



OPERATION PACIFIC EAGLE-PHILIPPINES

LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS



APRIL 1, 2020-JUNE 30, 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 the U.S. 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

This report normally includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. counterterrorism mission in the Philippines. Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

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 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 April 1 through June 30, 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 coronavirus disease–2019 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.



Handwritten signature of Sean W. O'Donnell in black ink.

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



Handwritten signature of Stephen Akard in black ink.

Stephen Akard
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of State



Handwritten signature of Ann Calvaresi Barr in black ink.

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



On the Cover

(Top row): An Assault Amphibious Vehicle in the Philippine Sea drives into the well deck of a ship (U.S. Marine Corps photo); U.S. sailors conduct a replenishment at sea training event (U.S. Navy photo); (Bottom row): USS America conducts flight operations 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, ISIS–East Asia (ISIS-EA), the Philippine faction of the terrorist group, sought to capitalize on the Philippine government’s deployment of military assets to assist with the response to the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. While ISIS-EA carried out its most deadly attack in 15 months, levels of violence in the Philippines were similar to previous quarters.

Since the beginning of Lead IG reporting on OPE-P in 2018, there has been little change in the capabilities, size, financing, and operations of ISIS-EA. The group continues to carry out sporadic, mostly small-scale attacks. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), with support from the United States, continues to conduct counterterrorism operations that keep ISIS-EA from spreading, and continues to rely on U.S.-provided intelligence, air assets, and other support to conduct counterterrorism operations.

In general, efforts to reduce extremism in the Philippines do not appear to have made a substantial difference since the launch of OPE-P. ISIS-EA and the other violent extremist groups in the Philippines that either coordinate with or share members with ISIS, have remained about the same size and strength for the last few years. These groups continue to operate in the southern Philippines where separatist groups and extremist groups have existed for decades. Since the outset of Lead IG reporting on OPE-P in 2018, we have seen little progress in improving the economic, social, and political conditions in that part of the country.

This quarter, the Philippine government suspended its termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement between the Philippines and the United States, which was set to enter into effect in August. The termination of the agreement would alter, and possibly end, some of the support the DoD provides to the Philippines. The suspension, announced on June 2, is valid for 180 days, at which point the Philippine government can either extend the suspension or resume the termination process.

Lastly, while USAID and its implementing partners prioritized COVID-19 response efforts in the Philippines this quarter, only 3 percent of the \$22 million USAID allocated for COVID-19 activities in the Philippines had been disbursed by the end of the quarter.

I look forward to working with my Lead IG colleagues to continue to report on and provide oversight of OPE-P and related U.S. Government activity, as required by the IG Act.



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



USS America conducts flight operations in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

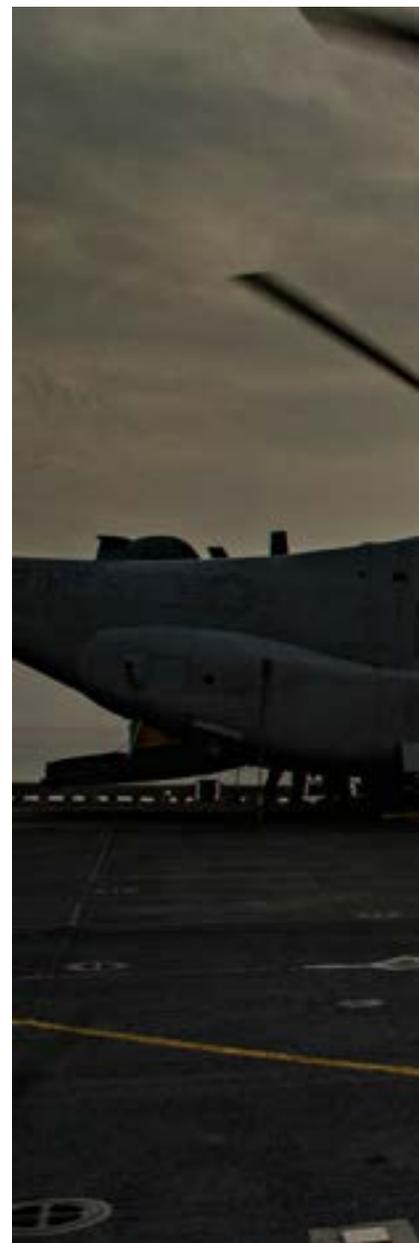
ISIS-EA Continues to Clash with Philippine Forces During COVID-19 Pandemic

During the quarter, ISIS–East Asia (ISIS-EA) conducted terrorist attacks in the Philippines despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. On April 17, the group carried out its deadliest attack in 15 months, ambushing Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) soldiers on the island of Jolo, killing 12 AFP soldiers and wounding 13.¹ In June, Philippine security officials disrupted an ISIS-EA cell near Manila, killing four suspected terrorists.² This incident appears to be significant as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) had previously reported to the DoD OIG that ISIS-EA operated almost exclusively in the country’s southern provinces and activity near the capital was extremely rare.³ Additional ISIS-EA attacks in their traditional area of operations included a rocket attack against civilians and an attempted ambush of AFP soldiers, both of which took place as Muslims were celebrating the end of Ramadan in late May.⁴

The AFP continued to pursue ISIS-EA this quarter, including an operation in June that resulted in the killing of at least five terrorist fighters and the capture of an ISIS-EA faction leader who specialized in kidnap-for-ransom operations.⁵ International law enforcement efforts this quarter also targeted human trafficking along a known terrorist transit route in the region. An International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) operation resulted in the arrests of more than 180 individuals from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, and the rescue of 82 human trafficking victims from the Philippines.⁶

Quarantine Measures May Fuel Local Tensions and Strain Security Resources

The U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that the economic impact of COVID-19 quarantine measures may be fueling social tensions, as consumer prices increased, small businesses were closed, and access to consumer goods and banks was limited.⁷ In May, terrorists attacked a COVID-19 quarantine checkpoint in Maguindanao, killing two AFP soldiers.⁸ Social media posts by ISIS affiliates included calls for attacks against individuals adhering to the Philippine government’s COVID-19 restrictions and threats of violence if mosques were not allowed to reopen. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) also assessed that it was possible that ISIS-EA was attempting to take advantage of the AFP’s shift of counterterrorism resources to enforce COVID-19 restrictions.⁹



An MV-22B Osprey aircraft lands aboard the USS America assault ship in the Philippine Sea. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)



According to a media report, local governments in and around Manila requested hundreds of AFP forces to assist with enforcing the government's strict COVID-19 quarantine policies.¹⁰ According to Philippine government media reporting, in April, the Philippine National Police deployed 116 Special Action Forces personnel to the national capital area to set up checkpoints and to serve as a show of force to those violating quarantine. Additionally, the AFP deployed 800 reservists to assist in implementing quarantine restrictions.¹¹

Arrests for quarantine violations compounded the existing problem of overcrowded prisons and jails. According to the World Prison Brief, a database that provides information about prison systems throughout the world, the Philippines' 7 national prisons and 926 local jails were already filled to more than 450 percent of capacity before the pandemic.¹² As of May, the Philippine prison system had 9,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 637 deaths. The Philippine Supreme Court ordered the release of nearly 10,000 prisoners due to infections

among both inmates and staff.¹³ U.S. Special Operations Command–Pacific (SOCPAC) stated that while the Philippine government intended to keep violent criminals and terrorists incarcerated, non-violent offenders who may have been recruited into ISIS-EA while in prison may be among those released.¹⁴

COVID-19 restrictions during the quarter affected the type and amount of support that U.S. military advisors were able to provide to their Philippine partners. SOCPAC reported that it held leadership engagements and training events virtually and provided expertise, analytics, and information collection support to Philippine operations remotely.¹⁵ However, COVID-19 restrictions, coupled with force rotations, negatively impacted the amount of U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support provided to the AFP this quarter. As a result, the AFP leveraged its own manned ISR and small unmanned aerial system platforms to augment U.S. ISR support for counterterrorism operations.¹⁶ Civil affairs activities under OPE-P this quarter focused on delivery of medical supplies and equipment to Philippine frontline healthcare professionals treating COVID-19 patients on the islands of Mindanao and Luzon.¹⁷

USAID reported this quarter that it had approved more than \$22 million for the COVID-19 response in the Philippines.

