



# Terrorism Observer

Quarterly Report

## TERRORISM EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SECOND QUARTER OF 2021

### Global Trend

Daesh Central is struggling to demonstrate any form of resilience or capabilities to regroup and resurge. Heightened military pressure across Iraq and Syria has subdued the militants in the region for now. Their last successful attack was last January's twin suicide bombings in Tayaran Square, Baghdad. Since then, Daesh has not been able to demonstrate their relative strength or leadership prowess as surgical military actions continue to disrupt their attempts.

Militant groups in the Philippines are also struggling to strengthen their presence in the southern part of the country. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has been very focused in their incisive anti-terrorism operations in the region. Many members from groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) have been neutralised – either captured or killed by the AFP. Many others have also surrendered themselves out of exhaustion, hunger, and distress at being aggressively pursued by the military. The BIFF even staged an attempt to occupy a market, but the effort was thwarted by the Philippines SF.

Pro-Daesh groups in Indonesia continue to try maintaining their credibility and legitimacy. However, like the militants in the Philippines, jihadists in Indonesia are also experiencing difficulties in coping with the intensifying security pressure and anti-terrorism crackdowns. The rapidly worsening security situation in eastern Indonesia due to secessionist tensions provided groups like Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) an opportunity to find refuge to evade arrest.

Other key global terrorist incidents are as follows:

- a. In Afghanistan, Afghan Special Forces (ASF) successfully neutralised a local Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) leader, Kamin @ Hakimullah, during a night raid in the Kuz Kunar district on 17 Apr 21. Kamin was trying to evade capture when he was killed by the AFS. He was the ISKP commander for Pachir Wa Agam and Deh Bala districts of Nangarhar province. On 27 Apr 21, the United States of America (USA) successfully assassinated senior Taliban commander Mullah Mawlawi Ahmad Kandahari in a drone strike. Kandahari was Taliban's second most important leader after Mullah Akhtar Mansour. He was responsible for planning bombings and sophisticated attacks in southwest Afghanistan. On 8 May 21, ISKP staged a deadly Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack on the Sayed-ul-Shuhada High School for girls in the Dasht-e Barchi district in Kabul. More than 70 people were killed and at least 150

others were wounded in the attack, most of them young schoolgirls from the local Shiite-Hazara ethnic minority community. One month later, ISKP launched a deadly massacre on a HALO Trust camp in Baghlan province on 8 Jun 21. ISKP gunmen killed 10 Afghan deminers working for the British-American organisation and wounded over a dozen other at the site. The militants were specifically targeting Hazara ethnic minority group amongst the demining workers. The local Taliban group came to their aid and drove the attackers away. Four days later, ISKP launched yet another bomb attacks in Dasht-E-Barchi, targeting the Shiite-Hazara community once again. ISKP struck two minivans in the district with magnetic bombs, killing seven people and injuring six others.

b. On 24 Apr 21, 36-year-old Jamel Gorchene stabbed a woman who worked at the police station in Rambouillet, a suburb southwest of Paris, France. Gorchene reportedly watched jihadist propaganda videos moments before the attack. A native of Tunisia, Gorchene came from M'saken, the same town in northeastern Tunisia as Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the delivery-truck driver who in 2016 plowed a 19-ton refrigeration vehicle into a crowd on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, killing 86 people. Gorchene arrived in France in 2009 and lived for a decade without legal status, most recently in Rambouillet, before securing authorisation to stay in 2019 and a temporary residence permit in 2020. French authorities viewed the incident as “possible terror attack”.

c. On 28 Apr 21, Turkey’s National Intelligence Organisation, the Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MIT), successfully captured a Daesh militant, Basim, in Atasehir in Istanbul. An Afghan national, Basim was a close aide of the slain Daesh leader, Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi. Basim oversaw training for Daesh while he was in Syria and Iraq, as well as serving on its decision-making council. He arrived in Turkey with a false passport and identifications.

