

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Name: Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Type of Organization:

- al-Qaeda/affiliate
- insurgent
- ISIS/affiliate
- non-state actor
- religious
- terrorist
- violent

Ideologies and Affiliations:

- Islamist
- jihadist
- Salafi
- Wahhabi

Place of Origin:

Philippines

Year of Origin:

1991

Founder(s):

Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani

Places of Operation:

Mindanao region of the southern Philippines (particularly in the southern provinces of the Sulu Archipelago—specifically Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi—and on the Zamboanga Peninsula); Malaysia

Overview

Executive Summary:

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is an Islamist terrorist organization that seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in the southern [Philippines](#). ASG is known for kidnapping innocents, including Westerners, for ransom, and beheading captives if their demands are not met. ASG's brutal decapitations date back to 2001, predating notorious beheadings carried out by al-Qaeda in Iraq and that group's successor, [ISIS](#).¹ ASG is also known for its relationship with al-Qaeda, which has become strained since the beginning of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror.² The group is divided into two main factions: [Radulan Sahiron](#), one of the United States' most-wanted terrorists, leads the ASG faction based in Sulu, while a pro-ISIS faction was spearheaded by Basilan-based ASG leader [Isnilon Hapilon](#) before Hapilon's death in October 2017.³

In the summer of 2014, Hapilon and his followers pledged allegiance to ISIS leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#). The pledge drew attention to ASG's presence in the southern Philippines and its potential threat to Southeast Asia.⁴ According to the Philippines' Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana, ISIS made direct contact with Hapilon in December 2016, instructing him to find an area to establish a caliphate in Mindanao.⁵ Afterward, Hapilon reportedly attempted to unite ISIS-supporting groups throughout the Philippines under his leadership.⁶ In May 2017, the Philippine military launched an operation to target Hapilon in the city of Marawi. The operation devolved into a five-month-long armed conflict that displaced over 350,000 civilians, during which ASG and ISIS-linked militants laid siege to the city.⁷ The conflict ended shortly after Philippine troops killed Hapilon on October 16, 2017.⁸ In February 2019, the Associated Press reported that Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, an

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ASG commander based in Jolo, became the new leader of ISIS in the Philippines. The U.S. Department of Defense believed Sawadjaan to be “acting emir,” but Philippine officials claimed that he was installed as head of ISIS in the Philippines the year prior.⁹ In August 2020, the then Philippine army commanding general claimed that Sawadjaan had likely died following clashes with government forces in July 2020.¹⁰

ASG has received funding and training from [al-Qaeda](#) and [Jemaah Islamiyah \(JI\)](#).¹¹ ASG continues to provide sanctuary to foreign militant jihadists, such as JI fugitives.¹² The group also maintains links with other Philippines-based extremist organizations, including the more violent splinter groups of both the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).¹³

ASG was founded by and named after Abdurajak Janjalani, who took the *nom de guerre* Abu Sayyaf, “Father of Swordsmen.” Janjalani previously participated in the MNLF, which, like ASG, sought to create an independent Islamic state in the Moro¹⁴ regions of Mindanao in the Philippines.¹⁵ However, unlike ASG, the MNLF was willing to negotiate with the Philippine government (which it did, beginning in 1989) to achieve Moro autonomy.

Unhappy with the MNLF’s 1989 agreement with the Philippine government establishing the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM),¹⁶ Janjalani and other radicals formally split from the MNLF in 1991 to form al Harakat al Islamiyya (the Islamic Movement),¹⁷ later known as ASG.¹⁸ They refused to settle for anything less than an independent Islamic state—and believed their only path to achieving that goal was through violent jihad.¹⁹

In 1998, Philippine forces launched a counterterrorism raid on Basilan Island, killing ASG founder Abdurajak Janjalani in the ensuing shoot-out.²⁰ After his death, ASG splintered into two factions: one headed by Janjalani’s brother, Khadaffy Janjalani, on Basilan Island, and a second, headed by Ghalib Andang, a.k.a. Commander Robot, in the Sulu Archipelago.²¹

During this period, ASG shifted its tactics from jihadist activities to terrorism conducted to meet the basic survival needs of the organization. Creating revenue through terrorism had been discussed internally among ASG’s leadership beginning in 1995, when Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, ASG’s main conduit to funding from al-Qaeda, was barred by the Philippine government from returning to the country.²² Andang advocated for the strategic use of kidnapping for ransom, believing that tactic would not only help bankroll ASG but raise the group’s profile and distinguish it from the more mainstream and increasingly less violent Moro organizations, such as the MILF and the MNLF.²³

The Philippines received significant counterterrorism support from the United States in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. In 2002, the two countries launched Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines, which set back ASG’s operations significantly. In March 2005, the counterterrorism force assassinated Commander Robot and later killed other potential rivals, leaving Khadaffy Janjalani positioned to assert control over all of ASG.²⁴

Khadaffy reoriented ASG toward committing ideologically motivated, large-scale terrorist attacks and to the goal of his late brother—establishing an Islamic state in the southern Philippines.²⁵ Nonetheless, the group’s membership declined—another consequence of the Philippine-U.S. crackdown. The group’s numbers fell to 250 fighters in 2005 from a peak of 1,269 in 2000.²⁶ ASG is believed to be comprised of 300 to 400 armed militants as of February 2019.²⁷

Khadaffy Janjalani died in a shootout with Philippine forces on September 4, 2006, creating another power vacuum within the group. ASG then splintered along clan lines into smaller alliances, and the group returned to less ambitious terror activities. ASG factions in the Sulu archipelago continue to rely on kidnapping-for-ransom operations for its members’ survival and as a monetary incentive for recruitment.²⁸ However, ASG, primarily the Basilan-based faction, has also engaged in increasingly large-scale terror plots that appear to be targeted toward the group’s ideological objectives.²⁹

Throughout its existence, ASG has engaged in terrorism and guerilla warfare, targeting Catholics and Westerners, as well as locals of the villages ASG has infiltrated.³⁰ In many ways, ASG functions as an organized crime ring. Aside from pledging allegiance to ISIS in late July 2014, recent major group activities reflect members’ greed rather than extremist pursuits. One ASG analyst calls the group an “entrepreneur of violence.”³¹ On the other hand, ASG is considered a resilient extremist group, willing to exploit opportunities for violence whether motivated by financial gain or Islamist ideology.³²

Doctrine:

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ASG seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, the predominately Muslim region in the south of the Philippines. ASG derives its ideology from the group's eponymous founder, Abdurajak Janjalani, a.k.a. Abu Sayyaf.

In the early 1990s, Janjalani issued a public proclamation—the “Four Basic Truths”—which came to define ASG's goals and ideology. The first “truth” emphasizes that ASG should serve as a bridge and balance between MNLF and MILF and should recognize the early leadership of both groups in the struggle for Moro liberation. Second, ASG's ultimate goal is to establish in Mindanao an Islamic government whose “nature, meaning, emblem and objective” are synonymous with peace. However, the third truth asserts that the advocacy of war is necessary so long as oppression, injustice, capricious ambition, and arbitrary claims are imposed on Muslims. Lastly, ASG believes that “war disturbs peace only for the attainment of the true and real objective of humanity. That objective is the establishment of justice and righteousness for all under the law of the Koran and Sunnah.”³³

Before Janjalani died in December 1998, he gave eight radical ideological discourses, called *khutbahs*. Janjalani asserted that Muslim scholars in the Philippines did not truly know the Quran, and therefore Filipino Muslims were not practicing pure Islam, unlike the Islam practiced widely in Indonesia and Malaysia. In the discourses, Janjalani revealed his knowledge of Wahhabism, which he learned while studying theology and Arabic in Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabist brand of Sunni Islam is echoed in ASG's early ideology, wherein members advocated for reforming Philippine Islamic practice, making it more pure and ultra-conservative.³⁴

Since Janjalani's death, ASG has lacked an ideological leader, stunting the group's doctrinal development. The group's preoccupation with illicit profits appears to have taken priority over ASG's stated objective of creating an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines.³⁵ This is evidenced by the apparent lack of ideologically motivated recruitment efforts by ASG. Several analysts, such as Joseph Franco, research fellow at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, believe that the group is driven primarily by financial gain.³⁶

Other experts such as Sidney Jones of the Indonesia-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, however, believe that the rise of ISIS helped unify disparate Islamist militants in the Philippines under one ideological banner.³⁷ Despite ISIS's territorial losses in the Middle East, the terrorist group has inspired ASG fighters to help launch jihadist attacks. For example, on June 28, 2019, two suicide bombers killed five Philippine soldiers in an attack in Jolo, Sulu. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, and local authorities suspected that the ASG faction loyal to the global terrorist group were to blame. One of the suspected assailants was the first known Filipino militant to carry out a suicide bombing.³⁸

Organizational Structure:

ASG was a highly centralized organization under the leadership of ASG founder Abdurajak Janjalani. ASG's hierarchy included a Majlis Shura Council and a separate military arm.³⁹ Since Janjalani's death in 1998, however, ASG has increasingly descended into bands of armed groups scattered throughout the southern Mindanao region.⁴⁰

Analysts such as Rommel Banlaoi of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence, and Terrorism Research believe that this decentralized structure has enabled ASG to stay resilient, allowing the group to form partnerships with other Islamist cells that operate in the southern Philippines.⁴¹ ASG has also been able to build its finances by tapping into an existing network of narco-traffickers who reportedly help propel ASG's illicit drug activities, including running marijuana rings.⁴² ASG's network also pressures local populations to allow ASG to operate amongst them.⁴³

Two major factions have been operating under the ASG banner in recent years: the Sulu-based faction headed by Radulan Sahiron and an ISIS-supporting faction, historically based in Basilan, led by Isnilon Hapilon before his death in October 2017.⁴⁴

Sulu-Based Faction

[Radulan Sahiron](#), one of the United States' most-wanted terrorists, leads the ASG faction based in Sulu.⁴⁵ Sahiron was named the leader of ASG following Khadaffy Janjalani's death in 2005, though ASG members who support ISIS consider Hapilon to be ASG's leader.⁴⁶ Sahiron and the Sulu-based faction have reportedly rejected ISIS and remain committed to the realization of a local, regional caliphate.⁴⁷ However, there were reports of an alignment between the groups when ISIS's Amaq News Agency claimed attacks carried out by the Sulu-based faction in May and June of 2017.⁴⁸

ASG's Sulu-based faction is primarily responsible for the series of high-profile ASG kidnappings, beheadings, and piracy attacks in Mindanao.