Philippine Government Suspends Termination of U.S. Security Agreement

In February, the Philippine government notified the U.S. Embassy in Manila of its intention to withdraw from the bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), triggering the start of a 180-day waiting period after which the agreement would be terminated. This action threatens future prospects for U.S. military support to the Philippines.¹⁸ The VFA establishes the rules by which U.S. military personnel, vessels, and aircraft may enter the Philippines and stipulates how criminal offenses committed by U.S. military personnel in the Philippines should be prosecuted.¹⁹

On June 2, the Philippine government announced that it was suspending its earlier notice of termination for at least 6 months.²⁰ The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported in a cable that the main reasons for this suspension were the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening economic trends, and recent aggressive behavior by China.²¹ The embassy and U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper welcomed the suspension of the termination.²²

Revised Terrorism Law Aims to Combat Violent Extremists but Also Stirs Controversy

During the quarter, the Philippine Congress passed a revised anti-terrorism law, which Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte signed shortly after the quarter ended. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 criminalizes planning of and providing material support for terrorist acts.²³ The U.S. Embassy in Manila stated in a cable that the new law will bring the Philippines into closer alignment with international norms.²⁴ The law has drawn criticism both in the Philippines and internationally from those who believe that its definition of terrorism is overly broad and could lead to abuses, including the criminalization of political dissent.²⁵ The cable noted these concerns but maintained that the law itself is sound, and that any concerns from human rights groups should prompt scrutiny of how the law is implemented, rather than of the law itself.²⁶

USAID Adapts Assistance Programs to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic

USAID reported this quarter that it had approved more than \$22 million for the COVID-19 response in the Philippines.²⁷ However, only \$605,000 (or 3 percent) of the total funding had been disbursed by the end of the quarter.²⁸ USAID reported that it supported the Philippine government's five-point COVID-19 strategy of increasing resilience; stopping the transmission; reducing the contact rate; shortening the duration of infectiousness; and enhancing the quality, consistency, and affordability of healthcare.²⁹ However, with only limited funds disbursed, much of this assistance had yet to be implemented as of the end of the quarter.³⁰

Although a majority of COVID-19 cases were in the national capital region, USAID reported that Mindanao, in the south of the country, faced greater difficulty in responding to the pandemic than other parts of the Philippines due to weak healthcare systems, limited testing capacity, and displaced populations.³¹ USAID reported that in areas of the southern Philippines hardest hit by the pandemic, USAID implementers expanded access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.³² Other efforts included plans to upgrade laboratories and expand specimen transport systems to improve testing capacity.³³ In March, some humanitarian assistance organizations faced temporary challenges reaching populations in need, due to local quarantine measures and travel restrictions.³⁴ USAID reported that in response this quarter, its implementers adapted their field activities, employing online training and remote monitoring where possible.³⁵

Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies completed six reports related to Operation Pacific Eagle-Philippines (OPE-P), including an audit of DoD mobile medical team training and an audit of a DoS anti-terrorism training program. As of June 30, 2020, 10 oversight projects related to the Philippines were ongoing, and 1 was 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.



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, 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 the 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, many of which had existed for decades, declared allegiance to ISIS. The international leadership of ISIS supported its Philippine branch with financing, media, and foreign fighters, while recognizing 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, Hatib Sawadjaan has been the acting leader of ISIS-aligned jihadist groups in the Philippines, but these groups now operate largely independently of each other. International ISIS leadership continues to track and claim attacks in the Philippines, but operational ties between the core ISIS group in Iraq and Syria (ISIS-Core) and ISIS in the Philippines have been significantly weakened. However, the estimated 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.

THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

STATUS OF THE CONFLICT

This quarter, ISIS–East Asia (ISIS-EA) conducted violent terrorist activity in the Philippines as the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic strained the resources of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), contributed to social and economic tension across the country, and placed constraints on the capacity of U.S. military advisors to support their Philippine partners. As has been the case since the beginning of OPE-P, ISIS-EA remained organizationally fractured, largely isolated from the support of international terrorist networks, unable to expand its presence, but still capable of conducting sporadic deadly attacks.

Philippine Soldiers Ambushed in Deadliest Attack Since January 2019

On April 17, approximately 40 ISIS-EA and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants ambushed AFP soldiers near Patikul on the island of Jolo.³⁶ The militants killed 12 AFP soldiers and wounded 13 in what the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) described as the deadliest incident involving ASG or ISIS-EA since the January 2019 suicide bombing of a cathedral in Jolo, which left 23 people dead and more than 100 wounded.³⁷ According to media reports, the ambushed AFP unit was in pursuit of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, an ISIS-EA leader and organizer of the 2019 cathedral bombing. An AFP spokesperson told reporters that while the military mourned the losses of April 17, it would continue effort to capture or kill Sawadjaan.³⁸

The DIA attributed the high number of AFP casualties in this incident to the fact that a large number of ISIS-EA and ASG fighters had “assumed advantageous positions” before launching the attack.³⁹ A statement from the commander of the AFP’s Western Mindanao Command, Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana, confirmed that the enemy controlled the higher ground during the clash.⁴⁰ The DIA reported that of the 12 AFP soldiers who were killed, 3 were attacked with bladed weapons, probably machetes, and ISIS-EA fighters attempted to behead a fourth.⁴¹ The attackers seized AFP weapons and equipment during the engagement, including rifles, a grenade launcher, a light machine gun, and a handheld radio unit, according to the DIA.⁴² ISIS-EA later released footage on social media purportedly from the attack.⁴³ However, the U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that it confirmed the footage released by ISIS-EA was older and not recorded in 2020.⁴⁴

The ISIS-EA and ASG fighters operated under the joint command of Hatib Sawadjaan, the de facto leader of ISIS-EA, and Radulan Sahiron, who leads a non-ISIS aligned faction of ASG. The DIA stated that direct cooperation of this kind between Sahiron and Sawadjaan was unusual, and it is likely that AFP operations in the preceding days drove ISIS-EA and ASG fighters into a shared defensive posture. Sahiron previously operated from strongholds in the Patikul region, where the attack occurred.⁴⁵

On April 18, the day after the ASG ambush of the AFP, members of the AFP’s Joint Task Force Sulu, acting on a tip, killed Vikram Sahiron, an ASG bomb maker and a grandson of Radulan Sahiron, in Talipao, several miles south of Patikul. Lieutenant General Sobejana told reporters that Vikram had been involved in both the April 17 attack and the January 2019 cathedral bombing. Lieutenant General Sobejana also credited the involvement of the local community in the success of the operation and encouraged citizens to continue providing the military with reliable information on the movements of suspected terrorists.⁴⁶ According to the DIA, 4 AFP Special Operational Forces soldiers and 17 ASG fighters were killed in a separate firefight on Jolo between the AFP and ASG.⁴⁷ Additionally, the U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that six militants were killed and eight soldiers wounded in a firefight between the AFP and the ASG in Patikul on April 23.⁴⁸

COVID-19 Restrictions Create Possible Opportunities for Violent Extremists

The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported in an April cable that there were possible signs that the economic impact of the enhanced COVID-19 quarantine was fueling social tensions. The cable reported that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao’s (BARMM) Interior Minister told embassy officials on April 3 that “we cannot sustain enhanced quarantine until the end of April...there are food shortages already, there would be riots.”⁴⁹ The cable added that in North Cotabato province, where there had not been any confirmed COVID-19 cases at the time, local residents gathered on April 1 to protest the conversion of New Cebu Hospital into a COVID-19 isolation and treatment facility.⁵⁰ USAID reported that small businesses on Mindanao were unable to procure commodities and goods, and shops were ordered closed for 2 months before being allowed to reopen in mid-May.⁵¹ USAID added that consumer goods prices increased, retail sales decreased, and residents had less access to banks in nearby cities.⁵²

The DIA reported that individuals possibly linked to ISIS-EA attacked a COVID-19 quarantine checkpoint in Maguindanao in May, killing two AFP soldiers. ISIS-Core quickly claimed responsibility for the attack and indicated that it was a response to the Philippine government’s COVID-19 restrictions. The DIA stated that the May attack was likely one of opportunity. The DIA added that it lacked information indicating whether ISIS-EA had significantly shifted its overall intensity of recruitment and attack as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the DIA, the majority of ISIS-EA attacks during the quarter were likely to have been defensive in nature, possibly launched because of ongoing AFP operations against the group.⁵³

Extremists in the Philippines, some with possible links to ISIS-EA, attempted to capitalize on the Philippine government’s COVID-19 response for propaganda purposes, according to the DIA. Social media posts by extremists included calls for attacks against individuals adhering to the Philippine government’s COVID-19 restrictions and threats of violence if mosques were not allowed to reopen. According to the DIA, these social media posts were sporadic and inconsistent in





U.S. sailors conduct a replenishment at sea training event in the Indo-Pacific region. (U.S. Navy photo)

their messaging and appeared to have been issued by ISIS-EA, as opposed to ISIS-Core. The DIA added that it was possible that ISIS-EA was attempting to take advantage of the AFP's shift of counterterrorism resources to enforce COVID-19 restrictions; the DIA reported that it lacked information indicating whether this type of propaganda resulted in any increase in terrorist violence or recruitment.⁵⁴

This quarter, ISIS-EA members in Indonesia publicly touted COVID-19 as an “ally” in ISIS’ fight against its enemies, using the pandemic as a recruitment tool. The DIA reported that it had not seen similar rhetoric from ISIS-EA members in the Philippines. ISIS-EA factions in the Philippines recruit primarily through family and clan networks, recruitment methods that are largely unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to DIA, ISIS-EA’s branches in Indonesia and the Philippines will likely continue to draw upon these pools of individuals and recruit at a relatively similar rate to previous quarters.⁵⁵

Violence Mars Ramadan Celebration

In late May, two separate attacks in the southern Philippines resulted in three deaths during Eid al-Fitr celebrations marking the end of Ramadan, according to a media report. A mortar round fired into a residential neighborhood in Maguindanao province killed 2 children and wounded 13 other civilians. Although no one claimed responsibility, a Philippine police official said that the mortar round used was typical of those employed by guerrilla fighters in the area.⁵⁶ However, according to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the father of the two children killed in the attack claimed that the AFP fired the mortar round.⁵⁷ Separately, a Cotabato City official was gunned down in public. According to media reports, the official had survived a previous attempt on his life. As of the end of the quarter, no group had made any claim of responsibility for the official’s death.⁵⁸

In the second Eid attack, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ambushed an AFP detachment but did not harm any soldiers. The BIFF is a violent jihadist group operating primarily on Mindanao with several factions sworn to ISIS-EA. A spokesperson for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a group of former rebels now working with the Philippine government to build an autonomous Muslim region, expressed regret that these attacks took place when Muslims were celebrating the end of Ramadan. The MILF spokesperson told reporters, “The saddest part of the incident is that we are about to commence the next decommissioning of our combatants and I hope that this will not cause a hindrance to the process.”⁵⁹

Philippine Authorities Disrupt Rare ISIS-EA Plot in Manila

On June 26, Philippine security officials killed four suspected ISIS-EA militants in Parañaque, a city in Metro Manila (a densely populated urban area made up of several cities, including the capital). One officer was wounded when police raided a house where the suspects were staying. According to media sources, police and intelligence reporting connected the four suspects to a sleeper cell sent by Hatib Sawadjaan to Metro Manila.