d. Meanwhile, on 12 May 21, a 19-year-old Kazan teenager, Ilnaz Galyaviev, entered School No. 175, a high school in the capital of the republic Tatarstan, Russia and opened fire with a semi-automatic. Galyaviev gunned down seven children and two adults while injuring 21 others, mostly children in the grisly shooting rampage. Prior to the attack, Galyaviev went on social media, posting that he planned to kill a "huge number" of people before shooting himself. Screenshots of his account showed him wearing a black mask with the word “Bog” (“God”) written across it in red. Galyaviev was a former student of the school who studied in the fourth year at the local Institute of Management, but he was expelled in April due to academic debt. There were speculations that he was motivated by revenge. Russia’s Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin viewed the incident as terrorism act.

e. In Nigeria, a fierce infighting between Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) resulted in the death of Boko Haram’s notorious leader, Abubakar Shekau, on 20 May 21. Shekau had killed himself by detonating an explosive to avoid being captured alive by his nemesis. Boko Haram confirmed the death of Shekau in a video message two weeks after the battle, and announced their new leader, 24-year-old Bakura Modu @ Sahaba.

## **Terrorism Trends in Southeast Asia**

### **The Philippines**

The terrorism-related issues involving BIFF are as follows:

- a. On 24 Apr 21, four BIFF members were killed in an artillery attack by the military in the borders of Maguindanao and North Cotabato. They were reportedly followers of Abdulmalik Esmael @ Abu Toraife. Abu Toraife was allegedly wounded in the incident. The combat operation was a surgical strike and pre-emptive in targeting some 100 BIFF men in their hiding place in Shariff Saydona Mustapha, Maguindanao.
- b. On 28 Apr 21, two women were killed while six people – including four soldiers – were injured by a pair of mortar explosion in Barangay Kitango, Datu Saudi, Ampatuan. The two women were traveling with BIFF spokesman Abu Jihad when the bomb he was carrying prematurely exploded. However, Abu Jihad managed to escape unharmed. On the same day, BIFF militants also detonated an IED that targeted a group of pro-government militia, injuring two people.
- c. On 8 May 21, about 200 heavily armed BIFF militants from the Karilalan faction occupied a public market at Datu Paglas, Maguindanao, in the southern Philippines. They retreated immediately and splintered into small groups toward the mountainous area of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat when the Philippine army engaged them in combat with air and ground assault. BIFF spokesperson, Abu Jihad, clarified that the rebels had not intended to seize the market, but in fact were there to look for food and supplies.
- d. On 12 May 21, four BIFF members from a BIFF faction led by Muhideen Animbang Indong @ Commander Karilalan were killed in a clash with the Philippines SF in Datu Paglas, Maguindanao. The skirmish erupted hours after President Rodrigo Duterte visited the Army 6th Infantry Division's headquarters in Datu Odin Sansuat to urge military commanders and local Bangsamoro officials to support the Philippine government in addressing extremism and terrorism in the country.
- e. On 16 May 21, troops of the Joint Task Force (JTF) Central were conducting focused military operations when they encountered members of BIFF-Karialan Faction led by Mohiden Animbang @ Karialan in Barangay Mao, Datu Paglas. Two BIFF members were killed during the clash while the rest of the group scattered and escaped. The JTF also discovered two enemy foxholes believed to be dug by BIFF a few months ago. The slain BIFF members were believed to be part of the group of armed men that occupied the Datu Paglas market in the previous week.

The terrorism-related issues involving Dawlah Islamiyah (DI) are as follows:

- a. On 7 Apr 21, the AFP shot dead DI's moneymen, Jourhan Palalisap Utap in Polomolok, South Cotabato in the southern Mindanao along with his kinsman, identified as Mohaimen Palalisap Utap. Both men had refused to surrender when surrounded. A gunfight ensued before both men were killed. The authorities had also seized several firearms at the scene, including a .45 calibre and a .38 calibre.
- b. On 12 Apr 21, a DI subleader, identified as Usuf Nasif, was killed in a 30-minute gun battle in Marawi City. His wife along with eight AFP members were wounded in the clash.