⁴⁹ According to the Philippine military, Sahiron signaled in April 2017 that he may be willing to negotiate for his surrender following a wave of sustained military offenses in Sulu.⁵⁰

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On March 6, 2020, a group of ASG militants surrendered in Sulu, and on March 9, another group who were also followers of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, a local leader of ISIS, surrendered to the Philippine Army. Overall, 10 militants surrendered to army forces due to the lack of support from residents due to the repercussions of on-going counterterrorism operations in the area.⁵¹

Sawadjaan's nephew, Mudzrimar "Mundi" Sawadjaan, is also a unit sub-leader and bombmaker of ASG in Sulu. He is the suspected mastermind of the August 2020 twin blasts in Jolo, Sulu, which killed at least 14 people and wounded dozens of others. According to a military spokesman, Mundi Sawadjaan controls a group of about 40 fighters as of September 2020.⁵²

ISIS and the Basilan-Based Faction

In February 2019, the Associated Press reported that Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, an ASG commander based on Jolo, became the new leader of ISIS in the Philippines. The U.S. Department of Defense believed Sawadjaan to be "acting emir," but Philippine officials claimed that he was installed as head of ISIS in the Philippines in 2018. Sawadjaan had been active in the Sulu-based faction under Sahiron, but he reportedly split from Sahiron over the latter's disinterest in integrating foreign militants.⁵³ In 2019, Sawadjaan controlled between five or six sub-groups within ASG, consisting of a total of approximately 100 fighters.⁵⁴ It was reported that pro-ISIS groups in the Philippines convened a meeting in May or June 2019 and officially selected Sawadjaan as their leader.⁵⁵ He was believed to have harbored foreign terrorists and Islamist extremists, including the Indonesian couple that carried out the January 2019 Cathedral bombing in Jolo, Sulu.⁵⁶ The attack was orchestrated by a cell under Sawadjaan, known as the Ajang-Ajang.⁵⁷ Sawadjaan was also linked to a number of high-profile kidnappings and executions, including the beheadings of two Canadians in 2016.⁵⁸ In July 2020, local Philippine media reported that Sawadjaan had died days after he was injured in a clash with government forces, though the military later claimed he survived. In August 2020, a military official claimed Sawadjaan was likely killed, but troops were working to recover his remains to confirm his death.⁵⁹

[Isnilon Totoni Hapilon](#), the former leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia, led the ASG faction that has historically been based in Basilan in southern Mindanao before his death on October 16, 2017. According to the Philippine military, ISIS leaders in Syria made direct contact with Hapilon and called on him to stake out possible areas for a caliphate in Mindanao. Following ISIS orders, Hapilon and other Basilan-based members reportedly moved to central Mindanao in an attempt to unite with other ISIS-supporting terrorist groups in the country.⁶⁰

In July 2014, Hapilon and his militants pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.⁶¹ The Basilan-based group under Hapilon effectively ceased most of its kidnapping activities after the pledge.⁶² In January 2016, Hapilon's group, using their alternative name Harakatul Islamiyah (Islamic Movement), again pledged allegiance to ISIS in a video posted online and named Hapilon the leader of ASG.⁶³ Hapilon and his faction received international attention in May 2017 when they were the target of a Philippine military raid in Marawi City that devolved into a violent siege and resulted in President Rodrigo Duterte calling for martial law in Mindanao. The raid was originally carried out to target Hapilon, who was allegedly in Marawi to meet with the Maute Group, an ISIS-linked group based in the area.⁶⁴ Hapilon was killed in a military operation in the city of Marawi on October 16, 2017.⁶⁵ The following day, Duterte announced the liberation of Marawi from ISIS-affiliated militants.⁶⁶

Following Hapilon's death, [Furuji Indama](#) was believed to have taken charge of the Basilan-based ASG faction.⁶⁷ It is not known whether Indama pledged allegiance to ISIS or what connection he has with militants who supported Hapilon's shift to ISIS.⁶⁸ In 2019, Philippine police arrested a number of ASG members operating under Indama, including one suspect linked to a 2015 bombing at a bus terminal that killed an 11-year-old girl.⁶⁹ In October 2020, the Philippine military announced that it believed Indama had been fatally wounded during a September 2020 clash with the armed forces. The military is still working to locate his remains in order to confirm his death.⁷⁰

Financing:

ASG's main funding sources are its kidnapping-for-ransom and extortion enterprises. ASG primarily targets Westerners and other wealthy foreign nationals for kidnapping. The group has also been known to target local politicians, business people, and civilians.⁷¹ In addition to its dependence on ransom, ASG engages in extortion, collecting so-called taxes from businesses and locals within ASG's areas of influence. The group also offers 'protection' to certain local moneymaking endeavors, reportedly including marijuana farms in the Sulu Archipelago.⁷² In February 2018, the Department of Public Works and Highways in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (DWPH-ARMM) reported that ASG threatened to delay the implementation of vital infrastructure projects in Basilan if the militants were not paid "protection money" of at least 200,000 Philippine pesos.⁷³

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In addition to violent and criminal activity, ASG has reportedly received funding and logistical support through a network of jihadist groups, including [Hezbollah](#), Jamaat-e-Islami, Hizbul-Mujahideen in Pakistan, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin in Afghanistan, al Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, International Harakatu'l al-Islamia in Libya, and the Islamic Liberation Front in Algeria.⁷⁴ ASG has also received funds from [Jemaah Islamiyah \(JI\)](#). In exchange, ASG continues to harbor JI militants who provide in-kind assistance to the group, in the form of military and bomb-making training.⁷⁵

ASG received a majority of its seed funding from [al-Qaeda](#). The most notorious ASG financier was one of Osama bin Laden's brothers-in-law, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Khalifa established a Philippine branch of the Saudi-based International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), an illicit charity organization used to channel funds to ASG.⁷⁶ ASG's leadership used the funds to pay for training its members and building up its arms.⁷⁷ In the mid-1990s, Mahmud Abd al-Jalil Afif ran the IIRO Philippines, using the organization to funnel money to terrorist groups, and was a major ASG supporter.⁷⁸ In June 2014, ASG senior leader Khair Mundos was arrested after a seven-year manhunt, having been designated as a U.S. most-wanted terrorist. Mundos confessed to transferring funds from al-Qaeda to former ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani. The funds were earmarked for use in bombings and other criminal acts throughout Mindanao.⁷⁹ In 1995, Khalifa was refused re-entry into the Philippines for his association with Ramzi Yousef, who plotted the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the Bojinka Plot. Consequently, ASG lost a major financial pipeline and connection to al-Qaeda Central.⁸⁰

ASG has also received funding through remittances from Filipinos working overseas and from other extremists in the Middle East.⁸¹ Philippine officials maintain that funds secured through these channels are miniscule compared to ASG's other sources of funding. Authorities maintain that this pipeline may be unintentional, as money sent to Filipino families may be intercepted by ASG operatives via wire transfer agencies and redirected to ASG's coffers.⁸² Remittances from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are an integral component of the Philippine economy, accounting for nearly 10 percent of the country's GDP.⁸³ OFWs working in Western or Middle Eastern countries send money through a wire transfer agency, such as MoneyGram or Western Union and their agents in the Philippines. Some OFWs are unaware that their money is channeled to the extremist group, while other OFWs may be sympathetic to ASG's cause or are relatives or friends of the militants.⁸⁴

Following the siege of Marawi in 2017, the Philippine military chief revealed that ISIS had funneled a "couple of million dollars" to Hapilon's faction. The terrorist organization reportedly sent at least \$1.5 million to finance the siege, which began in May 2017 and killed more than 1,100 people and displaced approximately 400,000 residents.⁸⁵

Recruitment:

Traditionally, ASG draws members from clan and family groups.⁸⁶ According to the Australian government, most of ASG's new recruits (as of 2013) are young Muslims from the impoverished southernmost islands of the Philippines, primarily the main Mindanao region and the Sulu Archipelago. At times, the group has also absorbed foreign fighters into its ranks, including Indonesian⁸⁷ and Malaysian⁸⁸ jihadists.

According to Australian intelligence, ASG works to recruit members so that it maintains a base of at least 400 fighters. Despite these reported aspirations, ASG membership appears to have fluctuated significantly—increasing in correlation with the success of its terror operations, and then decreasing as pressure mounts from the Philippine military. According to Filipino security analyst Rommel C. Banlaoi, ASG's illicit operations have enhanced the group's resources and reputation, facilitating recruitment.⁸⁹

Many of the areas in the southern Philippines where ASG is most active—the Sulu Archipelago, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi—lack economic opportunities and infrastructure. Locals rely on subsistence fishing and struggle with difficult agricultural conditions.⁹⁰ Recruits to ASG appear to be primarily motivated by the promise of wealth and status rather than ideological fulfillment. This is unsurprising, given the group's vacillation between jihadist-style, ideologically driven operations and criminal activity for financial gain.⁹¹ For example, in the Sulu Archipelago, Basilan, and Tawi-Tawi, poor Muslim parents volunteer their sons to join ASG in exchange for monthly food supplies and financial support amounting to a few hundred dollars.⁹²

In some cases, youths joined ASG as a status symbol, setting themselves apart from their peers who sought criminal activity through ordinary street gangs. Other recruitment motivations have included ASG's marijuana production and openness to use of the drug, revenge for family members killed by the Philippine police or military, or clan conflicts that abound in Mindanao.⁹³ ASG exploits youth in these underserved and marginalized areas, seducing them with the promise of wealth or notoriety. More recently, the group has used its pledge to ISIS as a propaganda tactic to bring in new recruits.⁹⁴

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During the Marawi siege that began in May 2017, ASG members and other militants documented their victories—real or perceived—and clashes with Philippine government forces on ISIS social media accounts.⁹⁵ According to a report from the Indonesia-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, Filipino fighters who posted on ISIS-supporting Telegram channels were able to create an international constituency for the Marawi jihad. They used social media to perpetuate the narrative that the Philippine government was to blame because of its oppression of Muslims in Mindanao and, during the siege, for destruction of the city.⁹⁶

Training:

Both al-Qaeda and JI have trained ASG members in guerrilla warfare, military operations, and bomb making.⁹⁷ Before the 2001 war in Afghanistan, ASG members occasionally trained there with al-Qaeda. After the post-9/11 crackdown on al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the cooperation between the larger group and ASG has been limited. However, several ASG members who trained with al-Qaeda are still active. The U.S. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) claims that ASG members receive continued operational guidance from al-Qaeda affiliates who are in hiding or visiting the Philippines.⁹⁸

ASG has a long history of receiving training in bomb-making and weapons from foreign terrorists. Ramzi Yousef—perpetrator of the 1995 World Trade Center bombing—trained a small ASG cadre in bomb-making, having experimented with various bombs and explosives in an apartment in the Philippines.⁹⁹ Two well-known Indonesian JI members—Dulmatin and Umar Patek, the masterminds behind the deadly 2002 Bali bombings—traveled to the Philippines to train ASG militants. Philippine intelligence identified the two as key trainers on the manufacture and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).¹⁰⁰

ASG has become adept at maritime terror attacks, as evidenced by its targeting of ferries and various sea vehicles carrying tourists. Almost all members of ASG have some knowledge of the maritime domain, as descendants from a long Moro tradition of seafaring and subsistence fishing. To further its kidnap-for-ransom agenda, ASG trains its members to overtake and attack boats, ships, and barges.¹⁰¹

Also Known As:

- Abu Sayyaf
- Grupong Abu Sayyaf¹⁰²
- Jamaah Abu Sayyaf¹⁰³
- Al Harakat al Islamiyya¹⁰⁴
- Islamic Movement¹⁰⁵

¹ “Timeline: Hostage Crisis in the Philippines,” CNN, August 25, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/06/07/phil.timeline.hostage/>; Garrett Atkinson, “Abu Sayyaf: The Father of the Swordsman: A Review of the Rise of Islamic Insurgency in the Southern Philippines,” American Security Project, March 2012, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Abu-Sayyaf-The-Father-of-the-Swordsman.pdf>.

