host-nation governance capacity
- Supporting sustainable and appropriate recovery and reconstruction activities, repairing infrastructure, removing explosive remnants of war, and reestablishing utilities and other public services
- Countering trafficking in persons and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse

SUPPORT TO MISSION

Support to Mission focuses on U.S. Government administrative, logistical, and management efforts that enable military operations and non-military programs. Activities that fall under this strategic oversight area include:

- Ensuring the security of U.S. Government personnel and property
- Providing for the occupational health and safety of personnel
- Administering U.S. Government programs
- Managing U.S. Government grants and contracts

The COVID-19 global pandemic reduced the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations this quarter. Due to the evacuation of many deployed staff and country-imposed travel restrictions, some oversight projects by Lead IG agencies have been delayed or deferred. The Lead IG agencies reported that their personnel will be able to conduct some work while teleworking and practicing social distancing, but may consider adjustments in project scope of work or in timelines for completing the oversight work.

This quarter, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) completed one report on oversight of DoD acquisition procedures related to OPE-P. As of March 31, nine oversight projects related to the Philippines were ongoing, and six were planned. Project titles and objectives for the ongoing and planned oversight projects can be found in Appendix C.

Final Reports

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Defense Logistics Agreements—DoD Should Improve Oversight and Seek Payment from Foreign Partners for Thousands of Orders It Identifies as Overdue

GAO-20-309; March 2020

The GAO conducted this audit of DoD acquisition and cross-servicing agreements (ACSA) to review various aspects of DoD use of ACSA to fulfill a requirement contained in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2019. This audit included a review of 1) current agreements signed by the United States; 2) the criteria and processes used to determine the need for acquisition and cross-servicing agreements; 3) the DoD's accounting of support provided under these agreements and receipt of reciprocal support or reimbursements from partner nations; 4) notifications to Congress of the DoD's intent to sign an acquisition and cross-servicing agreements with a non-NATO member country; and 5) the use of these agreements as mechanisms for transfers of logistics support, supplies, and services to third-party countries for which there is no current agreement.

According to the DoD, during FYs 2014 through 2019, it used ACSAs to provide billions of dollars of logistic support, supplies, and services to more than 100 partner countries. This support included fuel and ammunition to assist with international exercises and coalition operations, among other efforts. As of February 2020, the DoD had ACSAs with countries in the USINDOPACOM area of operations, including the Philippines.

The GAO determined that the DoD generally provided required information to Congress. However, the GAO found that poor recordkeeping by the DoD, and late notifications to Congress by the DoD, limited the accuracy and timeliness of information provided to Congress regarding ACSAs. Furthermore, the GAO found that the DoD had not maintained

useful data to track ACSA orders and had not received reimbursement for thousands of ACSA orders. The GAO found that for an estimated 12 percent of ACSA orders authorized from October 2013 through March 2018 in the DoD's system of record, the DoD could not determine whether it had received reimbursement for support, supplies, and services provided to partner nations. Some orders remained unpaid, in part because the DoD had not requested timely repayment or monitored reimbursement. These weaknesses limited the DoD's ability to obtain reimbursement for overdue ACSA orders, which, according to the DoD, were valued at more than \$1 billion as of November 2019.

The GAO made seven recommendations to the DoD to improve ACSA recordkeeping and reimbursement, through steps such as better monitoring, periodic data reconciliation, and timely invoicing. The DoD agreed with all seven recommendations.

INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

Investigations

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies continued to conduct investigative activity related to OPE-P during the quarter, with USAID OIG investigators located in Manila.

The Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG's criminal investigative division), the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DCIS has temporarily suspended investigative personnel from traveling to the Philippines and is continually monitoring the health and welfare of the personnel performing DCIS's mission in the USINDOPACOM area of operations.

During this quarter, investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies coordinated on four open investigations. The open investigations involve grant and procurement fraud, theft, and corruption.

Hotline

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; and abuse of authority for independent review. A DoD OIG investigator coordinates the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. This quarter, the investigator did not receive any complaints related to OPE-P.

■ APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Classified Appendix to this Report

This unclassified report normally includes a classified appendix that provides additional information on Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (OPE-P). Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

APPENDIX B

Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with sections 2, 4, and 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, including the 8L requirement that the designated Lead Inspector General (IG) provide a publicly available quarterly report on an overseas contingency operation. The Department of Defense (DoD) IG is the designated Lead IG for OPE-P. The Department of State (DoS) IG is the Associate Lead IG for the operation.

This report contains information from the three Lead IG agencies—DoD Office of Inspector General (OIG), DoS OIG, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) OIG—as well as from partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period from January 1 through March 31, 2020.

To fulfill its congressional mandate to produce a quarterly report on OPE-P, the Lead IG gathers data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified or audited the information collected through open-source research or requests for information to Federal agencies.

INFORMATION COLLECTION

Each quarter, the Lead IG gathers information from Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to OPE-P. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

Various DoD, DoS, and USAID offices participated in information collection for OPE-P this quarter.