The terrorism-related issues involving ASG are as follows:

- a. On 16 Apr 21, an Egyptian national was amongst three other ASG militants killed in a clash with government forces. The Egyptian, identified as Yusof, was the son of two foreign

militants who died in separate suicide attacks in Basilan and Sulu provinces in 2018 and 2019. His father staged the first reported suicide bombing in the Philippines, which took place at a military roadblock in Lamitan, Basilan, in July 2018. Yusof's mother involved in a foiled suicide bombing at an army base in Indanan town in Sulu province in September 2019. Yusof's family arrived in Mindanao in 2018 and subsequently joined the late Hatib Hadjan Sawadjaan, the ASG leader designated as Daesh emir in the Philippines.

b. On 23 Apr 21, the AFP killed two ASG members in Patikul, Sulu, Mujafal "Jhapz" Sawadjaan and Muktihar Taha @ Mukti. Mujafal was ASG's bombmaker Mundi Sawadjaan's older brother. Mundi is believed to be involved in the twin explosion attack in Jolo on 24 Aug 20 which killed seven soldiers, a police officer, and six civilians, and injured 75 others.

c. On 25 May 21, the police and military had succeeded in arresting one of the most wanted member of ASG, 45-year-old Abdulhakim Nasalon in Zamboanga City. Nasalon was a member of ASG's Zamboanga cell known as the Ajijul group, and he was involved in the 2009 kidnapping and beheading of farmer, Doroteo Gonzales.

d. On 5 June 21, an ASG bombmaker identified as Aroy Ittot @ Oroy was killed while resisting arrest. Police officers and soldiers were serving Oroy with an arrest warrant when the latter fired his M16 rifle which prompted the troops to return fire. Oroy died from his gunshot wounds. Oroy was a trusted follower of ASG leader Furuji Indama and was involved in various bombing attacks in Basilan.

e. Meanwhile, on 13 June 21, four more ASG militants were killed in a clash with the 35th Infantry Battalion in Jolo in the southern Philippines. Three of them were identified as Al-Al Sawadjaan who was Mujafal and bombmaker Mundi Sawadjaan's younger brother, subleader Injam Yadah and Rauf while the fourth member was unidentified. Al-Al allegedly had some bombmaking knowledge and had pledged to become a suicide bomber. Mundi remains at large.

f. On 23 June 21, JTF Sulu and Patikul Municipal Police Station were conducting an operation in Barangay Bangkal, Patikul in Sulu when they encountered four ASG members. They engaged in a firefight which resulted in the death of one ASG member while the remaining three fled the scene towards Bud Bangkal.

The BIFF is seen as one of the biggest threats to the fragile peace in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. (BARMM). BIFF militants continue to take advantage of the hopelessness, disgruntlement, and poverty of the local farming communities to coax people into joining their cause and take up arms against the Bangsamoro government and impede the peace process between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the BARMM government. BIFF under the Karialan faction remains persistent in sowing terror to drive their separatist agenda. BIFF endeavours to prove that they are still fighting strong, but BIFF as a group is struggling to cope with the intensifying security pressure coming from all sides directed by the military and local authorities, along with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 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 second quarter of terror-activities in the Philippines shows a series of surrenders took place involving members of ASG, DI and the BIFF. The number of militant surrenders indicates that both BIFF and ASG

are experiencing membership fatigue, logistics deficiency and loss of support. Terrorism in Mindanao is declining since 2020 due to numerous factors, including territorial losses, enhanced intelligence exchange and stronger security environment which impacted their capabilities and potency. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has given the Philippines government an unexpected advantage when they introduced enhanced community quarantine strategy to curb local infections. Consequently, the quarantine has helped restrict the movement of local militant groups and cut off their access to resources. Simultaneously, this also adds to the government's bargaining power that allows them to introduce attractive incentive packages which include cash and livelihood aid to encourage militants to surrender and return to society.