² Joe Penney, “The ‘War on Terror’ Rages in the Philippines,” Al Jazeera, October 5, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2011/10/2011104145947651645.html>.

³ Carmela Fonbuena, “Abu Sayyaf top man Sahiron sends surrender feelers – military,” Rappler, April 19, 2017, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/167207-abu-sayyaf-radullon-sahiron-surrender-feelers-military>; Ted Regencia, “Marawi siege: Army kills Abu Sayyaf, Maute commanders,” Al Jazeera, October 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/marawi-siege-army-kills-abu-sayyaf-maute-commanders-171016072551985.html>.

⁴ Aurea Calica, “Islamic State Threatens Mindanao, Philippines Tells Asean,” Philippine Star (Manila), April 27, 2015.

⁵ Carmela Fonbuena, “ISIS makes direct contact with Abu Sayyaf, wants caliphate in PH,” Rappler, January 26, 2017, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/159568-isis-direct-contact-isnilon-hapilon>.

⁶ “Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia,” Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, October 25, 2016, 2, http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2016/10/IPAC_Report_33.pdf.

⁷ Joseph Hincks, “The Battle for Marawi City,” Time, May 25, 2017, <http://time.com/marawi-philippines-isis/>; “Timeline: the Marawi crisis,” CNN Philippines, October 15, 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/05/24/marawi-crisis-timeline.html>.

⁸ Ted Regencia, “Marawi siege: Army kills Abu Sayyaf, Maute commanders,” Al Jazeera, October 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/marawi-siege-army-kills-abu-sayyaf-maute-commanders-171016072551985.html>; Joseph Hincks, “The Leaders of the ISIS Assault on Marawi in the Philippines Have Been Killed,” Time, October 15, 2017, <http://time.com/4983374/isis-philippines-killed-marawi-hapilon-maute/>; Euan McKirdy and Joshua Berlinger, “Philippines’ Duterte declares liberation of Marawi from ISIS-affiliated militants,” CNN, October 17, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/asia/duterte-marawi-liberation/index.html>.

⁹ Jimmy Gomez, “Amid loss of leaders, unknown militant rises in Philippines,” Associated Press, February 21, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/730b6ee409364975817a82ad9f15d90c>.

¹⁰ Ellie Aben, “Philippine military says Abu Sayyaf leader still alive,” Arab News, July 11, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1702951/world>; Jim Gomez, “Army chief: Militant leader likely killed in Philippines,” Associated Press, August 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-islamic-state-group-asia-pacific-d4595e2a569618d3f7abb3dd10aa30f7>.

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- 11 “Country Report on Terrorism 2014,” U.S. Department of State, June 19, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239413.htm>.
- 12 James Griffiths, “ISIS in Southeast Asia: Philippines battles growing threat,” CNN, May 29, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/28/asia/isis-threat-southeast-asia/index.html>.
- 13 “Philippines-Mindanao Conflict,” Thomson Reuters Foundation, June 3, 2014, <http://www.trust.org/spotlight/-Mindanao-conflict/?tab=briefing>.
- 14 The term “Moor”—“Moro” in Spanish—comes from the Muslim Arab and Berber peoples who invaded what became modern-day Spain and Portugal in the 700s. The Spanish came to refer to Muslims in North Africa by this term in the pre-colonial period. When Spanish colonists came to the Philippines in the 15th century, they again used “Moro” to describe darker-skinned, indigenous Filipino Muslims who attempted to push back against colonial expansion on their lands. While the term was once considered offensive, Filipino Muslims have taken ownership of it, calling themselves Moro and coining the term Bangsamoro (“bangsa” meaning state or nation) to describe their homeland.
- 15 Garrett Atkinson, “Abu Sayyaf: The Father of the Swordsman: A Review of the Rise of Islamic Insurgency in the Southern Philippines,” American Security Project, March 2012, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Abu-Sayyaf-The-Father-of-the-Swordsman.pdf>.
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- 17 Octavio A. Dinampo, “Khadaffy Janjalani’s Last Interview,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Makati City), January 22, 2007, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070122-44761/A_last_ext.
- 18 Octavio A. Dinampo, “Khadaffy Janjalani’s Last Interview,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Makati City), January 22, 2007, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070122-44761/A_last_ext.
- 19 Zack Fellman, “Abu Sayyaf Group,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2011, http://csis.org/files/publication/111128_Fellman_ASQ_AQAMCaseStudy5.pdf.
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- 21 Zack Fellman, “Abu Sayyaf Group,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2011, http://csis.org/files/publication/111128_Fellman_ASQ_AQAMCaseStudy5.pdf.
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Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Key Leaders



Radulan Sahiron

Leader, operational commander



Isnilon Totoni Hapilon

Leader of Basilan faction and
alleged ISIS leader in Southeast
Asia (deceased)



Yasser Igasan

Religious leader



Furuji Indama

Leader of Basilan-based faction
(deceased)



Marzan Ajilul

Co-commander of the Basilan
faction



Nasser Usman

Leader for Islamic propagation and
indoctrination



Khair Mundos

Fundraiser, bomb maker, arrested



Jainal Antel Sali, Jr.

Spokesperson, senior leader,
confirmed dead

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)



**Abdurajak Abubakar
Janjalani**

Founder and former emir,
confirmed dead



**Khadaffy Abubakar
Janjalani**

Former emir and senior leader,
confirmed dead



Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan

Emir (leader) of ISIS in the
Philippines (reportedly deceased)



**Mudzrimar "Mundi"
Sawadjaan**

Unit sub-leader, bombmaker

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

History:

- **July 30, 2022:** A hundred former ASG members officially surrender to the Philippine government and return to their communities in Sulu. The Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. officiated the oath of the former ASG members during a program held at a gymnasium in Patikul town, Sulu. The program reportedly demonstrates the success of the government's Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (ECLIP) program for former extremist members who have surrendered. Source: Roel Pareno, "100 former Abu Sayyaf members vow allegiance to gov't," Philippine Star, July 30, 2022, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2022/07/30/2199087/100-former-abu-sayyaf-members-vow-allegiance-govt>.
- **June 17, 2022:** Almujaer Yadah and Bensito Quitino, two ASG commanders accused of beheading two kidnapped Canadian tourists and a German in the southern Philippines, surrender to authorities. The militants face multiple murder and other criminal charges, including violation of the Philippines' anti-terrorism law. Additionally, they are accused of beheading the hostages after failing to obtain large ransoms they had demanded. Source: Jim Gomez, "Philippine militants accused of beheading tourists surrender," Associated Press, June 17, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/philippine-militants-accused-beheading-tourists-surrender-85457518>.
- **July 30, 2021:** Philippine police intelligence operatives arrest civilian personnel member Masckur Adoh Patarasa, also known as "Makong" and "Omair Sali Taib," in Jolo, Sulu. According to the Philippine National Police (PNP) chief, Patarasa is an alleged finance and logistics officer of the ASG. A few days later on August 3, Chief General Guillermo Eleazar orders an "intensified cleansing" of police ranks. Source: Ellie Aben, "Philippine police arrest mole identified as Abu Sayyaf Group member," August 3, 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1904581/world>.
- **June 14, 2021:** The Philippine military engages in a shootout with ASG members in the province of Sulu. The shootout results in the death of Injam Yadah, an ASG leader who was known to behead hostages and three of his followers. Yadah also reportedly played a role in the kidnapping of five Indonesian fishermen in Malaysian waters in January 2020. Source: Teofilo Garcia, "Abu Sayyaf leader, 3 members killed in Sulu clash," Philippine News Agency, June 14, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1143591>.
- **May 19, 2021:** Police in Borneo, Malaysia ambush ASG members in a squatter area, killing five of them in a shootout. Among the ASG members killed is Mabur Binda, an ASG deputy commander who was listed on the Philippine government's wanted list. Source: "Malaysian police say five suspected Abu Sayyaf militants killed in raid," Reuters, May 18, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysian-police-say-five-suspected-abu-sayyaf-militants-killed-raid-2021-05-18/>.
- **May 8, 2021:** Malaysian authorities, aided by Philippine forces, arrest eight suspected ASG members in Sabah, on the Malaysian island of Borneo. The militants are suspected of planning to use Sabah as a base to launch kidnappings and facilitate the travel of foreign fighters to the southern Philippines, according to a Philippine military official. However, a Malaysian police commissioner claims the detained were not engaged in kidnap-for-ransom, but were in hiding after they escaped a military operation in the southern Philippines. Among the arrested are two sub-leaders of the Sulu-based ASG, Sansibar Bensio and Mabur Binda, who were allegedly involved in past deadly clashes with the Philippine military and the kidnap of foreign citizens. Sources: "Malaysia arrests Abu Sayyaf militants with Philippine help," Associated Press, May 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/abu-sayyaf-philippines-malaysia-arrests-662995bd8b0afa8fd0f5ae4515cb16e9>; "Abu Sayyaf suspects arrested in Sabah," Rappler, May 10, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/abu-sayyaf-suspects-arrested-sabah-may-8-2021>.
- **April 23, 2021:** Philippine troops clash with militants in Patikul, Sulu. A military official later confirms the death of two ASG members, Mukhtihar Taha and Mujafal Sawadjaan, the eldest brother of Mundi Sawadjaan. Mujafal Sawadjaan had been on the security forces' ASG watchlist as of the end of 2020. Sources: "Brother of Abu Sayyaf leader killed in Sulu encounter," CNN Philippines, April 23, 2021, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/4/23/Brother-of-Abu-Sayyaf-leader-killed-in-Sulu-encounter.html>; "Brother of Abu Sayyaf bombmaker Mundi Sawadjaan killed in Sulu clash," Rappler, April 24, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/brother-abu-sayyaf-bombmaker-mundi-sawadjaan-killed-sulu-april-23-2021>.
- **Philippine troops rescue four Indonesian hostages held by ASG.** On March 18, after the militants' boat capsizes near the province of Tawi-Tawi, the Philippine military successfully recaptures three hostages. However, the ASG fighters escape inland with the fourth captive, a 15-year-old Indonesian, with troops in pursuit. After pursuing the fighters, on March 20, the Philippine military engages in a gun battle and kills three ASG members, including commander Majan Sahidjan, also known as Apo Mike, who had been involved in ransom kidnappings since 1990s. On March 21, government troops discover the remaining captive in the town where the gun battle took place, Languyan, Tawi-Tawi. Sources: Jim Gomez, "Filipino troops kill rebel commander, rescue last hostage," Associated Press, March 21, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/asia-pacific-philippines-kidnapping-manila-7a8f824ada255fbc039b095537a4427>; "Philippine troops kill Abu Sayyaf leader, rescue Indonesian hostages," Reuters, March 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-security/philippine-troops-kill-abu-sayyaf-leader-rescue-indonesian-hostages-idUSKBN2BD060>.
- **November 25, 2020:** Philippine National Police officers kill three suspected ASG bombers on board a boat off the coast of Zamboanga City in Mindanao. The militants, Radi Nalul Tahirin, Hasan Alimin, and Abdilla Aspalin, are believed to be "on a bombing mission" when they are intercepted by Philippine authorities. Source: "Three 'Abu Sayyaf bombers' killed in encounter off Zamboanga City," CNN Philippines, November 25, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/11/25/suspected-abu-sayyaf-bombers-killed-zamboanga-city-.html>.
- **November 20, 2020:** AFP troops kill two ASG members in a firefight in Sulu. The slain militants, identified as Hatib Munap Binda and Bensio Baraham, are believed to be ASG sub-leaders. Source: "2 alleged Abu Sayyaf sub-leaders killed in Sulu encounter," CNN Philippines, November 20, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/11/20/2-alleged-Abu-Sayyaf-sub-leaders-killed-Sulu-encounter.html>.
- **November 3, 2020:** Government troops kill seven alleged ASG members during clashes on the Sulu Sea, at the southwestern point of the Philippines. Two of those killed are Madsmar Sawadjaan and Mannul Sawadjaan, brothers of ASG bombmaker Mundi Sawadjaan and nephews of local ISIS leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan. The military believes the group was engaged in kidnap-for-ransom activities under the leadership of the elder Sawadjaan and Radulan Sahiron. Source: "2 brothers of Jolo bombing suspect, 5 other Abu Sayyaf members killed in sea clash," CNN Philippines, November 3, 2020, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/regional/2020/11/3/Abu-Sayyaf-members-Sawadjaan-Sulu-Sea.html>.
- **October 30, 2020:** The Philippine military announces that it believes ASG leader Furuji Indama is dead.