Extremists in the Philippines, some with possible links to ISIS-EA, attempted to capitalize on the Philippine government’s COVID-19 response for propaganda purposes, according to the DIA.

A media report identified one of the suspects as a finance and logistics facilitator who allegedly provided support for the 2019 Jolo cathedral bombing with funds received from an Indonesian terrorist financier.⁶⁰

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) previously reported that the group “remains confined to its historic operating areas of the southern Philippines, and it has not demonstrated a capability to operate elsewhere in the country.”⁶¹ USINDOPACOM added that it did not believe the activity in Metro Manila represented a shift in ISIS-EA tactics or strategy, saying that while ISIS-EA has supporters across the country, the group remains focused on operations in the south.⁶²

AFP Operations on Mindanao Target the BIFF

On June 6, the AFP announced that combat operations against the BIFF in Sultan Kudarat province on Mindanao killed at least five enemy fighters and wounded nine. An AFP spokesperson told reporters that the operation was directed against Tugali Guimal Galmak, a BIFF faction leader, who was captured along with 13 others. According to the AFP, Galmak’s group specialized in kidnap-for-ransom operations and was affiliated with ISIS-EA. The AFP reported no casualties of its own in the operation.⁶³

INTERPOL Operation Targets Terrorist Trade Routes and Human Trafficking

This quarter, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) announced that a coordinated international law enforcement operation targeting human trafficking activity resulted in more than 180 arrests and the rescue of 82 human trafficking victims between February 24 and March 20. One of those arrested was a suspected ASG member. Human trafficking is a key source of revenue for terrorists in Southeast Asia. Operation Maharlika III involved a series of simultaneous law enforcement and border control actions along known terrorist transit routes in the region, conducted by law enforcement authorities from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. INTERPOL announced that the operation also seized firearms, improvised explosive devices, and other illicit goods and substances worth more than \$1 million.⁶⁴

USINDOPACOM stated that despite the success of Operation Maharlika III, criminal and terrorist groups operating in the waters between the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia have an extensive history of navigating across international borders in the Sulu archipelago and will likely continue to do so.⁶⁵

COVID-19 Delays Key Element of Peace Process

Previous Lead IG reports have noted that a key goal of the MILF’s peace agreement with the Philippine government and the establishment of the BARMM is the phased decommissioning and disarming of the MILF’s 40,000 fighters. However, progress toward achieving this goal has been slow.⁶⁶



The U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that the decommissioning process was facing problems even before COVID-19 and that it essentially had stalled since the pandemic began. The third phase of decommissioning, which requires former combatants to travel to Camp Abubakar in Maguindanao, was scheduled to begin on March 11 but it was suspended due to the pandemic and quarantine measures. Some MILF members who took part in the second phase were stranded at Camp Abubakar and unable to get back to their home provinces, according to the embassy.⁶⁷

Since the decommissioning began, former militants have surrendered 2,100 weapons, which the government has destroyed, according to the Independent Decommissioning Body. However, embassy contacts reported that the destroyed weapons were mostly older and lower grade. The embassy reported that former combatants received cash grants of approximately \$2,000 for taking part in the program. The embassy predicted that this process, which was already facing delays before the pandemic, would likely fail to meet the deadlines established in the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF.⁶⁸

USAID has trained health workers and frontline responders to strengthen the COVID-19 response in Manila, Philippines. (USINDOPACOM photo)

Government Ceasefire with Communist Rebels Breaks Down

Last quarter, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippine government declared a temporary, unilateral ceasefire with the country's communist insurgency, the New People's Army (NPA), effective March 19. On March 26, the NPA announced that it would reciprocate the temporary ceasefire, which did not apply to ISIS-EA. According to media sources, the Philippine government opted not to extend the ceasefire when it ended on April 15, citing bad faith on the part of the NPA, which it accused of conducting attacks during the ceasefire.⁶⁹ The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that an NPA representative submitted a letter to the UN Secretary General claiming that the AFP committed 13 ceasefire violations while maintaining that the NPA fully complied with the ceasefire. However, the AFP disputed this claim, countering that in all 13 alleged cases, the NPA fired first.⁷⁰

According to media reporting, the NPA accused government forces of failing to abide by the terms of their own ceasefire by continuing "unabated" counterinsurgency operations between March 19 and April 15. The NPA claimed that 18 of its fighters and 31 AFP soldiers were killed in clashes while the ceasefire was supposed to be in effect; an AFP spokesperson told reporters that the military disputed these numbers. According to media sources, the NPA extended its unilateral ceasefire until April 30 in compliance with the UN's call for a global cessation of hostilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on media reporting, it was unclear whether and to what extent the NPA actually abided by its pledge during that period. The NPA's political wing, the Communist Party of the Philippines, announced that NPA militants would openly resume offensives against Philippine government forces on May 1.⁷¹

In June, as the Philippine government eased COVID-19 restrictions in many parts of the country (see page 22), the AFP announced plans to increase pressure on the NPA. An AFP spokesperson told reporters that Philippine forces killed at least 10 NPA fighters in clashes between June 16 and 23. The AFP reported that it captured 22 militants during that same period, as well as firearms, explosives, electronics, and USB flash drives containing information about the organization.⁷²

According to a media report, the NPA has approximately 4,000 members and conducts insurgent activities in 219 towns across 31 provinces. The Philippine government has previously targeted individuals with tangential connections to the NPA on suspicion of being communists or communist sympathizers.⁷³ President Duterte initially pledged to bring about peace talks with the NPA early in his administration, and both sides have periodically indicated a willingness to negotiate, according to a media report.⁷⁴ However, as of this quarter, both the Philippine government and the NPA had rejected the notion of commencing peace talks.⁷⁵

In early June, the U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that there had been a "surge" in NPA recruitment after the ceasefire collapsed and President Duterte announced he would no longer engage in peace talks. The embassy reported that the NPA clashed with the AFP in areas of southern Luzon and northern Mindanao where the NPA had not been active for several years. While the embassy reported that it was not certain of an exact reason for the increase in NPA recruitment and activity, it stated that the economic impact of the quarantine measures was a likely cause, as the NPA had provided salaries and food to many of its fighters during the crisis.⁷⁶

STATUS OF ISIS-EA

USINDOPACOM reported to the DoD OIG that it uses four metrics to track the degradation of ISIS-EA in the Philippines: 1) the lack of an ISIS-Core designated leader in the Philippines; 2) ISIS-Core's financial support to ISIS-EA; 3) the quality of ISIS-Core media coverage of ISIS-EA's activities; and 4) cohesion or fragmentation of ISIS-EA's individual elements. This quarter, USINDOPACOM reported that it observed no changes in ISIS-EA according to any of these metrics. USINDOPACOM assessed that ISIS-Core may never publicly acknowledge a new ISIS-EA leader due to the length of time since the death of ISIS-EA's first and only recognized leader, Isnilon Hapilon, in 2017.⁷⁷

Sawadjaan Continues as Acting Head of a Divided ISIS-EA

As of this quarter, ISIS-Core had not publicly acknowledged a leader of ISIS-EA. However, international ISIS affiliates regard Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, an ASG faction leader, as the de facto leader of ISIS-EA in the Philippines, according to the DIA. A group of ISIS-aligned ASG leaders confirmed Sawadjaan as ISIS-EA's overall leader in May 2018. However, the validity of this decision has remained in question because the meeting excluded other ISIS-EA faction leaders who oppose Sawadjaan. The DIA concurred with USINDOPACOM's assessment that ISIS-Core may never publicly acknowledge Sawadjaan's appointment.⁷⁸

ISIS-Core Enabled Funding Remains Unclear

The DIA reported that it had observed no changes this quarter in ISIS-EA's finances, adding that ISIS-EA does not publicize the type of financial support it receives from ISIS-Core.⁷⁹ The DIA added that it had not observed any indication of changes in ISIS-EA's tactics, capabilities, or capacity to carry out large-scale attacks this quarter.⁸⁰

ISIS Media Seeks to Amplify ISIS-EA Activity

This quarter, ISIS-EA claimed seven attacks in the Philippines through official ISIS-Core media channels, according to the DIA. Six of the attacks were individually claimed through ISIS-Core's Amaq Media and one claim appeared in the weekly ISIS magazine, al-Naba. ISIS-Core media also claimed a June 1 attack on a police station in Indonesia. However, the claim did not positively link the attacker to ISIS-EA. The DIA stated that ISIS-Core provided multimedia support to ISIS-EA this quarter, which included publishing photos of ISIS-EA members celebrating Ramadan.⁸¹

The DIA stated that while the overall trend is towards better media support from ISIS-Core, the support provided this quarter does not represent a significant increase over previous quarters, either in terms of quantity or quality.⁸² USINDOPACOM added that while there were more ISIS-EA media claims this quarter, ISIS-EA likely exaggerates its claims. USINDOPACOM stated that it disputes the facts of ISIS-EA media claims.⁸³

ISIS-EA Remains Organizationally and Geographically Divided

The DIA assessed that ISIS-EA's posture in the Philippines remained unchanged from previous quarters, with an estimated 300 to 500 members divided among several factions, including the ASG, the Esmael faction of the BIFF, the Maute Group, and Ansar Khalifah

