



Quarterly Report

TERRORISM EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2021

Global Trend

As nations across the world struggle to recuperate with the pandemic's impact in its wake, the United States are anticipated to reduce their forces in the Middle East, South Asia and throughout Africa this year. Iraq and Afghanistan will significantly be affected by this. Despite continuous operations and pursuits by local military forces in targeting terrorist groups, these withdrawals may encourage groups like Al-Qaeda (AQ) and Daesh to regain strength, rebuild their bases and capture new territory or destabilise countries or regions. While there are uncertainties concerning AQ's leadership given the vacuum left from the death of Ayman al-Zawahiri and Muhammad al-Masri's assassination last August, AQ still has the potential to re-establish itself through affiliates around the globe.

Meanwhile, Daesh continues to demonstrate resilience and strong aspirations to regroup and resurge through renewed attacks. January's twin suicide bombings in Tayaran Square, Baghdad, demonstrated Daesh's relative strength in Iraq and their capabilities to regroup and rebuild themselves. Pro-Daesh groups in South Asia and Southeast Asia (SEA), particularly in Afghanistan, the Philippines and Indonesia, continue to persist in engaging in violent acts to maintain the credibility of their narratives and remain relevant. The Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) continues to strengthen their presence in Afghanistan. In the meantime, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) persist in applying military pressure in hot spots in the Southern Philippines to curb terrorism-related activities. These military actions, compounded with the draconian anti-terrorism laws introduced last year, have curtailed some of the militant groups' movements. Additionally, many members from groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Maute Group, Dakwah Islamiyah (DI) surrendered or were killed or captured. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) persists in their aggression against the government.

Other key global terrorist incidents are as follows:

- a. On Jan Oct 21, chaos ensued in Washington D.C. when violent pro-Donald Trump extremists stormed the United States (U.S.) Capitol. The mob of supporters mobilised themselves in response to Trump's call to action to overturn his defeat in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The Insurrection saw five dead. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) viewed the incident as domestic terrorism.

b. On 16 Mar 21, 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long was charged with killing eight people at three Atlanta-area massage parlours. Six of the victims were Asian women. Long claimed to suffer from “sex addiction”. Despite the police reluctance to categorise it as a hate crime, the attacks were racially motivated and related to the growing anti-Asian sentiments in America due to Donald Trump’s demonisation of Asian people for the pandemic. Not one week later, on 24 Mar 21, 21-year-old Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa opened fire at the King Soopers store in Boulder, Colorado. The attack left 10 dead. Alissa has a known history of deteriorating mental health and is said to suffer from increasing paranoia. Despite being mentally ill, he still managed to make a legal purchase a semiautomatic rifle, along with other weapons. This recent attack ignited yet another heated debate on gun control and woeful background checks for gun purchases in the country.

c. Meanwhile, in Iraq, twin suicide bombings in a crowded market in Tayaran Square in the centre of Baghdad killed 32 people and injured 110 others on 21 Jan 21. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on the group’s Telegram communications channel. Following this, on 20 Feb 21, five militants died in a clash that erupted between the Iraqi SF and Daesh militants in Tarmiyah. The operation was carried out in response to intelligence about a potential Daesh attack planned in the area.

d. On 8 Feb 21, Daesh militants ambushed the Syrian SF in the province of Deir ez-Zor, Syria. The attack left 26 members of the Syrian Government regime dead, including seven members of the Syrian Army. Eleven Daesh members were also killed during the offensive. The attack targeted a convoy that carried the regime forces and the Syrian Army that were sweeping the area for Daesh militants. On the same day, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had successfully captured two Daesh members in the Al-Hol refugee camp. The arrests were part of an effort to combat human trafficking activities organised by Daesh that are taking place in the camps.

e. In Afghanistan, the ISKP orchestrated quadruple bombing attacks across Kabul on 10 Feb 21. The attacks were targeting the armoured police vehicle that was traveling through. The district police chief, Mohammadzai Kochi and his personal bodyguard were killed in the attack. On 14 Feb 21, reports revealed that Taliban leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, was killed in April 2020 along with his chief of intelligence, Hafiz Abdul Majeed, in an explosion at the latter’s safehouse. On 8 Mar 21, Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security (NDS) had killed a key ISKP operative, Amir Khan @ Amir Masoud Kaftari, in Nangarhar. Khan served as ISKP’s deputy intelligence chief who was planning attacks in Jalalabad and Kabul.