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Indama may have succumbed to wounds sustained during a September 2020 clash with the armed forces. The military is still working to locate his remains in order to confirm his death. Source: "Military believes Abu Sayyaf subleader Furuji Indama is dead," Rappler, October 30, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/military-believes-abu-sayyaf-subleader-furuji-indama-dead>.

- **August 15, 2020:** Philippine National Police take high-ranking ASG fighter Anduljihad "Idang" Susukan into custody. Susukan is wanted for kidnap-for-ransom activities and faces "23 counts of murder, five counts of kidnapping and serious illegal detention, and six counts of frustrated murder." Source: Eimor Santos, "Abu Sayyaf leader transferred to PNP headquarters," CNN Philippines, August 15, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/8/15/abu-sayyaf-idang-susukan-camp-crame.html>.
- On March 6, a group of ASG militants surrendered in Sulu, Philippines, and on March 9, another group who were also followers of Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, a local leader of ISIS, surrendered to the Philippine Army. Overall, 10 militants surrendered to army forces due to the lack of support from residents due to the repercussions of on-going counter-terror operations in the area. Source: Roel Pareno, "10 Abu Sayyaf bandits surrender in Sulu," Philippine Star, March 15, 2020, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2020/03/15/2000888/10-abu-sayyaf-bandits-surrender-sulu>.
- **January 23, 2020:** The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) readjusts their timeline for dismantling ASG. Although the forces claim to have "significantly decimated" the group by their original deadline of December 31, 2019, they believe that March 31, 2020 is a more realistic campaign timeline. Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana, Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) chief, believes that given that ASG has lost mass-based support, it is more likely that the AFP will be successful in their extended campaign. As of April 6, 2020, the Philippine government has not reported on whether the campaign has been suspended. Source: Teofilo Garcia Jr., "AFP resets timeline to dismantle Abu Sayyaf Group," Philippine News Agency, January 23, 2020, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1091712>.
- **January 17, 2020:** Regional police in Mindanao arrest Benhajar Salapuddin Alan, reportedly a prominent member in ASG, and charge the suspect for the murder of a civilian and the January 12 killing of the team leader of the provincial drug enforcement unit of Sulu Police Provincial office. Alan was allegedly one of the principal negotiators in Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping-for-ransom attacks. Source: Cathrine Gonzales, "'Notorious' Abu Sayyaf member arrested in Zamboanga City," Inquirer, January 17, 2020, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1214469/notorious-abu-sayyaf-member-arrested-in-zamboanga-city>.
- **October 16, 2019:** The Philippine army raids a terrorist hideout in Maluso, Basilan. During the raid, the army discover six improvised explosive devices. It is alleged the suspects in the hideout were planning a bomb attack on a major road in Basilan. Source: JC Gotinga, "Army foils Abu Sayyaf bomb plot in Basilan," Rappler, October 16, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/242693-abu-sayyaf-bomb-plot-basilan-foiled-says-military>.
- **September 27, 2019:** Philippine government forces arrest Nasirin Balajadji in Naga, Zamboanga Sibugay. Balajadji was a high-ranking member of ASG and orchestrated the kidnapping of high-profile journalist Baker Atyani in 2012. Source: "Abu Sayyaf kidnapper nabbed in Zamboanga Sibugay," ABS-CBN News, September 27, 2019, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/27/19/abu-sayyaf-kidnapper-nabbed-in-zamboanga-sibugay>.
- **September 22, 2019:** Three members of ASG, including local sub-leader Khadaffy Kalitut, surrender to Philippine authorities in Basilan. According to Lieutenant General Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Western Mindanao Command, the suspects sought to return to the "mainstream of society." Source: "Abu Sayyaf leader, 2 others surrender in Basilan," ABS-CBN News, September 22, 2019, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/22/19/abu-sayyaf-leader-2-others-surrender-in-basilan>.
- **March 28, 2018:** An ASG senior commander in Basilan, Nurhassan Jamiri, surrenders with 13 of his men to the Philippine military. Jamiri is responsible for multiple bombings as well as a 2007 ambush that killed 24 Philippine marines, some of whom were beheaded. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana expresses hope that Jamiri's surrender will bring the collapse of ASG in Basilan. Source: Associated Press, "Filipino extremist blamed for bombings, killings surrenders," ABC News, March 29, 2018, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/filipino-extremist-blamed-bombings-killings-surrenders-54087823>.
- **ASG extortion activities worsen in Basilan.** Members of the group threatens to stall implementation of infrastructure projects if the Department of Public Works and Highways in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (DWPH-ARMM) does not pay "protection money". Source: Nonoy E. Lacson, "ASG extortion activities worsen in Basilan," *Manila Bulletin*, February 5, 2018, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/02/04/asg-extortion-activities-worsen-in-basilan/>.
- On October 16, Hapilon is killed in a military operation in Marawi along with the commander of the Maute group and seven fighters. On October 17, Duterte declares Marawi free of ISIS-affiliated militants. Ted Regencia, "Marawi siege: Army kills Abu Sayyaf, Maute commanders," Al Jazeera, October 16, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/marawi-siege-army-kills-abu-sayyaf-maute-commanders-171016072551985.html>; Joseph Hincks, "The Leaders of the ISIS Assault on Marawi in the Philippines Have Been Killed," *Time*, October 15, 2017, <http://time.com/4983374/isis-philippines-killed-marawi-hapilon-maute>; Euan McKirdy and Joshua Berlinger, "Philippines' Duterte declares liberation of Marawi from ISIS-affiliated militants," CNN, October 17, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/asia/duterte-marawi-liberation/index.html>.
- **July 5, 2017:** ASG beheads two Vietnamese nationals, Hoang Thong and Hoang Va Hai, who were kidnapped from a ship in November 2016. Their bodies are found in the town of Sumisip in Basilan. Eimor P. Santos, "Abu Sayyaf beheads 2 Vietnamese hostages – military," CNN Philippines, July 6, 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/regional/2017/07/05/Abu-Sayyaf-beheads-Vietnamese-hostages.html>.
- **June 8, 2017:** ASG's Sulu-based faction carries out a mortar attack against Philippine forces. ISIS's Amaq News Agency also claims this attack. Michael Quinones, "More dangerous union: Abu Sayyaf Sulu and ISIS East Asia finally align," Rappler, July 17, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/175812-trac-abu-sayyaf-isis-alignment>.
- **May 25, 2017:** ASG's Sulu-based faction engages in a clash with Philippine soldiers, killing one and wounding eleven others. ISIS's Amaq News Agency claims this attack in what is ISIS's first public recognition of ASG's Sulu-based faction. Source: Michael Quinones, "More dangerous union: Abu Sayyaf Sulu and ISIS East Asia finally align," Rappler, July 17, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/175812-trac-abu-sayyaf-isis-alignment>.
- **May 23, 2017:** The Philippine military launches an offensive to capture Hapilon in the city of Marawi on the island of Mindanao. Hapilon's forces, which number between 50 and 100 and are allied with hundreds of militants from the ISIS-linked Maute Group, counter the military offensive. Militants take control of city buildings and take hostages. Duterte declares martial law in Mindanao. Over 350,000 civilians are displaced as a result of the ensuing battle, which lasts

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until October 2017. Sources: Joseph Hincks, "The Battle for Marawi City," *Time*, May 25, 2017, <http://time.com/marawi-philippines-isis/>; Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State video shows destruction of church in Marawi," *Long War Journal*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/06/islamic-state-video-shows-destruction-of-church-in-marawi.php>; "Timeline: the Marawi crisis," CNN Philippines, October 15, 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/05/24/marawi-crisis-timeline.html>; Joseph Hincks, "The Battle for Marawi City," *Time*, May 25, 2017, <http://time.com/marawi-philippines-isis/>; "Timeline: the Marawi crisis," CNN Philippines, October 15, 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/05/24/marawi-crisis-timeline.html>.