Philippines. According to the DIA, the ASG factions operate primarily on the islands of Basilan and Jolo, while the BIFF is most active in the provinces of Maguindanao and South Cotabato on Mindanao. The Maute Group retains a marginal presence in Lanao del Sur province, of which Marawi is the capital, according to the DIA.⁸⁴ The DIA reported that the number of confrontations between ISIS-EA and the AFP was highest on Jolo this quarter. ISIS-EA has maintained a strong foothold in the Sulu archipelago and central Mindanao, but according to the DIA, the local population does not actively support ISIS, which makes it necessary for these fighters to operate out of transient jungle encampments.⁸⁵

According to the DIA, ISIS-Core stated its intent to spread its ideology to other Southeast Asian countries. While ISIS affiliates are now active in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, ISIS has not been successful in expanding ISIS-EA's presence into a functional trans-Southeast Asian movement, despite vulnerable Muslim populations in Burma and Bangladesh. The DIA reported that while ISIS affiliates have conducted attacks in Indonesia, there was no evidence of a concerted coordination effort between ISIS-EA's Indonesian and Philippine branches. The DIA added that Indonesian and Malaysian counterterrorism operations were largely successful in interrupting ISIS-EA's plans and disrupting the flow of foreign fighters into the Philippines.⁸⁶

The DIA reported that while it had not observed an influx of foreign fighters into the Philippines, it assessed that Indonesian and Malaysian terrorists likely continue to view the southern Philippines as an attractive destination to escape counterterrorism pressure in their respective home countries.⁸⁷ The DIA estimated that there are probably fewer than 40 active foreign fighters supporting ISIS-EA in the Philippines, and that most of these are from Indonesia and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia.⁸⁸

PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT

Advise and Assist Operations Continue with COVID-19 Restrictions and Modifications

This quarter, U.S. Special Operations Command–Pacific (SOCPAC) reported that its elements in the Philippines modified operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related movement restrictions. SOCPAC reported that it held virtual key leader engagements, partner nation coordination, and limited training events where possible. According to SOCPAC, these activities included the provision of expertise, analytics, and information collection support to AFP operations remotely.⁸⁹

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) stated that the DoD was employing a tiered approach to protect its forces from COVID-19. OUSD(P) said the system was designed to prioritize testing and public health measures to ensure the health of those troops who must be on mission and are unable to social distance while conducting their work. The counterterrorism forces executing OPE-P are included in the top tier, as their work is considered mission essential. The DoD stated that it employs restriction of movement, screening questionnaires, and testing to enable these forces to conduct their missions as safely as possible.⁹⁰

SOC PAC reported that COVID-19 significantly impacted the ability of U.S. forces to provide casualty evacuation support to the AFP this quarter. However, SOC PAC stated that U.S. advisors developed procedures and isolation techniques to transport AFP casualties while protecting personnel from exposure to COVID-19. The AFP responded positively to these efforts, according to SOC PAC, but Philippine troops did not use the capability and instead continued to rely on the AFP's air and ground platforms for casualty evacuation support throughout this quarter.⁹¹

U.S. Special Operations Forces Provide Remote Advising and ISR Support

This quarter, U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support to the AFP was negatively impacted by COVID-19 personnel restrictions, a transition between ISR contracts, and seasonal weather.⁹² Despite these factors, the AFP continued to leverage ISR provided by the U.S. in their operations, according to SOC PAC. The AFP also leveraged their own manned ISR and small unmanned aerial system (UAS) platforms to augment U.S. support to counterterrorism operations.⁹³ SOC PAC reported that its advisors continued to provide advice on ISR and best practices for small UAS deployment, as the AFP plans to increase its own ISR capacity in the near future.⁹⁴

SOC PAC reported that U.S. special operations personnel supporting OPE-P continued to conduct advise and assist efforts remotely. They were challenged in their ability to support the AFP's activities fully due COVID-19 restrictions, and because the AFP shifted some resources to support virus quarantine efforts. U.S. advisors continued to share information with the AFP to develop target intelligence packages and provided ISR-related information in support of AFP operations against ISIS-EA. Sulu province, which includes the island of Jolo, remained the most active region for AFP operations this quarter, according to SOC PAC.⁹⁵

SOC PAC assessed that the most severe restrictions on the movement of U.S. advisors and their coordination with the AFP will likely be relaxed next quarter, although social distancing requirements and reduced manpower may continue to impact operations. Additionally, SOC PAC assessed that in the coming quarter ISIS-EA will likely increase its attacks, regroup, recruit, and advance its messaging because of the Philippine government's COVID-19 restrictions and the redirection of AFP assets away from counterterrorism efforts and toward pandemic response. As larger social gatherings slowly return, opportunities for terrorist attacks may increase, according to SOC PAC.⁹⁶

U.S. military advisors continued to work with Philippine counterparts to support development of the AFP's Special Operations Command, a unified combatant command similar to U.S. Special Operations Command. SOC PAC reported that COVID-19 restrictions limited these interactions to a series of virtual meetings to discuss acquisition processes and strategies.⁹⁷

Civil Affairs Efforts Shift to COVID-19 Relief

According to SOCPAC, U.S. civil affairs activities related to OPE-P focused on the delivery of locally procured personal protective equipment for Philippine frontline healthcare professionals treating COVID-19 patients on Mindanao and Luzon. SOCPAC stated that U.S. troops, operating under COVID-19 precautions, delivered \$203,000 worth of equipment in conjunction with local government units, the AFP, and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to increase the capacity of Philippine medical facilities in Zamboanga, Jolo, Basilan, Iligan, Cotabato, Puerto Princesa, Tarlac, Bulacan, and Bataan.⁹⁸

Unrelated to OPE-P, U.S. advisors worked with the AFP to distribute medical aid provided through the DoD's Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid program. SOCPAC reported that through these efforts, it provided assistance to local medical facilities and aided the AFP in its focus on responding to COVID-19.⁹⁹

Figure 1.

Map of Mindanao Region



Interagency U.S. Government Efforts Seek to Combat Terrorism in the Philippines

This quarter, the Department of Justice (DoJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) described several of their initiatives intended to develop law enforcement capabilities and to counter VEO activity in the Philippines.

DOJ ACTIVITY

- The DoJ's National Security Division and its Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training concluded a multi-year effort to advise the Philippine government on amending its counterterrorism law. The Philippines enacted a new law shortly after the quarter ended. (See page 20.) According to the DoJ, this new law addresses preparation and planning of terrorist activity while also strengthening procedures for terrorism trials.¹⁰⁰
- The Joint Terrorism Financial Investigations Group, established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, consists of Philippine law enforcement agencies which focus primarily on terrorism investigations. According to the DoJ, this task force is exploring options available under the Philippine counterterrorism financing law to disrupt and dismantle terrorist groups in the region.¹⁰¹
- The DoJ stated that the Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training conducts a quarterly training of Philippine judges on money laundering and asset forfeiture. This office also conducts regular training of prosecutors and investigators on counterterrorism, which have been conducted virtually since March.¹⁰²
- The DoJ reported that its International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program continued to engage with the Philippine Anti-Money Laundering Council this quarter in efforts to identify specific gaps and needs in Philippine counterterrorism finance investigations. Through this program, the DoJ collaborates with Philippine government partners with the goal of building stronger and more effective analytical, targeting, and investigative capabilities. According to the DoJ, the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed activity under this program.¹⁰³
- On June 28, PNP instructors trained by DoJ advisors planned to conduct a 3-week police ethics course for approximately 250 cadets at the PNP Academy, despite COVID-19 restrictions. According to the DoJ, this course was designed to facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between sound ethical behavior and effective police service, which the DoJ says contributes to greater integrity in counterterrorism investigations and operations.¹⁰⁴

DHS ACTIVITY

- The Transportation Security Administration worked in cooperation with the DoS to mitigate threats against commercial aviation flights departing Philippine airports bound for the United States. According to the DHS, the Sustaining Asian Shield in Southeast Asia program includes assessing airports and airlines to identify vulnerabilities; subject matter expert mentoring; aviation security training; and donating screening equipment.¹⁰⁵
- U.S. Coast Guard's National Security Cutter deployments in support of USINDOPACOM aim to promote professional exchanges with the Philippine Coast Guard and Navy. According to the DHS, the U.S. Coast Guard's history of supporting the Philippines includes the provision of training in both maritime security and law enforcement with the goal of helping to counter ISIS affiliates and other VEOs in the Philippines.¹⁰⁶

DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Philippine Government Suspends Termination of Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States

On June 2, according to a Philippine government news service, the Philippine government announced that it had suspended its earlier decision to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States “in light of political and other developments in the region.”¹⁰⁷ According to the news service, the official notice delivered to the U.S. Embassy in Manila was made effective June 1, and provided for a 6-month suspension of the February 11 notification of the Philippines’ intent to terminate the agreement. The Philippine government’s notice to the embassy stated that the suspension would be renewable for an additional 6 months at the discretion of the Philippine government.¹⁰⁸

The VFA, which entered into force in 1999, establishes the rules by which U.S. military personnel, vessels, and aircraft may enter the Philippines. The VFA also delineates whether certain criminal offenses alleged to have been committed by U.S. military personnel are subject to U.S. or Philippine legal systems.¹⁰⁹ According to the terms of the agreement, the notification provided by the Philippine government to the U.S. Embassy in Manila on February 11 triggered the start of a 180-day waiting period after which the agreement would be terminated, absent any action by the Philippine government to reverse its decision.¹¹⁰

On June 12, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper spoke with his Philippine counterpart, Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana, to express his support for the Philippine government’s decision to suspend termination of the VFA. According to the DoD summary of the call, Secretary Esper reiterated how the VFA benefits both countries and discussed a range of regional security issues of mutual interest, including impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the South China Sea, counterterrorism, and the Philippine plans for military modernization.¹¹¹