f. On 15 Mar 21, the Libyan National Army (LNA) arrested a prominent Daesh operative, Mohamed Miloud Mohamed @ Abu Omar in Ubari, Libya. Described as a dangerous terrorist, Abu Omar had close ties with the head of Daesh in Libya, Abu Moaz al-Iraqi. Al-Iraqi was killed by pro-Haftar forces in Sebha last September. Abu Omar was amongst the top Daesh leaders in Libya when the group took control of Sirte in 2015. He was believed to be involved in the abduction of four Italian engineers in the same year.

g. On 31 Jan 21, the Al Shabaab group in Somalia staged a deadly terrorist attack on the Hotel Afrik, Mogadishu. Suicide attackers initiated the siege by crashing into the main entrance of the hotel with vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). Al-Shabaab militants then stormed the building with armed attacks on civilians and security forces in the hotel. The attack left nine people killed and 10 others

injured. Al-Shabaab issued a statement on the pro-Al-Shabaab radio station, Andalus, which claimed responsibility for the attack.

Terrorism Trends in Southeast Asia

The Philippines

On 21 Jan 21, the Philippines SF carried out a raid to target Russel Mamo, a senior member of Dawlah Islamiyah (DI) - Maguid. However, four DI members were killed during a shootout in Barangay Basag in South Cotabato, Mindanao. The four men were identified as Harudin Macabangin, Nordin Macabangin, Baharan Macabangin and Moin Macabangin. Mamo is still at large.

The terrorism-related issues involving BIFF are as follows:

- a. BIFF senior member and spokesperson Abu Misry Mama @ Sadaan Salendab (67 years old) died from natural causes in Maguindanao in the Southern Philippines on 8 Jan 21. The Philippine government had offered 1 million pesos (USD 21,0000) for Mama's arrest or capture. He was amongst guerillas that broke away from MILF when they gave up their struggle for independence and opened talks with the central government for an autonomous region in the south.
- b. One of the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by BIFF on a Barangay Kuya street in South Upi, Maguindanao, meant for the mayor of South Upi, Reynalbert Insular, had exploded on 26 Jan 21. A passing motorist was killed while another was injured. The IED was built using an 81mm mortar bullet. The second IED, made with a 105mm cannonball, was found and successfully defused by the bomb disposal unit.
- c. Two suspected BIFF militant members were shot and killed in foiled escape by the Philippines SF on 4 Feb 21 in Rajah Buayan in Maguindanao in the Southern Philippines. These men were affiliated with the DI Hasan Group and were core members of the BIFF Karialan-Bungos faction. The police sought them for their involvement in four bombing incidents.
- d. On 18 Mar 21, there was a clash between BIFF and the Philippines SF in Datu Saudi Ampatuan, Maguindanao. Seven of the BIFF militant members were killed during the incident. The violent conflict forced hundreds of local to leave their homes to seek refuge for safety. This particular BIFF faction was reported to be responsible for burning some of the houses in the area.
- e. The introduction of tougher anti-terrorism laws in the country does not appear to discourage violent actors from continuing with their activities. However, they have been helpful in subduing violent activities. BIFF's attack that targeted the Mayor of Upi demonstrated the group's attempt to increase pressure on the locals to retract their support for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The terrorism-related issues involving Maute are as follows:

- a. On 14 Jan 21, members of the Maute Group shot dead three Philippines SF in Poona Piagapo, Lanao del Norte in the Southern Mindanao. The three SF members were en route to the Baloi market on

motorcycles when they were ambushed and killed. The assailants also attacked a Hilux 4-wheel drive, injuring the driver.

b. On 13 Feb 21, the ZAMPELAN (Zamboanga Peninsula and Lanao) Joint Task Force units assaulted Maute's lair with helicopter gunships and artillery fire in Madamba, Lanao del Sur. Army forces captured the camp after the firefight. All fifteen Maute members at the scene managed to flee capture. The soldiers found 20 foxholes and eight makeshift huts, assorted empty shells of linked 7.62mm, 40mm grenade launcher, and 5.56mm and cal. 30 cartridges at the scene.