- **February 27, 2017:** ASG militants behead Jürgen Kantner, a German citizen who has been held captive since he was kidnapped from a yacht in November 2016, following the expiration of a ransom payment deadline.
"German government confirms killing of hostage in Philippines," *Deutsche Welle*, February 27, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/german-government-confirms-killing-of-hostage-in-philippines/a-37728138>.
- Hapilon moves from Basilan to central Mindanao, reportedly at the behest of ISIS leadership who direct him to find a suitable area to establish a caliphate.
According to the Philippine military, he is attempting to unite with the Maute Group, an ISIS-linked terrorist group based in the area. Carmela Fonbuena, "ISIS makes direct contact with Abu Sayyaf, wants caliphate in PH," *Rappler*, January 26, 2017, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/159568-isis-direct-contact-isnilon-hapilon/>; "Pro-ISIS Groups in Mindanao and Their Links to Indonesia and Malaysia," Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (Indonesia), October 25, 2016, 2, http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2016/10/IPAC_Report_33.pdf.
- **October 21, 2016:** Ten suspected ASG fighters board a South Korean cargo ship, abducting the captain and one crew member.
Military sources believe ASG still holds a Dutch hostage, five Malaysians, two Indonesians and four Filipinos. Source: "Philippine army: 'Abu Sayyaf' attacks S Korean ship," *Al-Jazeera*, October 21, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/philippine-army-abu-sayyaf-attacks-korean-ship-161021112019969.html>.
- **September 2, 2016:** An improvised explosive device (IED) explodes in a crowded market in Davao City, killing 14 people and injuring at least 71 others.
President Rodrigo Duterte, the former mayor of Davao City, calls the blast an act of terrorism. ASG claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: Tim Hume, Christina Zdanowicz and Ralph Ellis, "Philippines President: Explosion that killed 14 was act of terrorism," *CNN News*, September 3, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/02/asia/philippines-explosion-davao-city/rj.rosalado/>; "Abu Sayyaf owns up to Davao blast, warns of more attacks," *ABS-CBN News*, September 3, 2016, <http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/03/16/abu-sayyaf-owns-up-to-davao-blast-warns-of-more-attacks>.
- **June 13, 2016:** Philippine police find a severed head in a plastic bag near a Roman Catholic Church in the southern Philippines.
DNA tests later confirm the head is that of Robert Hall, the second Canadian held hostage by ASG. Source: Floyd Whaley and Ian Austen, "Philippines Confirms Killing of Robert Hall, Canadian Hostage, by Abu Sayyaf," *New York Times*, June 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/15/world/asia/abu-sayyaf-philippines-robert-hall-canada.html?_r=0.
- **May 1, 2016:** ASG releases 10 Indonesian captives unharmed following 35 days of captivity after their vessel was seized by the militants.
The hostages indicate that they may have been released because of intensifying military operations against ASG. The lead negotiator, who represents the company operating the seized vessel, claims that the Indonesian government paid no money for the hostages' release. Sources: "Philippines' Abu Sayyaf Militants Free 10 Indonesian Hostages," *Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/philippines-abu-sayyaf-militants-free-10-indonesian-hostages-1462093079#xT0P2VyoVy2iDA>; "No ransom paid for release of 10 Indonesians, negotiator claims," *Jakarta Post*, May 2, 2016, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/05/02/no-ransom-paid-for-release-of-10-indonesians-negotiator-claims.html>.
- **April 25, 2016:** Abu Sayyaf Group beheads Canadian citizen John Ridsdel, reportedly hours after the deadline for his ransom expires.
Prime Minister Trudeau calls the incident an "act of cold blooded murder." Ridsdel had been held by the Abu Sayyaf Group since September 2015, when ASG kidnapped three westerners and one Filipino woman. The terror group demanded a \$6.5 million ransom for each of the hostages. Sources: "John Ridsdel: Hostage from Canada killed in the Philippines," *BBC News*, April 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36132382>; Mitch Potter, "Devastation, anguish after Canadian John Ridsdel killed in Philippines: Analysis," *Toronto Star*, April 25, 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2016/04/25/beheading-threat-prompts-philippines-bid-to-rescue-kidnapped-canadians-2-others.html>; "Family devastated after John Ridsdel killed by captors in Philippines," *CBC News*, April 25, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/hostage-philippines-ridsdel-militants-1.3551416>.
- **April 9, 2016:** During an AFP operation on Basilan Island, ASG members ambush the soldiers, killing 18, at least four of whom are beheaded, and injuring more than 50.
Four of the soldiers killed in action are former MNLF fighters who were integrated into the AFP and assisted with implementing the MNLF and MILF peace processes. The military succeeds in killing Ubaida Hapilon, son of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon, and a Moroccan terrorist, Mohammad Khattab. Sources: "Philippines: 18 soldiers dead in clashes with Abu Sayyaf militants," *BBC News*, April 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36008645>; Gerg Cahiles and Liza Jocson, "18 soldiers dead, 5 Abu Sayyaf bandits killed in Basilan encounter," *CNN Philippines*, April 10, 2016, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/04/10/basilan-encounter-araw-ng-kagitingan-abu-sayyaf.html>; "Statement of GPH Peace Panel Chair Miriam Coronel-Ferrer on the armed encounter between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Basilan," Philippine Government, April 12, 2016, <http://www.gov.ph/2016/04/12/ferrer-armed-encounter-afp-abu-sayyaf-group-basilan/>.
- A band of ASG members, using the group's alternative name Harakatul Islamiyah (Islamic Movement), pledges allegiance to ISIS in a video posted online.
They also name the leader of their unit, Isnilon Totoni Hapilon, as the leader of ASG. In July 2014, Hapilon and his men pledged allegiance to ISIS leader al-Baghdadi. However, the ASG band says they are pledging again, "officially" with their newly named leader as a witness. Sources: Moh Saaduddin, "Abu Sayyaf rebels pledge allegiance to ISIS," *Manila Times*, January 11, 2016, http://www.manilatimes.net/breaking_news/abu-sayyaf-rebels-pledge-allegiance-to-isis/; Maria A. Ressa, "Senior Abu Sayyaf leader swears oath to ISIS," *Rappler*, August 4, 2015, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/65199-abu-sayyaf-leader-oath-isis>.
- **November 18, 2015:** ASG beheads Malaysian hostage Bernard Then Ted Fen.
ASG militants leave Then's severed head in a sack in front of a local government office and place his decapitated body in a separate location on the Sulu, Philippines. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak condemns the killing, calling on Philippine authorities to take action against the perpetrators of the barbaric act. Source: Stephanie Scawen, "Abu Sayyaf beheading of Malaysian condemned," *Al Jazeera*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/abu-sayyaf-beheading-malaysian-condemned-151118114320562.html>; Patricia Lourdes Viray, "PNP conducting forensics on beheaded Malaysian," *Philippine Star* (Manila), November 19, 2015, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/11/19/1523677/pnp-conducting-forensics-beheaded-malaysian>.
- **October 1, 2015:** Suspected ASG extremists target a vice mayor's convoy in the Philippines and a bus.

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The extremists detonate a bomb packed with shrapnel in a parked motorcycle taxi as the local vice mayor's convoy passes. Four people are killed and six are wounded in the attack. An hour earlier, a bomb blew up a crowded passenger bus, injuring 18 people. Though no one claims responsibility, police suspect ASG due to their past attacks in the area. Source: Jim Gomez, "Bomb in Southern Philippines Kills 4, Hits Vice Mayor Convoy," *Washington Post*, October 1, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/bomb-in-southern-philippines-kills-4-hits-vice-mayor-convoy/2015/10/01/5ad01f38-6829-11e5-bdb6-6861f4521205_story.html.

- **September 22, 2015:** Eleven ASG gunmen storm the Holiday Ocean View Samal Resort on an island off of Davao City, southeast of Mindanao.
The gunmen abduct a Norwegian resort manager, two Canadians, and one Filipino woman. Source: Associated Press, "Gunmen Kidnap 2 Canadians, Norwegian and Filipino Woman from Philippine Resort," *New York Daily News*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/gunmen-kidnap-canadians-norwegian-filipino-resort-article-1.2369307>.
- **September 18, 2015:** ASG attacks another civilian target in Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines.
A crude bomb set under a bus explodes, killing an 11-year-old girl and injuring at least 32 others. Local police find that ASG members are responsible for the attack, based on video evidence and extortion letters that were sent to the bus terminal management. Sources: Johnlee Varghese, "Philippines Bomb Blast: Bus Explosion Kills 11-Year Old, Injures 32 in Zamboanga City," *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/philippines-bomb-blast-explosion-bus-kills-11-year-old-injures-32-zamboanga-city-647113>; RJ Rosalado, "Abu Sayyaf Tagged in Zamboanga Bombing," *ABS-CBN News*, September 20, 2015, <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/nation/regions/09/20/15/abu-sayyaf-tagged-zamboanga-bombing>.
- **August 11, 2015:** Members of the Philippine military find the beheaded body of a man identified as the *barangay* captain, Rodolfo Buligao, kidnapped in May 2015.
Local sources report to the police that the group was demanding a 1 million Peso ransom for each of the hostages ASG was holding. Source: Gualberto Laput, "Abu Sayyaf Beheads Filipino Hostage in Sulu," *Rappler*, August 12, 2015, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/102347-abu-sayyaf-beheads-filipino-hostage-sulu>.
- **Philippine anti-terror forces launch attacks against ASG settlements in the jungles of Sulu, the southern Philippine province.**
On August 19, the Philippine military clashes with extremists, killing 15 ASG members. On August 29, marines conduct an operation in a remote southern village, where they engage in an hour-long gun battle with 300 militants. Ten members of the Philippine military sustain wounds, while only three ASG members were killed in the battle. Sources: Priam F. Nepomuceno, "15 Abu Sayyaf Bandits Killed in Sulu Clash," *Interaksyon*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.interaksyon.com/article/116293/15-abu-sayyaf-bandits-killed-in-sulu-clash>; AP News, "Philippine: 3 Abu Sayyaf Militants Killed, 10 Marines Wounded in Clash," *Asian Correspondent*, <http://asiancorrespondent.com/135200/philippines-3-abu-sayyaf-militants-killed-10-marines-wounded-in-clash/>.
- **June 25, 2015:** ASG members threaten to kill three hostages.
In a video, the hostages—two Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) members and a *barangay* captain—plead with government leaders for help or they will be executed by ASG. A masked ASG gunman reiterates that ASG will behead the hostages if the government does not comply with their demands. Sources: Gualberto Laput, "Abu Sayyaf Beheads Filipino Hostage in Sulu," *Rappler*, August 12, 2015, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/102347-abu-sayyaf-beheads-filipino-hostage-sulu>; Jaime Laude and Evelyn Macairan, "Abu Sayyaf Threatens to Behead 3 Captives," *Philippine Star* (Manila), June 25, 2015, <http://www.philstar.com/nation/2015/06/25/1469507/abu-sayyaf-threatens-behead-3-captives>.
- **October 17, 2014:** ASG frees two German hostages.
According to ASG, the hostages—Stefan Okonek and Henrike Dielen—were released in exchange for 250 million pesos (\$5.6 million) in ransom money. The two Germans were kidnapped in April 2014. In September 2014, the group had threatened to kill one of the hostages in retaliation for Germany's involvement with the U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS. Source: Michelle FlorCruz, "Philippine Terror Group Abu Sayyaf May Be Using ISIS Link for Own Agenda," *International Business Times*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/philippine-terror-group-abu-sayyaf-may-be-using-isis-link-own-agenda-1695156>.
- **July 28, 2014:** Approximately 50 ASG extremists open fire on locals in the village of Talipao, Mindanao.
The victims had been celebrating the end of Ramadan. Among the 21 killed are six children and four members of a civilian security force called the *Barangay Police Action Team*. The security force was assisting the military in fighting Islamist militants in the area. Source: Alroy Menezes, "Abu Sayyaf Militants Kill 17 Civilians in Philippines," *International Business Times*, July 28, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/asia/05FILL.html>.
- **ASG leader Isnilon Totoni Hapilon pledges allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS.**
ISIS does not immediately accept the pledge. The move by Hapilon worries officials in the region, and leads Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario to express fears of a renewed threat to the region. Sources: Michelle FlorCruz, "Philippine Terror Group Abu Sayyaf May Be Using ISIS Link for Own Agenda," *International Business Times*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/philippine-terror-group-abu-sayyaf-may-be-using-isis-link-own-agenda-1695156>.
- **April 29, 2014:** Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Marines wrest control of a jungle training camp from ASG on the southern archipelago of Sulu.
The 10-hour battle results in 26 casualties, including one AFP Marine. Source: "Country Report on Terrorism 2014," U.S. Department of State, June 19, 2015, 76, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/>.
- **July 11, 2012:** ASG attacks a local business on Basilan.
The business had refused to give in to ASG's extortion. Gunmen ambush a vehicle carrying rubber plantation workers on Basilan Island. ASG fighters kill six workers and injure another 27. Source: "Abu Sayyaf Attack Kills 6 Rubber Plantation Workers," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Makati City), July 11, 2012, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/227497/abu-sayyaf-attack-kills-6-rubber-plantation-workers>.
- **ASG steps up IED attacks.**
In March, five people are killed when an IED detonates outside an elementary school in San Raymundo village on the island of Jolo in Sulu. ASG kills three more with an IED outside of a wedding ceremony in a hotel in Zamboanga city in Mindanao. Source: "Abu Sayyaf Group," Australian National Security, accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/AbuSayyafGroup.aspx>.
- **April 13, 2010:** ASG launches a series of attacks on the Philippine island of Basilan.
Six ASG members are believed to have taken part in the attack, in which an IED detonates near the Basilan National High School. Philippine Marines respond to the blast and a firefight ensues, leaving 11 dead, including three Marines (another Marine was wounded). According to the head of the armed forces in Mindanao, this marks the first time ASG don uniforms to infiltrate their targets. Source: Mark Meruenas, "Military Tags Abu Sayyaf in Basilan Explosions," *GMA Network*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/188331/news/regions/military-tags-abu-sayyaf-in-basilan-explosions>.