In a public statement, the U.S. Embassy in Manila welcomed the Philippine government’s decision.¹¹² Additionally, the embassy reported in a cable that “leading figures from across the political spectrum welcomed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s June 2 decision to suspend termination” of the VFA.¹¹³ The embassy reported that its Philippine government contacts identified three main reasons for the suspension: the Philippine government’s focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening economic trends, and recent aggressive Chinese behavior in the South China Sea. In the cable, the embassy reported that the structure of the Philippine government’s decision, which creates a single renewable 6-month suspension rather than a complete reversal, provides the Philippine government the ability to restart the termination process should the Philippine government object to future U.S. Government actions.¹¹⁴

Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Loacin, Jr. told reporters that rising military tension in the South China Sea contributed to President Duterte’s decision to suspend termination of the VFA. According to media reports, China increased its militarization of the disputed region this quarter, regularly flying fighter patrols and dispatching Chinese Coast Guard vessels into contested airspace and waters. During these activities, the Chinese Coast Guard harassed a Philippine frigate and sank a Vietnamese fishing vessel. This quarter, a Chinese battle group, led by the aircraft carrier Liaoning, accompanied by two guided missile destroyers and two guided missile frigates, conducted sea trials in the South China Sea and off the east coast of Taiwan, north of the Philippines. Additionally, a Chinese survey ship conducted oil exploration activity inside the internationally recognized northern perimeter of Malaysia’s Exclusive Economic Zone, an area which China unilaterally claims as its sovereign territory.¹¹⁵

Philippine Government Passes Revised Counterterrorism Law

On June 3, the Philippine Congress passed the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, a bill to amend and update the country's previous anti-terrorism law, the Human Security Act of 2007. The bill was delivered to President Duterte's office on June 9, and he signed it into law on July 3. According to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the 2007 law was rarely used, and the modernized statute will bring the Philippines into closer alignment with international norms. The embassy reported that the revised law will enable the Philippine judicial system to mount more effective terrorism prosecutions.¹¹⁶ The DoJ stated that it worked for several years to assist the Philippine government in amending its anti-terrorism law. The DoJ said the new law addresses preparation and planning of terrorist activity while also strengthening procedures for terrorism trials.¹¹⁷

According to a news report summarizing the law, it is aimed at both jihadist terrorists in the south and communist insurgents in the central and eastern provinces. The revised law also criminalizes the threat, planning, training, facilitation, proposal, and incitement to terrorist activities by means of speeches, proclamations, writings, banners, and emblems. It subjects suspects to surveillance, warrantless arrest, and detention for up to 24 days.¹¹⁸

According to an early June cable from the U.S. Embassy in Manila, the new law will, for the first time in the Philippines, allow defendants to be charged with planning terrorist acts and providing material support, thereby enabling Philippine law enforcement agencies to be proactive rather than reactive, investigating and prosecuting terrorist acts only after they occur. According to the embassy, covered acts now include: harming or killing a person; destroying facilities or infrastructure; developing weapons of mass destruction; releasing dangerous substances; and causing fire, floods, or explosions.¹¹⁹ According to a news report, those found guilty of these charges may face life sentences without the possibility of parole.¹²⁰

The U.S. Embassy in Manila reported that the Anti-Terrorism Act also streamlines designation of terrorist groups by automatically recognizing all UN terrorist group designations under Philippine law. The embassy stated that the revised law eliminates procedural obstacles to terrorism prosecutions which hindered effective use of the 2007 law. The embassy concluded in the cable that enactment of this law would enable the embassy's growing portfolio of counterterrorism, law enforcement, and judicial sector programs to assist the Philippine government in realizing its long-term vision of transitioning from a military-centric to a law enforcement response to terrorism.¹²¹

ANTI-TERRORISM ACT DRAWS LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM

Philippine and international human rights organizations argued that the new law's definition of terrorism is overly broad and could lead to terrorism charges being leveled for relatively minor offenses or legitimate expressions of political dissent. According to media reports, hundreds participated in protests against the law in Manila despite restrictions on public gatherings due to COVID-19.¹²²

Opponents of the law argue that it would allow the authorities to classify government opponents as terrorists, arrest citizens for critical social media posts, and detain people without warrants for acts such as causing property damage or carrying a weapon. A Philippine senator critical of President Duterte suggested that citizens protesting insufficient aid amid the pandemic could potentially be



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte speaking at a business forum in Seoul. (Jeon Han/ photo)

charged with “inciting” under the new law.¹²³ According to a media report, the law will create an Anti-Terrorism Council, to be appointed by President Duterte, which would have the authority to designate individuals and organizations as terrorists, who could then be detained without a warrant.¹²⁴

Several international human rights organizations condemned the Anti-Terrorism Act. Amnesty International warned that “under Duterte’s presidency, even the mildest government critics can be labelled terrorists” and characterized the law as granting the government “excessive and unchecked powers.”¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch warned that the law will “eliminate critical legal protections and permit government overreach against groups and individuals labeled terrorists.”¹²⁶ Catholic bishops in the Philippines also denounced the law as “morally wrong” and a threat to “the very values of freedom, respect, justice, and compassion.”¹²⁷

The DoS Global Engagement Center reported that one of its implementing partners conducted an online survey this quarter to gauge Mindanao residents’ public opinion of the bill before it was signed into law.¹²⁸ Of the 430 responses, 64 percent said they were against the bill, 21 percent said they were in favor, and 15 percent said they were undecided. The majority of respondents said they believed there would be more human rights violations if the bill became law, that the law would further divide people, that the law lacked sufficient safeguards for innocent people, and that the Anti-Terrorism Council created by the law would not be responsible and careful in identifying suspected terrorists.¹²⁹

In its cable regarding the law, the U.S. Embassy in Manila stated that “credible human rights advocates are concerned about the potential for overreach” and added that “Duterte’s troubling human rights record makes overreach a possibility not just for this law but other reasonable measures.”¹³⁰ However, the cable described much of this criticism as “misplaced,” arguing that the legislation itself was sound, and that concerns from human rights groups should prompt scrutiny of how the law is implemented, rather than of the laws itself. The cable further stated that the Anti-Terrorism Act’s wiretapping provisions, a key target of the law’s opponents, were significantly more restrictive than similar provisions under U.S. law.¹³¹

Philippine Government Eases COVID-19 Quarantines as Infection Rate Increases

The WHO reported that as of June 30, there were 37,514 cases of COVID-19 in the Philippines, with 1,266 deaths and 10,233 recovered patients, according to the Philippine Department of Health. The infection rate was increasing as the quarter ended, with 5,756 new cases reported in the last week of the quarter, representing a 35 percent increase over the week before.¹³²

On June 1, the Philippine government moved from a strict enhanced community quarantine to a less restrictive general community quarantine.¹³³ Under enhanced community quarantine, public transportation systems were suspended, curfews could be imposed in certain areas, and only essential food and health services could operate, subject to government regulation.¹³⁴ General community quarantine requirements allowed public transportation at reduced capacity and the reopening of many businesses, subject to certain health standards.¹³⁵

President Duterte announced on June 30 that the general community quarantine in Manila would be extended until at least July 15, according to a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Manila. Other areas of Luzon and Visayas remained in general community quarantine while other parts of the country, except for Cebu City, had been placed under modified general community quarantine, the least-strict quarantine phase. Cebu City remained under enhanced community quarantine.¹³⁶

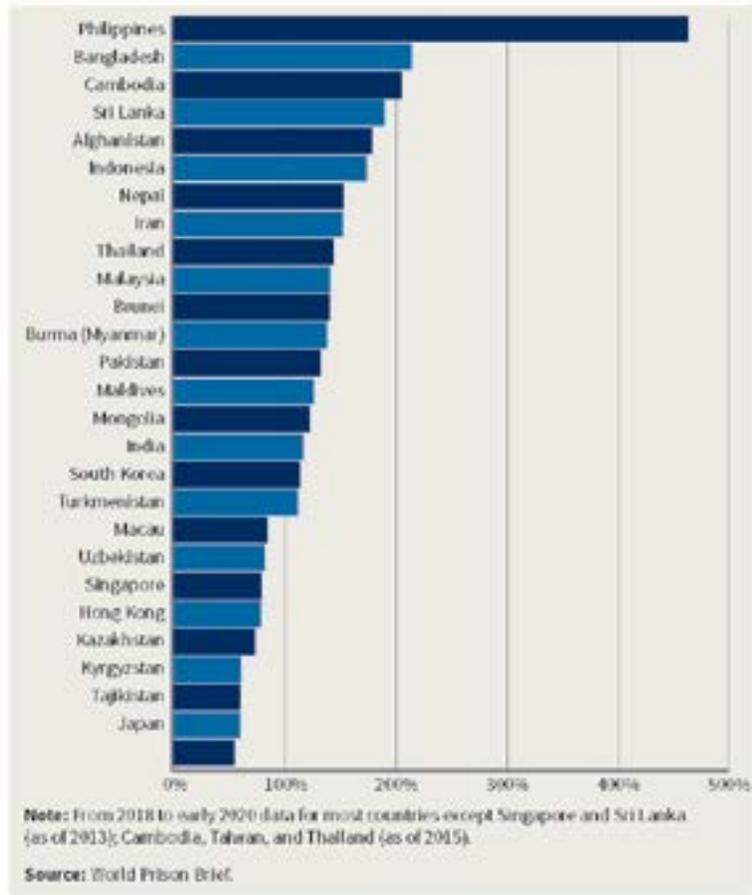
The embassy reported in the cable that the Philippine government might have relaxed quarantine restrictions without complete health data due to pressure from private industry and the public to allow greater economic activity.¹³⁷ According to the cable, the Philippine government's COVID-19 testing capacity did not meet its own targets, and contact tracing was below World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.¹³⁸

While testing slowly increased in the Philippines to between 12,000 and 13,000 tests per day, this rate was lower than the Philippine Department of Health's announced capacity of up to 34,000 tests per day and target of 30,000 tests per day by the end of May, according to the cable.¹³⁹ The Philippine government reported that, as of June 18, it had employed more than 52,000 contact tracers to identify people who had been infected and people with whom the infected people had come in contact, in order to interrupt the spread of the disease.¹⁴⁰ However, even if the Philippine government fulfilled its announced plans to hire an additional 50,000 contact tracers in July, according to the embassy cable the Philippines would still fall short of the WHO's recommendation of 132,000 contact tracers for a country the size of the Philippines, based on 1 contact tracer per 800 people.¹⁴¹

Philippine Military and Police Called in to Enforce COVID-19 Quarantines

The Philippine government announced strict enhanced community quarantine restrictions effective March 17 for the island of Luzon, which has a population of nearly 60 million and includes the capital, Manila.¹⁴² According to a media report, local officials in Metro Manila requested that the AFP provide hundreds of soldiers to help enforce these restrictions. An AFP

Figure 2.