OPEN-SOURCE RESEARCH

This report also draws on the most current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report include the following:

- Congressional testimony
- Press conferences and official U.S. Government briefings
- United Nations reports
- Reports issued by nongovernmental organizations and think tanks
- Media reports

Materials collected through open-source research provide information to describe the status of the operation and help the Lead IG agencies assess information provided in their agency information collection process.

REPORT PRODUCTION

The DoD OIG, as the Lead IG, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies. The Lead IG agencies then provide relevant DoD, DoS, and USAID offices with opportunities to verify and comment on the contents of the report.

Each OIG coordinates the review process with its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask their agencies to correct inaccuracies and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review. Each Lead IG agency participates in reviewing and editing the entire quarterly report.



A flag and Philippine Air Force patch adorn the uniform of a member of the Philippine Air Force. (DoD photo)

APPENDIX C

Ongoing and Planned Oversight Projects

Table 2 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies ongoing oversight projects. Table 3 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies planned oversight projects.

Table 2.

Ongoing Oversight Projects by Lead IG and Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2020

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Evaluation of Security Controls for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Supply Chains

To evaluate security controls for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance asset supply chains.

Audit of Readiness of Mobile Medical Teams Supporting Contingency Operations in the U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility

To determine whether the Defense Health Agency and the Military Services are providing effective training to mobile medical teams prior to deploying to U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command areas of responsibility in order to improve trauma care.

Evaluation of Counterintelligence Mission Programs (Activities) in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility

To determine whether the Defense Intelligence Agency and Military Services counterintelligence program support U.S. Indo-Pacific Command mission requirements in its area of responsibility.

Evaluation of DoD Counter Threat Finance Activities in Support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command Priorities

To determine whether U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command have established the capabilities to conduct Counter Threat Finance activities intended to deny, disrupt, or defeat and degrade adversaries' ability to use global financial networks.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Inspection of United States Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland

To evaluate the programs and operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva, including programs that provide assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons in Philippines.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism

To evaluate the programs and operations of the Bureau of Counterterrorism.

Follow-up Audit of the Department of State Efforts to Measure, Evaluate, and Sustain Antiterrorism Assistance Program Objectives in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

To determine whether the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the Bureau of Counterterrorism have implemented corrective actions to address DoS OIG's previous recommendations and whether those actions have improved the DoS's efforts to measure, evaluate, and sustain the Anti-Terrorism Assistance program objectives within the East Asian and Pacific Affairs region.

U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of USAID's Self-Reliance Initiative***

To determine to what extent are USAID's self-reliance metrics incorporated into its development programming strategy; and the challenges USAID faces in implementing development activities as envisioned under the Journey to Self-Reliance Initiative.

Audit of USAID's Contract Termination Practices

To assess USAID's procedures guiding acquisition award terminations, and if selected acquisition awards were terminated in accordance with established requirements.

Table 3.

Planned Oversight Projects by Lead IG and Partner Agencies, as of March 31, 2020**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****Evaluation of the Combatant Commands' Intelligence Interrogation Approaches and Techniques***

To determine whether U.S. Africa Command's and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's oversight of intelligence interrogations adheres to applicable DoD policies and regulations, and the overall effect of these policies and regulations on the interrogation process.

Classified Evaluation of an Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines Intelligence Program

To determine if the intelligence information sharing requirements of the U.S. forces, Armed Forces of the Philippines, and other regional partners in OPE-P are being satisfied by current policies, procedures, and supporting data architecture.

Evaluation of Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing

To determine whether Theater Support Activity's tactical signals intelligence processing is sufficient to satisfy priority intelligence requirements.

Evaluation of U.S. Special Operations Command Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center

To determine whether U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Military Information Support Operations Web Operations Center provides U.S. combatant commanders the increased capability to conduct Internet-based information operations globally.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL***Audit of DoS Management of Awards to International Organizations***

To determine whether DoS efforts to identify, assess, and manage risks before awarding funds to international organizations are effective; and assess whether DoS policies, processes, and guidance for monitoring awards to international organizations are effective in ensuring that funds are managed and spent to further U.S. goals and objectives.

Audit of DoS Implementation of National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

To determine whether the DoS Office of Global Women's Issues has tailored applicable DoS engagements and program to help women be more prepared for, and able to participate in, decision-making processes related to conflict and crisis; established metric and targets to evaluate, measure, and report DoS performance; and created a process to modify or redirect program resources on the basis of performance that informs resource allocation and planning.

ACRONYMS

Acronym	
ACSA	acquisition and cross-servicing agreement
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
COVID-19	coronavirus disease–2019
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoS	Department of State
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIS-EA	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria–East Asia, formerly referred to as ISIS-Philippines (ISIS-P)

Acronym	
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
NPA	New People’s Army
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPE-P	Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines
PNP	Philippine National Police
PRM	DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SOCPAC	U.S. Special Operations Command-Pacific
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USINDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
VFA	Philippines–United States Visiting Forces Agreement



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