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

- Three schoolgirls are beheaded in the Sulawesi region of Indonesia.
An Indonesian national known only as Sanusi assists in the beheading, and is believed to have fled to the Philippines following the attack. In 2010, the Indonesian government formally requests that Philippine law enforcement track Sanusi down.
- **February 14, 2005:** ASG guerillas launch near-simultaneous bombing attacks.
The attacks are scattered throughout three cities in the mainland Philippines: General Santos, Makati City, and Davao. It is one of the more sophisticated attacks close to the Philippine capital, though only eight are killed. Source: "Timeline: Hostage Crisis in the Philippines" CNN, August 25, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/06/07/phil.timeline.hostage/>.
- **February 27, 2004:** ASG militants set off a blast on the *Superferry 14*.
The *Superferry 14* is a passenger ferry docked in the Philippine capital of Manila and bound for the city of Bacolod in central Philippines. The explosion and resulting fire spreads through the ferry, killing 116 people, including 15 children. Twelve families lose multiple members; in one case, three generations perish. The Philippine government believes that senior ASG leaders Khadaffy Janjalani and Jainal Antel Sali Jr., a.k.a. Abu Solaiman, are the masterminds behind the attack. Sources: "Bomb Caused Philippine ferry fire," BBC News, Monday 11, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3732356.stm>; "Lives Destroyed: Attacks on Civilians in the Philippines," Human Rights Watch, July 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/philippines0707/background/2.htm>.
- **March 4, 2003:** Bomb detonates at Davao International Airport in the southern Philippines.
The bomb comes at a time of heightened sectarian violence. Twenty-two people are killed, including an American missionary, and 170 others are wounded. An ASG member claims responsibility days after the attack, though government authorities initially blame Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), another major Islamic insurgent group in the southern Philippines. Sources: Kit Collier and John Sifton, "Lives Destroyed: Attacks against Civilians in the Philippines," Human Rights Watch, July 2007, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/philippines_lives_destroyed.pdf; Seth Mydans, "Bombing Kills an American and 20 Others in Philippines," *New York Times*, March 5, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/international/asia/05FILL.html>.
- **August 2, 2001:** ASG members attack a village in the southern Philippines.
The village is predominately Christian, and located in Basilan Province. The ASG operatives kidnap 32 villagers and later decapitate 11 of them. Source: Kit Collier and John Sifton, "Lives Destroyed: Attacks against Civilians in the Philippines," Human Rights Watch, July 2007, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/philippines_lives_destroyed.pdf.
- **June 20, 2001:** ASG extremists report that they have beheaded Guillermo Sobero.
Sobero is one of three Americans held captive by the group at that time. ASG described the beheading as a gift to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, to celebrate the 103rd anniversary of Philippine independence from its colonial master, Spain. Sobero and other tourists were kidnapped in May from a holiday resort across the Sulu Sea, south of the Philippines. Source: "Troops Scour Area for Man rebels Say They Beheaded," *USA Today*, June 20, 2001, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/june01/2001-06-11-hostages.htm>.
- **May 27, 2001:** ASG members kidnap 20 tourists.
Among the hostages are three Americans and 15 Filipinos, taken from a resort in Palawan, Philippines. The next day, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declares an "all-out war" against ASG. The group murders several of the hostages in June. Source: "Timeline: Hostage Crisis in the Philippines" CNN, August 25, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/06/07/phil.timeline.hostage/>.
- Abdurajak Janjalani and his group bomb the MV Doulos.
The Doulos is a Christian missionary ship docked at the Zamboanga port on the southern tip of Mindanao. The attack kills two foreign missionaries and wounds 40 others, attracting international attention. It is a watershed moment—the first time Janjalani calls his organization the "Abu Sayyaf Group." Source: Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Abu Sayyaf Group: From Mere Banditry to Genuine Terrorism," in *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2006, ed. Daljit Singh and Lorraine Carlos Salazar (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 248.
- Abdurajak Janjalani (a.k.a. Abu Sayyaf) and others formally split from MNLF.
Janjalani believes that MNLF acquiesced too easily to a deal with the Philippine government and settled for an autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao. The breakaway group instead maintains that violent jihad is the only way to achieve its goal of an independent Islamic state. Two years later, Janjalani forms al-Harakat al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Movement). Source: Octavio A. Dinampo, "Khadaffy Janjalani's Last Interview," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Makati City), January 22, 2007, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070122-44761/A_last_ext.

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Violent history:

ASG's terror attacks can be categorized as either ideologically charged violent jihad or profit-seeking terror activities. The first group includes large-scale terror attacks targeting strategic assets, such as bombing Philippine military bases or law enforcement facilities. This group also includes attacks, kidnappings, and beheadings of Western targets such as missionaries and tourist destinations. The second type of terror activity, which includes kidnapping for ransom, has become ASG's *modus operandi*. These smaller-scale attacks are not necessarily ideologically motivated but are instead used to finance the group, along with extortion from businesses, forced taxation of locals, and kidnap-for-ransom operations.

- **September 30, 2020:** An Indonesian hostage is killed during firefight between ASG militants and Philippine security forces in Patikul, Sulu. The slain man, identified only as LB, was one of five Indonesian fisherman who were kidnapped by ASG in January 2020 and was being held for ransom.¹⁰⁶
- **February 5, 2020 – March 20, 2020:** On February 5, ASG militants kidnap a Filipino doctor from his home in Jolo, Sulu. On March 20, Philippine security forces rescue the doctor.¹⁰⁷
- **January 18, 2020:** Five Indonesian fishermen are kidnapped in Lahad Datu, Philippines, by ASG militants. The men continue to be held hostage while ASG waits for a ransom payment from the Indonesian government, which has reportedly negotiated with and acquiesced to ransom demands from the militant group in the past.¹⁰⁸
- **November 22, 2019 – January 15, 2020:** On November 22, ASG militants kidnap three Indonesian fishermen in Sabah. The militants demand P30 million in exchange for the captives. On December 22, two of the three fishermen are rescued following a firefight between the captives and Philippine soldiers. The third fisherman is rescued by security forces on January 15, 2020 following an intensive combat operation against the militant group in Sulu.¹⁰⁹
- **November 15, 2019:** ASG militants ambush Philippine government soldiers in Patikul, Sulu. The attack kills eight soldiers.¹¹⁰
- **October 31, 2019:** ASG militants open fire on Philippine soldiers in Patikul town, Sulu. The attack leaves seven soldiers wounded.¹¹¹
- **October 10, 2019 – November 24, 2019:** On October 10, ASG gunmen kidnap a couple at a resort in Tukuran, Zamboanga del Sur Province. On November 24, Philippine Special Forces rescue the couple from Jolo, after days of clashes with the militants.¹¹²
- **September 2019:** Security forces capture two ASG militants who kidnapped a government teacher in Sulu province in September of 2019. The hostage is released in October when her sister reportedly paid P283,000 in ransom.¹¹³
- **August 13, 2019:** Suspected ASG members open fire on a Philippine military motorcade during a festival celebrating Eid al-Adha in Sulu province. Two soldiers and a two-year-old girl are killed, an 11-year-old girl is wounded.¹¹⁴
- **June 28, 2019:** Two suicide attackers bomb a temporary camp of the Philippine army's counterterrorism unit in Jolo, Sulu and kill five soldiers. ISIS claims responsibility, though a police official maintains the attack was locally planned by ASG. DNA confirms the identity of one of the attackers as Sulu-born 23-year-old Norman Lasuca, making him the first known Filipino militant to carry out a suicide bombing.¹¹⁵
- **May 31, 2019:** Ewold Horn, a Dutch birdwatcher held hostage by ASG since 2012, is shot and killed as he attempts to escape during a firefight between the militants and Philippine soldiers.¹¹⁶
- **May 26, 2019:** ISIS-linked militants attack Philippine soldiers in Jolo, Sulu. A gun battle ensues, leaving two children dead and several civilians wounded. Six members of ASG die in the exchange of fire.¹¹⁷
- **February 2, 2019:** ISIS-linked ASG militants kill five members of the Philippine military during a gun battle in Jolo. The soldiers were searching for the group believed to be responsible for plotting the January 27, 2019 cathedral attack.¹¹⁸
- **January 27, 2019:** Two bombs explode during Sunday mass at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral in Jolo, Sulu in the southern Philippines, killing at least 23 people and wounding more than 100. Philippine authorities blame the attack on an ASG sub-group called Ajang-Ajang. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack, which is later revealed to be carried out by an Indonesian couple.¹¹⁹
- **February 2, 2018:** ASG kills four civilians, two of them government workers, and injures six other people in separate attacks. The two slain government employees are identified as road construction workers for the local public works bureau, which ASG had previously threatened with extortion.¹²⁰
- **August 21, 2017:** Suspected ASG militants kill at least nine people and wound 10 others in an attack in Maluso, Basilan.¹²¹
- **July 30, 2017:** Seven men kidnapped by ASG militants on July 20 are found dead in Basilan.¹²²