Occupancy Levels of Prisons in Asia, Based on Official Capacity

spokesperson told reporters that elected neighborhood leaders from communities across the national capital area had asked the AFP for assistance in enforcing the enhanced community quarantine provisions.¹⁴³

According to a Philippine government news service, on April 21, PNP General Archie Francisco Gamboa approved the deployment of 116 PNP Special Action Force commandos, along with troop transports and armored vehicles in Metro Manila, in order to enforce “enhanced community quarantine” guidelines.¹⁴⁴ An AFP spokesperson also stated that the AFP deployed 800 reservists to assist in implementing quarantine restrictions.¹⁴⁵ PNP Special Action Force Director, Major General Amando Empiso, stated that he was prepared to deploy his commandos as a show of force in areas with the most quarantine violators.¹⁴⁶ The PNP Special Action Force’s activity included setting up 24-hour checkpoints and arresting violators in the national capital area, according to Philippine media reporting.¹⁴⁷ General Gamboa told reporters that Metro Manila had more than 130,000 violations of quarantine restrictions through April 21.¹⁴⁸

Overcrowded Prisons Become Major COVID-19 Hazard

According to the World Prison Brief, a database that provides information about prison systems throughout the world, prison populations in the Philippines grew steadily over the last decade and by 2018 had reached more than 450 percent of capacity. (See Figure 2.) During the quarter, arrests for quarantine violations compounded the overcrowding problem.¹⁴⁹

In April, President Duterte stated to the Philippine Congress that if prisons were strictly managed, confinement would offer the best protection from the pandemic. However, SOCPAC reported that prisoner releases would likely be unavoidable as the Philippines had, in SOCPAC’s assessment, “the most significant capacity challenge in Asia.”¹⁵⁰ SOCPAC stated that while the Philippine government intended to keep violent criminals incarcerated, including those convicted of terrorism, inmates convicted of non-violent crimes who may have been recruited into ISIS-EA or other VEOs while in prison would likely be among the many thousands released.¹⁵¹

In May, the Philippine Supreme Court ordered the release of nearly 10,000 prisoners due to COVID-19 infections among both inmates and staff in Philippine prisons and jails. Many of these prisoners were granted bail or released on recognizance, according to media reporting.¹⁵²

According to media reports, social distancing was impossible in facilities like the Quezon City Jail, where inmates sleep in shifts due to lack of space.¹⁵³ According to the World Prison Brief, the Philippine's 7 national prisons and 926 local jails were operating at more than 450 percent of capacity, housing approximately 215,000 inmates in space intended for 40,000 as of November 2019.¹⁵⁴ According to media reports, thousands of individuals arrested for violating COVID-19 curfews and quarantines had further congested the prison population, which had 9,000 COVID-19 cases and 637 deaths as of early May.¹⁵⁵

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

USAID Approves \$22 Million for COVID-19 Response in the Philippines but Disbursements Have Been Slow

USAID reported that it had approved more than \$22 million for the COVID-19 response in the Philippines as of the end of the quarter, making the United States the largest international donor for the response, according to WHO data.¹⁵⁶ Except for \$4 million in International Disaster Assistance funding, nearly all of this \$22 million in announced funding had been obligated by the end of the quarter.¹⁵⁷ However, only \$605,000 (3 percent) of this funding had been disbursed by the end of the quarter.¹⁵⁸

USAID reported that it had directly supported the Philippine government's five-point COVID-19 strategy of increasing resilience, stopping the transmission, reducing the contact rate, shortening the duration of infectiousness, and enhancing the quality, consistency, and affordability of healthcare.¹⁵⁹ However, with only 3 percent of COVID-19-related funding disbursed by the end of the quarter and no other USAID programming redirected from other activities to support the COVID-19 response in the Philippines, many of the activities sponsored by this assistance had yet to be implemented.¹⁶⁰

USAID reported that its planned assistance included helping local government units to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through stronger health service delivery at village and household levels, protecting healthcare workers from infection through training programs, and supporting the Philippine Department of Health to communicate COVID-19 guidelines effectively.¹⁶¹ USAID reported that in areas hardest hit by the outbreak, USAID implementers expanded access to water, sanitation, and hygiene information, services, and commodities.¹⁶² According to USAID, other planned efforts included upgrading laboratories and expanding specimen transport systems to improve testing capacity, developing a commodity and logistics tracking tool to improve the availability of medical equipment and supplies in the places with the greatest need, and supporting the Philippine Department of Health to adapt its programs to maintain essential health services during the pandemic.¹⁶³

USAID reported collaborating with the local governments of eight key urban hubs to support them in the design and implementation of crisis communications strategies.

In addition, USAID said it implemented a crisis response plan for 10 local governments in Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte provinces, which were directly impacted by the 2017 Marawi siege. USAID reported that its support was designed to reduce the impact of the pandemic on communities of internally displaced persons (IDP).¹⁶⁴ USAID also reported assisting local government units to disburse emergency funding and procure locally sourced medical equipment and supplies. USAID reported that it strengthened the capacity of local crisis response centers to disseminate accurate and timely information, manage quarantine measures, and set up public handwashing facilities.¹⁶⁵ The WHO reported that USAID's Medicine Technologies and Pharmaceutical Services Program had reached 10,352 individuals regarding infection prevention and control in health facilities.¹⁶⁶

The DoS Sponsors Assistance for IDPs and Victims of Conflict Through International Organizations

The DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) reported that it operates closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of conflict in the Philippines.¹⁶⁷

DoS PRM reported that UNHCR co-led a forum on protection for Marawi IDPs with Task Force Bangon Marawi. UNHCR also provided technical assistance to the Philippine Congress and Land Dispute Resolution Committee on housing, property, land issues, and IDP compensation. PRM reported that, in May, UNHCR helped facilitate a dialogue between humanitarian organizations and Philippine public health officials in Iligan, with a focus on addressing humanitarian access during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁸

DoS PRM reported that the ICRC provides food, hygiene items, water and sanitation services, medical care, mental and psychosocial care, physical rehabilitation, and livelihood support to victims of conflict in the Philippines. The ICRC also works with the Philippine government and non-governmental armed groups to encourage compliance with international humanitarian law and to help reunite families separated by conflict. PRM reported that it provided \$875,000 to the ICRC's COVID-19 response in the Philippines, which contributed to the ICRC providing a 2-month supply of chlorine and fuel to 8,000 residents and 10,500 displaced persons in Marawi. This effort also helped provide support to six hospitals in conflict-affected and COVID-19-affected areas of Mindanao, according to PRM. PRM added that the ICRC also assisted the Philippine government with infection control inside 53 detention centers housing 35,000 individuals.¹⁶⁹

Weak Health Systems and Limited Testing Hinder COVID-19 Response on Mindanao

Although a majority of COVID-19 cases and 67 percent of deaths were in Metro Manila, USAID reported that Mindanao faced greater difficulty in responding to the pandemic than other parts of the Philippines due to weak health systems, limited testing capacity, and displaced populations with limited access to water, sanitation, and hygiene.¹⁷⁰ USAID reported that as of as of June 9, it had transported 1,033 COVID-19 specimens in the BARMM and trained 135 medical technicians, laboratory aides, nurses, and midwives on

collection, handling, packaging, and transport.¹⁷¹ USAID reported that as of June 22, the BARMM had recorded 99 positive COVID-19 cases, more than two-thirds of which were for individuals living in Lanao del Sur province.¹⁷²

USAID reported that there had been no positive COVID-19 cases reported within the IDP population on Mindanao, according to a Lanao del Sur provincial health office and confirmed by USAID implementing partners.¹⁷³ USAID stated that recent cases were most frequently the result of repatriated Filipino workers from overseas and other individuals returning from major Philippine cities, and not from community transmission.¹⁷⁴ The BARMM Department of Health reported low hospital capacity to treat severe cases with only 123 hospital beds, including 3 ICU beds, and 6 mechanical ventilators.¹⁷⁵ As of the end of the quarter, there were only two accredited COVID-19 laboratories for testing in the BARMM, located in Cotabato City and Marawi.¹⁷⁶ Throughout the Philippines, as of the end of the quarter, there were 72 laboratories certified to conduct COVID-19 tests and an additional 168 public and private laboratories under assessment for accreditation, according to the WHO.¹⁷⁷