The terrorism-related issues involving ASG are as follows:

a. On 18 Jan 21, reports revealed that the Indonesian woman identified as Rezky Fantasya Rullie @ Cici, arrested by the Philippines security forces in Jolo last October, admitted that she coerced by her parents to participate in terror activities. Her parents – Rullie Rian Zeke and Umi @ Ulfah Andayani Saleh – were the two suicide bombers responsible for the twin terrorist attack on Our Lady of Mount Carmel church in Jolo, August 2019. Cici herself was the wife of Andi Baso @ Radit, who orchestrated the said attacks. Baso was killed a few days later.

b. The Philippines police and the SF arrested nine women with suspected links to the ASG in separate parts of Sulu, Southern Philippines, on 19 Feb 21. Three of them who were identified as 36-year-old Isara Jalmaani Abduhajan, Jedah Abduhajan Amin (28 years old) and Elena Tasum Sawadjaan Abun (40 years old) are the daughters of ASG leader, Hatib Hadjan Sawadjaan. Three other women were wives to ASG members, two of whom were widowed. The remaining three were the locals. During the raid, the SF found IED components, batteries, pipes, nails, blasting caps and ammonium nitrate. These women were believed to be planning a suicide bomb attack, and they were undergoing orientation session and assembling the explosives.

The first quarter of terror-activities in the Philippines shows a series of surrenders took place as follows:

a. Two ASG members surrendered to the Philippines Security Forces (SF) in Barangay Tabiawan in Isabela City, Basilan, on 11 Jan 21. Both men were subordinates under the late Isnilon Hapilon, the Emir of ASG who was slain in the 2017 Marawi Operation.

b. On 4 Mar 21, another ASG member surrendered to the Marine Battalion Landing Team-12 (MBLT-12) unit in Bangao, Tawi-Tawi. He was previously involved in skirmishes with the SF in Patiul and Maimbung in Sulu.

c. Fourteen more ASG members surrendered to the Philippines SF on 8 Mar 21 in Barangay Samak, Talipao Town. They were followers of ASG's commander in Sulu, known as Radulon Sahiron, who is active in Kidnap for Ransom activities (KFR).

d. On 17 Mar 21, five BIFF members surrendered to the Philippines SF in Ampatuan, Southern Maguindanao. All five men were part of the Imam Minimbang @ Karianan faction. They also yielded six weapons, including three rifles, an M16, an M14 and an M79 rocket launcher.

The DI network's presence indicates that they are still active in the Cotabato area. With Mamo still at large, DI's capabilities pose some serious concerns, given Mamo's abilities in coordinating and directing the group's operations. The pockets of fighting and sporadic attacks in the southern part of the country underscore the remaining threats to the province's relative tranquillity.

The nine women's detention was significant to understanding the latest trend with the violent extremist movements in the province. They highlighted the increasing importance female recruits can lend to violent extremist activities in the Southern Philippines. Women recruits are often relegated to acting as the support network for the male-dominated violent extremist groups, with wives and sisters remaining as de facto members who do not undergo activation. Nevertheless, ASG recognises the value in sending women to commit suicide bomb attacks due to their tactical advantage in avoiding scrutiny. Moreover, ASG is losing men who surrendered, were captured or killed.

Indonesia

The terrorism-related issues involving Jamaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD) are as follows:

- a. On 6 Jan 21, Densus 88 shot dead two members of the JAD group in Makassar, South Sulawesi. The two men, who were identified as 46-year-old Moh Rizaldy and 23-year-old Sanjay Ajis, had links with the two suicide-bombers responsible for the 2019 attack on the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo, Sulu in the Philippines.
- b. Densus 88 arrested five terror suspects in separate locations in Kota Banda Aceh, Kota Langsa and Kabupaten Aceh Besar, Aceh on 25 Jan 21. They were arrested for planning a terrorist bomb attack in Aceh. The police found chemicals used in bomb-making such as 1 kg potassium nitrate, metal pipe, bow, a book on Hijra', a notebook containing notes on threats against the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the country, a book on Daesh and a CD. All five suspects were also involved in the suicide attack in at Kepolisian Resor Kota Besar (Polrestabes) Medan, North Sumatera in 2019. The five men have links with a terrorist network in Riau.
- c. On 17 February, the West Kalimantan Police revealed that Densus 88 captured three more JAD suspects in three separate locations across West Kalimantan for terror activities. All three men are in their 20s.
- d. On 28 Mar 21, approximately 20 people were wounded when two suicide bombers struck the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Makassar, South Sulawesi. The two men were seen riding a motorcycle before trying to enter the cathedral compound entrance, where a security guard stopped. One of the men then detonated the bomb, killing both of them and injuring the guard. The two attackers were unidentified man and woman. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, and the incident was still under investigation.