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- **July 5, 2017:** ASG beheads two Vietnamese nationals, Hoang Thong and Hoang Va Hai, that were held as hostages after being kidnapped from a ship in November 2016. Their bodies are found in the town of Sumisip in Basilan.¹²³
 - **June 8, 2017:** ASG's Sulu-based faction carries out a mortar attack against Philippine forces. ISIS's Amaq News Agency also claims this attack.¹²⁴
 - **May 25, 2017:** ASG's Sulu-based faction engages in a clash with Philippine soldiers, killing one and wounding eleven others. ISIS's Amaq News Agency claims this attack in what is ISIS's first public recognition of ASG's Sulu-based faction.¹²⁵
 - **May 23, 2017:** The Philippine military launches an offensive to capture Hapilon in the city of Marawi on the island of Mindanao. Hapilon's forces, which number between 50 and 100 and are allied with hundreds of militants from the ISIS-linked Maute Group, counter the military offensive. Militants take control of city buildings and take hostages. Duterte declares martial law in Mindanao. Over 350,000 civilians are displaced as a result of the ensuing battle, which lasts until October 2017.¹²⁶
 - **April 23, 2017:** ASG members engage in a second clash with Philippines soldiers on Bohol, where the terrorists were hiding in a cave. Three ASG terrorists die in the clash, including ASG leader Joselito Melloria.¹²⁷
 - **April 11, 2017:** Philippine soldiers corner suspected ASG members on the Island of Bohol in central Philippines, a popular tourist destination. Five militants and four members of the security forces are killed in the violent clash that ensues.¹²⁸
 - **March 31, 2017:** Government forces engage in a two-hour-long firefight with more than 100 armed ASG members under the leadership of Radulan Sahiron. Thirty-two soldiers are wounded during the exchange.¹²⁹
 - **February 27, 2017:** ASG militants reportedly behead Jürgen Kantner, a German citizen who has been held captive since he was kidnapped from a yacht in November 2016.¹³⁰
 - **November 7, 2016:** Philippine soldiers find the body of a German woman on a yacht, in an attack believed to have been carried out by ASG rebels. The Philippine military suspects a companion, possibly a German national, may have been captured by ASG from the vessel that was docked near the terror group's stronghold of Sulu.¹³¹
 - **October 21, 2016:** Ten suspected ASG fighters board a South Korean cargo ship, abducting the captain and one crew member. Military sources believe ASG still holds a Dutch hostage, five Malaysians, two Indonesians and four Filipinos.¹³²
 - **September 2, 2016:** An improvised explosive device (IED) explodes in a crowded market in Davao City, killing 14 people and injuring at least 71 others. Philippine President Duterte and former mayor of Davao City calls the blast an act of terrorism.¹³³ ASG claims responsibility for the attack.¹³⁴
 - **August 30, 2016:** ASG militants kill 15 Philippine soldiers in a series of clashes on the southern island of Jolo. The Philippine government announces that it plans to send thousands more soldiers to the island, an ASG stronghold.¹³⁵
 - **June 13, 2016:** Philippine police find a severed head in a plastic bag near a Roman Catholic Church in the southern Philippines. DNA tests later confirm the head is that of Robert Hall, the second Canadian held hostage by ASG.¹³⁶
 - **April 25, 2016:** ASG beheads Canadian citizen John Ridsdel, reportedly hours after the deadline for his ransom expires.¹³⁷ Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau calls the incident an "act of cold blooded murder."¹³⁸ ASG had held Ridsdel since September 2015, when it kidnapped three Westerners and one Filipino woman. The terror group demanded a \$6.5 million ransom for each of the hostages.¹³⁹
 - **April 9, 2016:** During an AFP operation on Basilan Island, ASG members ambush the soldiers, killing 18, at least four of whom are beheaded, and injuring more than 50.¹⁴⁰ Four of the soldiers killed in action are former MNLF fighters who were integrated into the AFP and assisted with implementing the MNLF and MILF peace processes. The military succeeds in killing Ubaida Hapilon, son of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon, and a Moroccan terrorist, Mohammad Khattab.¹⁴¹
 - **November 18, 2015:** ASG beheads Malaysian hostage Bernard Then Ted Fen. ASG militants plant Then's severed head in a sack in front of a local government office and placed his decapitated body in a separate location on the Sulu, Philippines. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak condemns the killing, calling on Philippine authorities to take action against the perpetrators of the barbaric act.¹⁴²
 - **October 1, 2015:** Suspected ASG extremists target a vice mayor's convoy in the Philippines and a bus. The extremists detonate a bomb packed with shrapnel in a parked motorcycle taxi as the local vice mayor's convoy passes. Four people are killed and six are wounded in the attack. An hour before, a bomb blew up a crowded passenger bus that injures 18 people. Though no one claims responsibility, police suspect ASG for their past attacks in the area.¹⁴³
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- **September 22, 2015:** Eleven ASG gunmen storm the Holiday Ocean View Samal Resort on an island off of Davao City, southeast of Mindanao. The gunmen abduct a Norwegian resort manager, two Canadians, and one Filipino woman. The extremists still hold two Malaysians and a Dutch bird watcher kidnapped three years ago.¹⁴⁴
 - **September 18, 2015:** ASG attacks another civilian target in Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines. A crude bomb found under a bus set explodes, killing an 11-year-old girl and injuring at least 32 others. Local police find that ASG members are responsible for the attack, based on video evidence and extortion letters that were sent to the bus terminal management.¹⁴⁵
 - **September 7, 2015:** An improvised bomb explodes outside of a police station in southwest Mindanao. No one is hurt, however police suspect an ASG operative slipped the improvised bomb into an alley while the town experiences a blackout. Philippine police speculate that the attack is retaliation for increased police crackdown on the extremist group.¹⁴⁶
 - **August 22, 2015:** ASG threatens to behead Malaysian Bernard Then Ted Fen if his family does not pay a ransom. Fen and another Malaysian national, Thein Nyuk Fun, were kidnapped in May 2014 from the Ocean King seafood restaurant in Malaysia.¹⁴⁷
 - **August 11, 2015:** Members of the Philippine military find the beheaded body of a man identified as the barangay captain, Rodolfo Buligao, kidnapped in May 2015. Local sources report to the police that the group was demanding a 1 million Peso ransom for each of the hostages ASG was holding.¹⁴⁸
 - **August 2015:** Philippine anti-terror forces launch attacks against ASG settlements in jungles of Sulu, the southern Philippine province. On August 19, the Philippine military clashes with extremists, killing 15 ASG members. On August 29, marines conduct an operation in a remote southern village, where they engage in an hour-long gun battle with 300 militants. 10 members of the Philippine military sustained wounds, while only three ASG members were killed in the battle.¹⁴⁹
 - **June 25, 2015:** ASG members threaten to kill three hostages. In a video, the hostages—two Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) members and a barangay captain—plead with government leaders for help or they will be executed by ASG. A masked ASG gunman reiterates that ASG will behead the hostages if the government does not comply with their demands.¹⁵⁰
 - **May 2015:** ASG members kidnap two Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) members and a barangay captain, or district chief. The three are kidnapped off the coast of the southern Philippines.¹⁵¹
 - **October 17, 2014:** ASG frees two German hostages. According to ASG, the hostages—Stefan Okonoek and Henrike Dielen—were released in exchange for 250 million peso (\$5.6 million) in ransom money. The two Germans were kidnapped in April 2014. In September 2014, the group had threatened to kill one of the hostages in retaliation for Germany's involvement with the U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS.¹⁵²
 - **July 28, 2014:** Approximately 50 ASG extremists open fire on locals in the village of Talipao, Mindanao. The victims had been celebrating the end of Ramadan. Among the 21 killed are six children and four members of a civilian security force called the Barangay Police Action Team. The security force was assisting the military in fighting Islamist militants in the area.¹⁵³
 - **July 2014:** ASG leader Isnilon Totoni Hapilon pledges allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS. ISIS does not immediately accept the pledge. The move by Hapilon worries officials in the region, and leads Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario to express fears of a renewed threat to the region.¹⁵⁴
 - **June 11, 2014:** Philippine National Police conducts a series of raids and arrests of ASG members. The crackdown takes place throughout 2014, though the most notable arrest is that of ASG leader Khair Mundos on June 11, putting an end to a seven-year manhunt for a U.S. most-wanted terrorist. Upon his arrest, Mundos confesses to transferring funds from al-Qaeda to former ASG leader Khadaffy Janjalani. The funds were earmarked for use in bombings and other criminal acts throughout Mindanao.¹⁵⁵
 - **May 2014:** ASG kidnaps two Malaysian nationals. The hostages—Bernard Then Ted Fen and Thein Nyuk Fun—are kidnapped from the Ocean King seafood restaurant in Malaysia.¹⁵⁶
 - **April 29, 2014:** Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Marines wrest control of a jungle training camp from ASG on the southern archipelago of Sulu. The 10-hour battle results in 26 casualties, including one AFP Marine.¹⁵⁷
 - **April 2014:** ASG takes two German hostages. The hostages—Stefan Okonoek and Henrike Dielen—are kidnapped while sailing near Palawan, to the west of the ASG-stronghold of southern Mindanao, Philippines.¹⁵⁸
 - **July 11, 2012:** ASG attacks a local business on Basilan. The business had refused to give into ASG's extortion. Gunmen ambush a vehicle carrying rubber plantation workers on Basilan Island. ASG fighters kill six workers and injure another 27.¹⁵⁹
 - **2011:** ASG steps up IED attacks. In March, five people are killed when an IED detonates outside an elementary school in San Raymundo village on the island of Jolo in Sulu. ASG kills three more with an IED outside of a wedding ceremony in a hotel in Zamboanga city in Mindanao.
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- **April 13, 2010:** ASG launches a series of attacks on the Philippine island of Basilan. Six ASG members are believed to have taken part in the attack, in which an IED detonates near the Basilan National High School. Philippine Marines respond to the blast and a firefight ensues, leaving 11 dead, including three Marines (another Marine was wounded). According to the head of the armed forces in Mindanao, this marks the first time ASG don uniforms to infiltrate their targets.¹⁶¹
- **December 31, 2009:** Thirty-one ASG and MILF members escape from prison. The prison break takes place on Basilan, located off the Philippine island of Mindanao.¹⁶²
- **2007:** Three schoolgirls are beheaded in the Sulawesi region of Indonesia. An Indonesian national known only as Sanusi assists in the beheading, and is believed to have fled to the Philippines following the attack. In 2010, the Indonesian government formally requests that Philippine law enforcement track Sanusi down.¹⁶³
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- **March 4, 2003:** Bomb detonates at Davao International Airport in the southern Philippines. The bomb comes at a time of heightened sectarian violence. Twenty-two people are killed, including an American missionary, and 170 others are wounded.¹⁶⁷ An ASG member claims responsibility days after the attack, though government authorities initially blame Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), another major Islamic insurgent group in the southern Philippines.¹⁶⁸
- **August 2, 2001:** ASG members attack a village in the southern Philippines. The village is predominately Christian, and located in Basilan Province. The ASG operatives kidnap 32 villagers and later decapitate 11 of them.¹⁶⁹
- **June 20, 2001:** ASG extremists report that they have beheaded Guillermo Sobero. Sobero is one of three Americans held captive by the group at that time. ASG described the beheading as a gift to Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo celebrate the 103rd anniversary of Philippine independence from its colonial master, Spain. Sobero and other tourists were kidnapped in May from a holiday resort across the Sulu Sea, south of the Philippines.¹⁷⁰
- **May 27, 2001:** ASG members kidnap 20 tourists. Among the hostages are three Americans and 15 Filipinos, taken from a resort in Palawan, Philippines. The next day, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declares an “all-out war” against ASG. The group murders several of the hostages in June.¹⁷¹
- **August 1991:** Abdurajak Janjalani and his group bomb the MV Doulos. The Doulos is a Christian missionary ship docked at the Zamboanga port on the southern tip of Mindanao. The attack kills two foreign missionaries and wounds 40 others, attracting international attention. It is a watershed moment—the first time Janjalani calls his organization the “Abu Sayyaf Group.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Alya Nurbaiti, “Indonesian held hostage by Abu Sayyaf killed in gunfire in Philippines,” *Jakarta Post*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/seasia/2020/09/30/indonesian-held-hostage-by-abu-sayyaf-killed-in-gunfire-in-philippines.html>.