Quarantines Create Temporary Access Limitations for Humanitarian Assistance

On March 17, the Philippine government enacted a nation-wide quarantine in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, followed by regional and provincial lockdowns, according to USAID.¹⁷⁸ In Lanao del Sur province, including the city of Marawi, all public transportation and non-essential services were closed and travel between cities and provinces was restricted.¹⁷⁹ By the end of that week, the same restrictions were placed on the city of Iligan and the province of Lanao del Norte.¹⁸⁰

According to USAID, humanitarian assistance organizations continued essential activities and managed operations through telework.¹⁸¹ While overall demand for water deliveries did not change for IDPs, the enhanced community quarantine caused delays or stoppages for other agencies.¹⁸² Despite movement restrictions, one USAID implementer increased the delivery of water to IDP shelter sites by one third, from 30,000 liters a day to 40,000 liters a day, to compensate for the impact of these delays or stoppages.¹⁸³

On May 1, the Philippine government placed the cities of Marawi and Iligan and the provinces of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur under a modified community quarantine, allowing limited public transportation to resume and non-essential businesses to reopen.¹⁸⁴ However, USAID reported that the Iligan city government continued to impose strict requirements on international non-governmental organizations transiting the Iligan to Marawi.¹⁸⁵ USAID reported that members of the humanitarian assistance staff were required to secure a medical certificate from the Iligan City Health Office and to limit travel to one trip per week.¹⁸⁶ By June 30, travel from Iligan to Marawi had been normalized, allowing USAID implementer fieldwork and monitoring in Marawi, according to USAID.¹⁸⁷

USAID donated hygiene kits to the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the fight against COVID-19 in the Sabah region. (USAID photo)





USAID Implementers Modify Field Activities Due to COVID-19

USAID reported that its implementers adapted their activities for online training and remote monitoring in response to the pandemic, and none of implementers' staff reported testing positive for COVID-19.¹⁸⁸ Restrictions on mass gatherings temporarily halted hygiene promotion sessions in March and April.¹⁸⁹ Instead, USAID reported that its implementers conducted remote financial management training for the beneficiaries of livelihood assistance programs, and local USAID implementers managed cash payments remotely.¹⁹⁰

USAID reported that it integrated COVID-19 messaging into hygiene promotion sessions and disaster risk reduction training for shelter beneficiaries.¹⁹¹ To facilitate better monitoring of projects in the COVID-19 environment, USAID released a “Guide for Adopting Remote Monitoring Approaches During COVID-19” on May 19.¹⁹² USAID reported that its Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance’s monitoring and evaluation team developed best practices for implementer teams to provide remote monitoring, and that the bureau tracked programmatic adaptations that implementers made in real time.¹⁹³ USAID reported that it extended one humanitarian assistance grant award due to delays associated with the COVID-19 quarantines and travel restrictions.¹⁹⁴

Transitional Shelter Construction for IDPs Slows Down Significantly Due to COVID-19

During the quarter, the number of IDPs from the 2017 siege of Marawi remained unchanged at approximately 70,000, according to the United Nation’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.¹⁹⁵ While the Philippine government’s Task Force Bangon Marawi continued to quote December 2021 as the target date for completion of IDP transitional shelter construction, USAID’s implementers reported that construction had slowed significantly due to COVID-19–related travel and work restrictions.¹⁹⁶ While the task force did not report any newly-occupied transitional shelters during the quarter, USAID reported that its implementer provided transitional shelter and rental assistance to 50 families.¹⁹⁷ USAID awarded \$300,000 to the non-governmental organization Action Against Hunger, increasing the total obligated to that implementer to \$5.25 million.¹⁹⁸ According to USAID, this additional funding will support assistance to 14,000 IDPs in Lanao del Sur province with emergency water supply, hygiene supplies, sanitation support, and cash-for-work activities.¹⁹⁹ Due to the pandemic-related quarantines and travel restrictions, USAID granted a 1-year extension to Catholic Relief Services’ contract to provide transitional shelter to 2,000 IDPs, 70 communal water points, and savings and lending activities for 600 IDP households.²⁰⁰

A MILF spokesperson told reporters that the COVID-19 crisis had “doubly affected” displaced residents of Marawi, who had still not recovered from the 2017 siege when the pandemic began. A spokesperson for the Moro Consensus Group, an organization composed of displaced Marawi residents, called on the Philippine government to provide free transportation and mass testing for COVID-19 and to allow residents to return to Marawi immediately. He added that after 3 years of displacement, many residents had given up on the hope of government reconstruction assistance and were willing to rebuild on their own using indigenous materials, such as bamboo and wood.²⁰¹

BUDGET AND EXECUTION

USINDOPACOM reported that it had committed \$68.2 million, obligated \$48.8 million, and disbursed \$16.1 million in base and overseas contingency operations (OCO) spending in support of OPE-P as of the end of this quarter.²⁰² USINDOPACOM reported that its FY 2020 OCO budget for OPE-P is approximately \$72.3 million, including \$43.5 million for contractor-owned and -operated ISR, \$24.8 million for casualty evacuation, and \$4.9 million for facilities support.²⁰³ In terms of direct assistance to the AFP, SOCPAC stated that it delivered two 11-meter rigid hull inflatable boats to the AFP's Naval Special Operations Group through U.S. security cooperation programs this quarter.²⁰⁴

Table 1.

USINDOPACOM Funding in the Philippines, in \$ Thousands

	3rd Quarter			Year to Date		
	Base	OCO	TOTAL	Base	OCO	TOTAL
Commitments	3,236.3	10,250.7	13,487.0	6,769.3	61,444.1	68,213.4
Obligation	2,330.0	6,250.7	8,580.7	5,863.7	42,943.3	48,807.0
Disbursements	1,297.6	1,324.7	2,622.3	1,796.3	14,271.2	16,067.5

Source: DoD OIGFSO (Comptroller)

U.S. Government Approves Attack Helicopter Sales to the Philippines

Separate from the OPE-P mission, the DoS approved the potential sale of two different helicopters, in advance of Philippine government's final decision on what system to buy, according to the DoD. The DoS approved the sale of six AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters and related equipment at an estimated price of \$450 million or six AH-64E Apache attack helicopters and related equipment for \$1.5 billion. The DoD's Defense Security Cooperation Agency stated that either of these systems would modernize the AFP's attack helicopter capabilities to maintain self-defense, counterterrorism, and infrastructure protection. According to the DoD, while both options include similar classes of munitions, the more expensive AH-64E Apache package would come with a larger complement of Hellfire missiles and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System kits than the AH-1Z Viper package. As of the end of the quarter, the Philippine government had not made its decision, and the final details of any potential transaction remained negotiable.²⁰⁵

According to USINDOPACOM, counterterrorism is one of the top capabilities cited in its Country Security Cooperation Plan for the Philippines, and air support for ground operations is a major line of effort under that capability. The AFP and the Philippine Air Force had submitted letters of request for both AH1Z Viper and AH64E Apache helicopters. Selection and purchase of one of these options would fulfill the Philippine government's requirements for an attack helicopter, according to USINDOPACOM.²⁰⁶

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 April 1 through June 30, 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 oversight 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 oversight 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.

In May 2020, the Joint Planning Group held its 50th meeting, carried out virtually to accommodate participants because of coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) limitations. Vice Admiral James Malloy, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, spoke about the Navy’s role in improving security and stability in the region, particularly in the Middle East area of operations.



**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.

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.

However, the COVID-19 global pandemic continued to affect the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations. Due to the evacuation of many deployed staff and host-country-imposed travel restrictions, some oversight projects by Lead IG agencies have been delayed or deferred. For some projects, the scope of the work has been revised or narrowed. The Lead IG agencies reported that their personnel were able to conduct some work while teleworking and while practicing social distancing.

Despite these restrictions and limitations, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed six reports related to OPE-P during the quarter. These reports examined various activities that support OPE-P, including: DoD oversight of training to mobile medical teams prior to deploying to USINDOPACOM area of operations; the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism's oversight and management of its foreign assistance programs; and financial accountability in humanitarian assistance programs.

As of June 30, 10 oversight projects related to the Philippines were ongoing, and 1 was planned. Project titles and objectives for the ongoing and planned oversight projects can be found in Appendix C. Appendix C also identifies the ongoing DoD OIG projects that were suspended due to COVID-19; those projects will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations.

Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Training of Mobile Medical Teams in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Africa Command Areas of Responsibility

DODIG-2020-087; June 8, 2020

The DoD OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the Defense Health Agency and the Military Departments provided effective training to mobile medical teams to improve trauma care before teams deployed to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which includes areas that support OPE-P in the Philippines, and U.S. Africa Command areas of responsibility.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force employ mobile medical teams in response to combatant commander requests for forces on military operations. Mobile medical teams typically consist of a general surgeon, an emergency physician, a critical care nurse, a surgical technician, and additional trauma care professionals. These mobile medical teams need to be capable of treating trauma injuries not commonly seen at their home station military medical treatment facility, such as multiple injuries to the body that could be life-threatening. Mobile medical teams need to develop both medical skills to perform operations in unforgiving environments and tactical skills to function safely in a combat zone.

The DoD OIG determined that the mobile medical teams were provided team, environmental, and equipment training before they deployed to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Africa Command areas of responsibility, and the team members reported that the training was generally effective. However, the DoD OIG determined that improvements were needed regarding surgical and tactical training to better prepare mobile medical teams before deployment.