The summary of terrorism-related issues in Indonesia are as follows:

- a. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) spiritual leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir was released from the Gunung Sindur Prison in Bogor on 8 Jan 21. Abu Bakar was captured in 2009 on terrorism charges. In the following year, he was found guilty of funding a militant training camp in Aceh and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

b. On 3 Feb 21, reports revealed that Indonesian authorities arrested a 47-year-old British woman identified as Tazneen Miriam Sailar @ Aisyah Humaira @ Ummu Yasmin with her 10-year-old son in 2020. Sailar was arrested for violating her travel documents. Furthermore, she was also listed on the terrorist watch list and was previously married to Acep Ahmad Setiawan @ Abu Ahmad al-Indunisy, killed in Syria in 2015. JI's spiritual leader Abu Bakar Ba'asyir had officiated their marriage in 2010. Sailar was responsible for organising charity work for women and children in Syria. She is currently being detained at the immigration centre for carrying an expired visa in 2018 and now waiting to be deported back to England.

c. Densus 88 arrested 20 terror suspects with links to the JI network in raids that were carried out separately on 26 Feb and 1 Mar 21 across Eastern Java in Surabaya, Sidoarjo, Mojokerto, Bojonegoro and Malang. The police also found bows, arrows, samurai swords and self-defense equipments at the scenes.

d. Densus 88 detained ten suspected militant members across Sumatera on 19 Mar 21. Six were arrested in Medan, and two others were captured in Tanjung Balai in North Sumatera. The remaining two were apprehended in Padang, West Sumatera. They were all members of the JI network operating in the province.

A Madago Raya Task Force member and two East Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT) militant members killed in a gunfight in the province of Kabupaten Parigi Moutong in Poso, Sulawesi on 1 Mar 21. One of terrorist named Irul was the son of the slain MIT leader Santoso. The Task Force found several items including machetes and homemade bombs at the scene. MIT members were reportedly planning to carry out an attack in Poso.

The latest attack in Makassar, which occurred on Palm Sunday, bore the hallmarks of a JAD attack. Since its formation, the pro-Daesh group has carried out numerous attacks, most prominently the triple church attack in 2018 in Surabaya. This latest attack may be related to JAD's recent presence in Makassar last January, where two JAD members were killed by Densus 88. This recent attack also demonstrated JAD's operational lethality and group resilience despite sustained counterterrorism pressure against them, indicating that they remain a persistent threat in the near future. Although this latest terrorist attack was successfully foiled due to the hardened security measures around the cathedral, it served as an indicator that pro-Daesh groups have not been discouraged from targeting non-Muslims in the country to push their narratives.

The release of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir in January may eliminate the cause célèbre of an ailing 82-year-old cleric dying in prison. His release will not raise the risk of terrorism in Indonesia as he has long been removed from the action. However, his significance is as a symbol versus the state, which may sustain JI's presence and relevance. JI remains a credible threat with a powerful presence and compelling influence that will continue to dominate Indonesia's violent extremist space.

Singapore

On 27 Jan 21, an unidentified 16-year-old teenager was detained last November under Singapore's Internal Security Act (ISA) for plotting to kill Muslims in two mosques on the anniversary day of the deadly 2019 Christchurch attacks. The unnamed teenager – an ethnic Indian of Protestant faith – had plans to attack Assyafaah Mosque and Yusof Ishak Mosque in Woodlands. The teenager had purchased a tactical vest and a Smith & Wesson machete online.