¹⁰⁷ “Philippine Military Searching for Doctor Kidnapped in Sulu,” Benar News, February 5, 2020, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/doctor-abducted-02052020121221.html>; “Kidnapped Filipino Doctor Rescued from Abu Sayyaf Militants,” Benar News, March 25, 2020, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/philippines-militants-03252020114108.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Zam Yusa, “5 Indonesian hostages guarded by 30 Sayyafs in Sulu village,” *Daily Express*, February 1, 2020, <http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/146776/5-indonesian-hostages-guarded-by-30-sayyafs-in-sulu-village/>.

¹⁰⁹ Al Jacinto, “Abu Sayyaf demands P30M for 3 hostages,” *Manila Times*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2019/11/22/news/regions/abu-sayyaf-demands-p30m-for-3-hostages/657724/>; “2 Indonesian fishermen rescued from Abu Sayyaf in Sulu,” ABS-CBN News, December 22, 2019, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/12/22/19/2-indonesian-fishermen-rescued-from-abu-sayyaf-in-sulu>; Zam Yusa, “Kidnapped Indonesian Fisherman Rescued in Southern Philippines,” Benar News, January 15, 2020, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/philippines-militants-01152020154104.html>.

¹¹⁰ “8 Philippine Soldiers Injured in Firefight with Abu Sayyaf Militants,” Benar News, November 15, 2019, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/soldiers-injured-11152019131649.html>.

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Designations:

Designations by the U.S. Government:

- **October 8, 1997:** The U.S. Department of State designated Abu Sayyaf Group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).¹⁷³
- **September 23, 2001:** The U.S. Department of State designated Abu Sayyaf Group as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).¹⁷⁴
- **December 17, 2004:** The U.S. Department of Treasury designated Khadaffy Abubakar Janjalani as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).¹⁷⁵
- **November 30, 2005:** The U.S. Department of Treasury designated Jainal Antel Sali, Jr. as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).¹⁷⁶
- **November 30, 2005:** The U.S. Department of Treasury designated Radulan Sahiron as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).¹⁷⁷
- **November 30, 2005:** The U.S. Department of Treasury designated Isnlon Totoni Hapilon as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).¹⁷⁸

Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:

- Australia—designated Abu Sayyaf Group as a terrorist organization on November 14, 2002.¹⁷⁹
- Canada—listed Abu Sayyaf Group as a terrorist organization on February 12, 2003.¹⁸⁰
- New Zealand—designated Abu Sayyaf Group as a terrorist entity on October 17, 2002.¹⁸¹
- United Nations—listed Abu Sayyaf Group as a terrorist organization associated with al-Qaeda on October 6, 2001.¹⁸²

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Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Associations:

Ties to Extremist Entities:

- [Al-Qaeda](#)

ASG has enjoyed a historically symbiotic relationship with al-Qaeda, receiving funding and training from al-Qaeda and its network in return for a safe haven and operational support for al-Qaeda operatives. During 1991 and 1992, Ramzi Yousef—perpetrator of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing—traveled in and out of the Philippines with Abdurajak Janjalani.¹⁸³ Yousef was able to return to the Philippines after the 1993 bombing unscathed and began planning what was to be known as the Bojinka plot with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM).¹⁸⁴ The duo planned to bomb at least 12 Western airliners traveling over the Pacific Ocean. ASG provided operational support to the two.¹⁸⁵

Ultimately, the Bojinka plot failed due in part to a chemical fire that Yousef started in his kitchen in Manila while attempting to create a liquid explosive device. The fire attracted the Philippine police, who in turn shared recovered files with the United States.¹⁸⁶ According to the *9/11 Commission Report*, KSM first conceived of using aircraft as weapons during this time, later inspiring him to reemploy this strategy for the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.¹⁸⁷

- [ISIS](#)

Leader of ASG's Basilan-based faction, Isnilon Hapilon, flanked by a group of guerrillas, pledged allegiance to ISIS leader [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) in the summer of 2014.¹⁸⁸ Though ISIS has not declared a province or wilayat in the region as of February 2017, the group reportedly endorsed Hapilon as emir for Southeast Asia in June.¹⁸⁹ In a June 2016 video, alleged Indonesian, Malaysian and Filipino fighters acknowledged Hapilon as the head of ISIS in Southeast Asia.¹⁹⁰ According to the Philippines' Secretary of National Defense, ISIS made direct contact with Hapilon in December 2016, instructing him to find an area to establish a caliphate in Mindanao.¹⁹¹

The Philippine government leaked a document from August 2014 that tells of close to 200 Filipinos who may have fought with ISIS. However, there were no domestic plots related to ISIS reported by the government at that time.¹⁹² In a report from a major Philippine news channel, the mayor of a city on Basilan Island claimed that ISIS had been present, proselytizing in religious centers, for a few months. In the same news report, there were some local officials who claimed ISIS flags have been present since 2006. However, officials from the Armed Forces of the Philippines are skeptical that this is the case.¹⁹³

On September 19, 2014, photos emerged from the city of Marawi in ASG's stronghold of southern Mindanao, showing ISIS flags and members with their faces covered in front of a mosque. The chief of police in Marawi has confirmed their presence, asserting that if they remained peaceful and actions were "within the law," they would not be arrested.¹⁹⁴ In May 2017, an ISIS-linked organization operating in Marawi, the Maute Group, became violent following a Philippine military raid on an apartment building reportedly serving as Hapilon's hideout. According to Philippine authorities, Hapilon was in Marawi to join forces with the Maute Group. The ISIS-linked militants laid siege to the city, burning several structures as Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte called for martial law on the entire island of Mindanao.¹⁹⁵ Hapilon and the commander of the Maute group were killed in an operation on October 16, 2017.¹⁹⁶

- [Jemaah Islamiyah \(JI\)](#)

ASG provided a special training camp to JI militants in its stronghold of southern Mindanao. JI militants intermingled with ASG during this time, training together on subjects such as bomb making.¹⁹⁷ ASG has also been known to harbor JI militants in its dense jungle landscape. In March 2010, the Indonesian government formally requested that Philippine law enforcement track down an Indonesian national and JI trainer of the MILF and ASG known only as Sanusi. Sanusi allegedly perpetrated sectarian violence in the Sulawesi region of Indonesia, including the beheadings of three school girls in 2007.¹⁹⁸

In 2003, a key JI leader and most-wanted terrorist, Zulkifli Abdir, a.k.a Marwan, went into hiding in the ASG-controlled region in the Philippines.¹⁹⁹ In February 2015, DNA evidence confirmed that Marwan had been killed after a 12-hour bloody gunfight with the Philippine police's elite Special Action Force (SAF), during which 44 members of the SAF were killed.²⁰⁰ However, a Philippine intelligence chief has asserted that 10 to 12 JI members continue to reside among ASG in the southern Philippines.²⁰¹

- [Moro National Liberation Front \(MNLF\)](#)

Many of ASG's disaffected founding members left the MNLF in March 2007, under the tutelage of radical leader Habier Malik.²⁰² In 1986, MNLF was able to negotiate a degree of self-rule in a newly established Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). ASG has not had

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formal ties with the MNLF since the MNLF began political discussions with the Philippine government in the mid-1980s.²⁰³

• Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

Another off-shoot of the MNLF is the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which separated from the MNLF in 1984 amidst disagreement over the MNLF's peace negotiations with the Philippine government.²⁰⁴ Though the MILF proved too moderate and secular for ASG, there are some radical elements within the MILF that have maintained ties.²⁰⁵ Like the MNLF, the MILF has officially distanced itself from the ASG. However, it is believed that some units of the MILF still cooperate with ASG members, providing refuge for them and their JI counterparts.²⁰⁶

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Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Media Coverage:

Pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ISIS

In the summer of 2014, a video was released showing Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon swearing allegiance to ISIS.²⁰⁷ In its coverage of ASG's pledge to ISIS, several media outlets cite ASG's opportunistic motives as a reason for the pledge, as opposed to pure ideological alignment. Along with other smaller, regional extremist groups such as JI, ASG appears to be using the pledge for publicity to further their own agenda of recruitment.²⁰⁸

Despite ASG's motives for supporting ISIS, media in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Australia perceive a dangerous threat in the return of Filipino foreign fighters who have joined ISIS and al-Qaeda.²⁰⁹ In a speech to the United Nations, the Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has expressed the ISIS threat to the Southeast Asia and Australia.²¹⁰ Likewise, in a statement before the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario attributed ISIS's wide support base in the country to extremist groups such as ASG.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Michelle FlorCruz, "Philippine Terror Group Abu Sayyaf May Be Using ISIS Link for Own Agenda," *International Business Times*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/philippine-terror-group-abu-sayyaf-may-be-using-isis-link-own-agenda-1695156>.

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²⁰⁹ Carmela Fonbuena, "Filipino Jihadists Killed in Syria – Reports," *Rappler*, September 22, 2014, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/69817-dead-filipino-isis-jihadists>.

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²¹¹ Aurea Calica, "Islamic State threatens Mindanao, Philippines tells Asean," *Philippine Star* (Manila), April 27, 2015, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/04/27/1448336/islamic-state-threatens-mindanao-philippines-tells-asean>.

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

Rhetoric:

Isnilon Hapilon, Pledge of Support for ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, July 2014

Pledging support for ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi:

“We pledge to obey him on anything which our hearts desire or not and to value him more than anyone else. We will not take any emir (leader) other than him unless we see in him any obvious act of disbelief that could be questioned by Allah in the hereafter.”²¹²

Khadaffy Janjalani, January 22, 2007

When asked if ASG is a terrorist group:

“We are mujahideen, albeit a bit brutal since we won’t distinguish oppressive soldiers from its public of citizenry—they are generally our enemies. And we cannot soften up or become friends even with Arabs if they are in league with our enemies.”²¹³

Khadaffy Janjalani, Narration on the origins of ASG, Date Unknown

“We don’t kill Muslims but rather we kill people who claimed themselves to be Muslims. They are called MURTADIN. This kind of people – we see them praying five times a day, performing all Islamic rites, but working with the enemy and with the Shaytan Forces against the Muslims, especially fighting Mujahideen.”²¹⁴

²¹² Michelle FlorCruz, “Philippine Terror Group Abu Sayyaf May Be Using ISIS Link For Own Agenda,” *International Business Times*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/philippine-terror-group-abu-sayyaf-may-be-using-isis-link-own-agenda-1695156>.

²¹³ Octavio A. Dinampo, “Khadaffy Janjalani’s Last Interview” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Makati City), January 22, 2007, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20070122-44761/A_last_ext.

²¹⁴ Khadaffy Janjalani, “A Brief History of Al-Harakatul Islamiyyah,” *Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyyah, Essays on the Abu Sayyaf Group*, Third Edition, (Philippines: Philippine Institute for Peace Violence and Terrorism Research, 2012), 120, https://www.academia.edu/1921767/Al_Harakatul_Al_Islamiyyah_Essays_on_the_Abu_Sayyaf_Group_by_Rommel_Banlaoi.