The DoD OIG recommended that the Surgeons General of the Army, Navy, and Air Force issue guidance implementing standardized training programs for all mobile medical teams, update training curriculums to include tactical training of mobile medical teams, and require all mobile medical team personnel complete standardized post-deployment after action reports and submit them to the Joint Lessons Learned Information System. The DoD OIG also recommended that a standardized post-deployment after action report template be developed to gather information on the effectiveness of training provided to mobile medical team members.

Management agreed with the recommendations.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Inspection of U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland

ISP-I-20-16; June 10, 2020

The DoS OIG inspected the executive direction, program and policy implementation, resource management, and information management operations of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland (Mission Geneva). Geneva is home to more than 100 UN-affiliated and other international organizations, and the U.S. Government engages with these multilateral institutions through Mission Geneva. Among the international organizations based in Geneva—including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—are several through which the U.S. Government directs substantial portions of its humanitarian assistance funding for migrants, refugees, and others affected by conflicts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. For example, UNHCR works in the Philippines to protect and assist refugees and displaced people.

Among other things, the DoS OIG found that the Charge d’Affaires and the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission led Mission Geneva in a professional and collegial manner; Mission Geneva and the DoS’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs did not have shared procedures for promoting and tracking U.S. citizen employment at Geneva-based UN and other international organizations; Mission Geneva had deficiencies in its procurement program, including unauthorized commitments and poor contract administration; and while Mission Geneva’s Information Management Office met customer needs, the Mission did not always carry out information security responsibilities, putting the DoS’s information systems at risk of compromise.

The DoS OIG made 20 recommendations—18 to Mission Geneva, 1 to the DoS Bureau of International Organization Affairs, and 1 to the DoS Bureau of Global Talent Management—to address the shortcomings identified in the report. Management agreed with the recommendations.

The DoS OIG also completed a classified annex to this report after the quarter ended, which was distributed to authorized recipients.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism’s Foreign Assistance Program Management

ISP-I-20-14; June 1, 2020

This report was among three issued based on an inspection of the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT Bureau), which is discussed below (Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism; ISP-I-20-13). During the DoS OIG’s inspection of the CT Bureau, the DoS OIG inspected CT Bureau’s management of its foreign assistance program. The CT Bureau leads the DoS’s efforts on international counterterrorism strategy, policy, and operations. The CT Bureau advances its efforts, in part, through its foreign assistance programs, which also aim to strengthen partner countries’ capabilities to help achieve U.S. counterterrorism policy goals and objectives. The CT Bureau managed more than \$384 million in foreign assistance funds during FY 2018, including for programs to counter the spread of violent extremism in the Philippines.

The DoS OIG determined that: the CT Bureau’s monitoring and evaluation framework did not fully comply with DoS standards because the CT Bureau had yet to develop performance management plans for 13 of its 15 major programs; the CT Bureau relied on third-party contractors to help with foreign assistance program oversight, and these contractors inappropriately performed inherently governmental functions in some instances; the CT Bureau’s Federal assistance award files did not always include documentation to show whether a recipient performed the award in accordance with the statement of work; and the CT Bureau returned \$51.9 million in expired and canceled funds from FYs 2016 to 2019, partly as a result of weaknesses in its oversight and management of foreign assistance awards.

The DoS OIG made seven recommendations to the CT Bureau to resolve the management weaknesses and gaps identified in the inspection. Management agreed with the recommendations.

The third report associated with this inspection was a classified annex distributed to authorized recipients on May 4, 2020.

Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism

ISP-I-20-13; May 7, 2020

The DoS OIG inspected the DoS CT Bureau’s executive direction, policy and program management, administrative operations, and information management and information security activities. The CT Bureau leads the DoS’s efforts on international counterterrorism strategy, policy, and operations. The CT Bureau is responsible for a complex set of policies

and programs ranging from international information sharing to foreign assistance programs. The CT Bureau’s policy mandate includes areas such as terrorist detention and repatriation, countering violent extremism, and management of aspects of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

This report is a companion report to the DoS OIG Inspection of the Bureau of Counterterrorism’s Foreign Assistance Program Management (ISP-I-20-14, discussed above). The DoS OIG determined that the CT Bureau established effective internal policy coordination and communication processes; the head of the CT Bureau spearheaded interagency efforts to increase the pace and number of terrorist designations in 2018, which resulted in more than 50 designation packages; employees from other DoS bureaus and Federal agencies expressed differing opinions about the CT Bureau’s effectiveness in promoting its policy goals in interagency processes; the CT Bureau did not provide sufficient policy guidance, training, and administrative support to overseas employees who are responsible for coordinating and reporting on regional counterterrorism issues; and the CT Bureau’s statutorily mandated annual Country Reports on Terrorism—the CT Bureau’s flagship product, on which Congress, the media, and the public rely as an authoritative statement of terrorist incidents worldwide—were submitted late in 7 of 8 instances reviewed during the inspection.

U.S. Marines prepare for a fast rope exercise onboard the USS America. (U.S. Navy photo)

The DoS OIG made 11 recommendations to the CT Bureau to address the deficiencies identified in the report. Management agreed with the recommendations.



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

AUD-MERO-20-32; May 12, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this follow-up audit to determine whether the DoS Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS) and the DoS CT Bureau implemented corrective actions to address previous recommendations related to the DoS Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program and whether those actions had improved the DoS's efforts to measure, evaluate, and sustain ATA program objectives in the East Asia and Pacific region, which includes the Philippines. The Philippines has participated in the ATA program since 1986, receiving 173 training courses for 3,362 participants during FYs 2017-2020. Moreover, in October 2019, U.S. and Philippine officials broke ground on a \$10 million counterterrorism training facility that, when completed, will be jointly operated by the ATA program and specialized Philippine National Police units and provide training for law enforcement personnel from the Philippines and other nations in the East Asia and Pacific region.

The DoS OIG found that DS and the CT Bureau had implemented corrective actions to warrant closure of 13 previous DoS OIG recommendations related to the ATA program. However, the DoS OIG found that DS and the CT Bureau need to take additional steps to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation process is followed and that desired program results are achieved and accurately reported in accordance with DoS policy.

The DoS OIG made four recommendations to the DoS to improve the execution of the ATA program in the East Asia and Pacific region. Management agreed with the recommendations.

Management Assistance Report: Legal Determination Concerning Department of State Non-Acquisition Interagency Agreements Is Needed

AUD-MERO-20-24; April 15, 2020

This management assistance report was issued to the DoS based on fieldwork for an audit report issued in September 2019, "Audit of Monitoring and Evaluating Department of State Foreign Assistance in the Philippines," AUD-MERO-19-39. While conducting that audit, the DoS OIG learned that the DoS had used a "notice to proceed" to extend the period of performance for a non-acquisition interagency agreement—an agreement between two Federal agencies that specifies the goods to be furnished or tasks to be accomplished by one agency in support of another—relating to activities in the Philippines. This was done even though DoS policy does not explicitly recognize this as a valid mechanism for extending such an agreement's period of performance. In addition, the DoS OIG found that DoS policy is silent on whether non-acquisition interagency agreements have the potential to create unauthorized commitments and, if so, whether ratification procedures were required when an unauthorized commitment involving an interagency agreement occurred.

The DoS OIG made four recommendations to the DoS to address the issues identified. Management agreed with the 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 component), 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. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, DCIS investigators neither traveled to the Philippines the quarter, nor initiated any new investigations there. Any OPE-P related cases will be addressed by DCIS investigators stationed in South Korea. DoS OIG and USAID OIG investigators have temporarily relocated from the Philippines, but have been teleworking from other locations on OPE-P related cases.

During the quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies coordinated on four open investigations. The open investigations involved 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 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 April 1 through June 30, 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.



Philippine and U.S. service members load boxes of donated cots for delivery to the Philippines Office of Civil Defense to help the country's COVID-19 response. (Disposition Services photo)

APPENDIX C

Ongoing and Planned Oversight Projects

Table 1 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies ongoing oversight projects. Table 2 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 June 30, 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.

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. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

Evaluation of Combatant Command 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. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command are planning and executing counter threat finance activities to impact adversaries' ability to use financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

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. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

Classified Evaluation of 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 are being satisfied by current policies, procedures, and supporting data architecture. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

Evaluation of Tactical Signals Intelligence Processing

To determine whether Theater Support Activity's tactical signals intelligence processing is sufficient to satisfy priority intelligence requirements. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

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. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. Project will restart when the DoD OIG resumes normal operations. ***

DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Audit of Department of State's Risk Assessments and Monitoring of Voluntary Contributions to International Organizations

To determine whether DoS policies, processes, and guidance for voluntary contributions ensure that 1) risks are identified, assessed, and responded to before providing funds to public international organizations and 2) funds are monitored to achieve award objectives.

Table 3.

Planned Oversight Projects by Lead IG and Partner Agencies, as of June 30, 2020**DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****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 programs 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	
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
ATA	Antiterrorism Assistance
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
COVID-19	coronavirus disease–2019
CT Bureau	DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism
DCIS	Defense Criminal Investigative Service
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DoJ	Department of Justice
DoS	Department of State
DS	DoS Bureau of Diplomatic Security
FY	fiscal year
GEC	DoS Global Engagement Center
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	internally displaced person
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIS-Core	the core ISIS group in Iraq and Syria

Acronym	
ISIS-EA	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria–East Asia, formerly referred to as ISIS–Philippines (ISIS-P)
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
Lead IG	Lead Inspector General
Lead IG agencies	DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
NPA	New People’s Army
OCO	overseas contingency operations
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPE-P	Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines
PNP	Philippine National Police
PRM	DoS Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
SOC PAC	U.S. Special Operations Command-Pacific
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USINDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
VFA	Philippines–United States Visiting Forces Agreement
WHO	World Health Organization



Endnotes

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