Twenty-year old Amirull Ali was arrested on 5 Feb 21 under the ISA for plotting to attack the Maghain Aboth Synagogue on Waterloo Street. Amirull had planned to target three Jewish men after leaving their Saturday congregational prayers in December. The Internal Security Department (ISD) believed that Amirull was motivated by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Amirull, who was a full-time National Service member in the Singapore Armed Forces, made preparations for the planned attack by visiting the location last August and October for reconnaissance and studying the human anatomy to establish fatal kill points. He also made replicas of a knife and an AK-47 assault rifle to practise his attack skill. Amirull was also planning to travel to Gaza to join Hamas.

The two recent terrorism-related detentions in Singapore, where both involved two young men in their early 20s, renewed concerns on the so-called “self-radicalisation” phenomenon in the country. Both arrests involved two different violent ideologies, with one of them being influenced by far-right extremism. Regardless, they indicate that Singapore may need to interrogate their approach to the country’s counterterrorism and rehabilitation efforts that seem to prioritise Islamist terrorism. Given the country’s demographics, Singapore should consider a more holistic and whole-of-society approach instead of targeting one specific community.

Malaysia

On 18 Jan 21, The Royal Malaysia Police’s Special Branch E8 Unit revealed that only seven terrorism-related arrests were made in 2020, including individuals involved in Daesh activities. The number showed a serious decline in arrests compared to the previous years. The Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented in 2020 as part of the nation-wide Covid-19 response strategy had restricted regular activities. There were 83 and 72 arrests made in 2018 and 2019, respectively. The local authorities will continue to monitor for any terrorist activities or developments in the country. There have been 558 arrests since 2013, 362 of them were Malaysian citizens and the remaining 196 were foreigners.

On 22 Jan 21, the US military prosecutors filed charges at the tribunal against Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) senior members. They were Riduan Isamuddin @ Hambali and two Malaysian citizens Mohammed Nazir Lep and Mohammed Farik Amin. The three of them faced various charges of terrorism with links to JI and Al-Qaeda, including conspiracy and murder. The three men were captured in Thailand back in 2003 and are now serving their sentences in Guantanamo Bay.

A 33-year-old Malaysian man who worked as a sanitation worker was deported from Singapore on 9 Feb 21 for planning to travel to Syria to join Daesh. Mohd. Firdaus Kamal Intdzam was detained under Singapore’s ISA in July 2021. His Singaporean wife, Ruqayyah Ramli (34), who is a religious teacher was also arrested for the same charges and is now put under surveillance.

The MCO and Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO) has affected the country’s terror-related activities. The drastic drop of the arrest domestically shows that Malaysia is capable of containing the threat. However, the terrorism threat level remains moderate, and Malaysia will continue to exercise the existing counterterrorism laws in neutralising any presence of terrorist activities.

What Can Be Expected

Daesh networks across the globe continue to struggle to reassert their presence and relevance. Even so, they are up against serious challenges given that military forces in Iraq and Syria continue to sustain pressure against

them to reduce their impact and influence. The imminent withdrawal of US troops may see a rise in renewed threats in conflict areas.

Religious extremism remains to be the primary driver of political violence in the Philippines and Indonesia. The latest attack in Makassar, Indonesia, demonstrated the local pro-Daesh networks' will and determination in extending and sustaining the larger organisation's missions and aspirations – both in terms of ideology and territory to re-establish the Dawlah and to maintain its relevance. Although the attack was considerably clumsy in that they failed to kill any of the churchgoers, however it signalled their commitment and lingering presence to continue to appeal to popular support. The attack also provided an indication of lag effect as a result from last year's COVID-19 crisis – we can expect to see similar attacks of this nature being attempted again after being suppressed by prolonged movement restrictions.

The ongoing aggressive military operations have fragmented the strength of some key violent extremist groups in the Southern Philippines, most notably the ASG. However, SF in the region must remain consistent in targeting these groups as they still have the capabilities to replenish their ranks.

Conclusion

Although most of the violence appears to remain centred in the Southern Philippines and Indonesia, Malaysia must remain cautious and watchful for domestic violent extremists' potential activities or actions. Malaysia must also consider Singapore's latest experience with home-grown inspired violence as an important lesson in recognising how violent conservative ideas from the West can spread organically to inspire and activate local actors. In summary, it is critical to recognise that grievance and bigotry can both serve as powerful motives. Local violent actors only need to look for opportunity and means to be motivated into taking meaningful action.