## Indonesia

The terrorism-related issues in Indonesia are as follows:

- a. On 6 Apr 21, Indonesian Police arrested six terror suspects in separate locations across Central Java, Indonesia. All six suspects were believed to be part of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) cells.
- b. On 21 Apr 21, the East Jakarta District Court sentenced six people to death for masterminding a riot inside a detention centre at the Mobile Brigade headquarters in Depok, West Java, killing five police officers. The court had found all six defendants, aged between 25 and 54, guilty of committing terrorism in the May 2018 riot. In the incident, 155 detainees including JAD terror suspects were holed up inside the facility for 39 hours after stealing guns and ammunition.
- c. On 28 May 21, Indonesian Police detained 12 suspected members of JAD in Merauke, Papua province. Authorities believed that the men came from Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi to escape the country's counterterrorism squad for the increased targeting of terror groups and had settled in Timika, the main town in Papua's Mimika regency. Densus 88 also confiscated air rifles, arrows, machetes, and several chemical materials from the suspects. The arrested militants had planned to attack a local archbishop and police stations in Merauke.
- d. On 14 June 21, security forces arrested 13 suspected JI members in Riau, Indonesia. All of them were linked to the JI network operating in Sumatra. They were undergoing weapons training to prepare for planned attacks.
- e. On 15 June 21, security forces arrested a suspected JAD militant in Bogor, West Jawa. The suspect was believed to be responsible for preparing chemicals used as raw materials in bombmaking. He was also guilty of promoting the group on social media and administering a WhatsApp group that catered to discussing extremist agenda.
- f. Three days later, Indonesian Police captured four more JAD members in separate operations on 18 June 21 in West Java. Three of them who were arrested in Pangandaran district were involved in a terrorist activity in September 2019 in the East Priangan region. The fourth suspect was apprehended in Linggajaya village of Tasikmalaya district.

Following the Palm Sunday suicide attack in Makassar last March, Indonesian authorities have been enhancing their pressure against terror groups in the country by hardening their security measures and exercising their proactive policies to seek and eliminate terrorist groups.

Despite the encouraging numbers of arrests, the threat of terrorism in the country shows no sign of waning. The latest capture of JAD members in Merauke, Papua indicated that the group is expanding their influence to local Muslims while planning terror attacks on churches and police stations. Numerous arrests on JAD members have not disrupted the group's modus operandi. Currently, the group has eight cells that operated across Indonesia with more than 30,000 sympathizers, decentralised and expanding, making it the largest Daesh-affiliated terror network in Indonesia. JAD is still actively recruiting youths and family to continue suicide bombing in the republic, imitating Surabaya church bombings and Makassar church attack.

## Singapore

On 8 June 21, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) disclosed that thirty-four-year-old Internal Security Act (ISA) detainee Ruqayyah Ramli has refused to make any effort in being rehabilitated and stubbornly remains steadfast in her radical beliefs. Ruqayyah was arrested under Singapore's ISA last August along with her Malaysian husband Mohd. Firdaus Kamal Intdzam for planning to travel to Syria to join Daesh. Ruqayyah remains persistent with her undying support for Daesh and their violent actions against the perceived enemies of Islam. Ruqayyah's background as a former religious teacher may be the reason for her resistance towards the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore's (MUIS) efforts in rehabilitating her. Ruqayyah's deep conviction in Daesh's legitimacy, compounded by her theological knowledge which allows her to shape her own beliefs and narratives, has proven to be a serious challenge for Singaporean authorities to deradicalise her.

Daesh narratives remains the primary concern facing Singapore while far-right extremism is an emerging threat. It remains on high alert despite the collapse of Caliphate in Syria and Iraq. Recent development has displayed that Singaporeans are susceptible to being influenced by external developments and events abroad which can have an impact on the domestic security landscape.

## Malaysia

Terrorism threat level in the country remains moderate. However, on 20 Apr 21, the Kuala Lumpur High Court sentenced 34-year-old Mohd. Firdaus Kamal Intdzam, who is also the husband to Singaporean Ruqayyah Ramli, to three years' jail. Firdaus had worked as a sanitation worker in Singapore when he was detained under Singapore's ISA in July 2020 before being deported from the country on 5 Aug 20 for planning to travel to Syria to join Daesh. He was charged with six counts of possessing items linked to the terrorist group, including two memory cards, a flag four books and a mobile phone.

Then, on 8 May 21, Malaysian security forces captured eight ASG members in Beaufort, Sabah. They were identified as ASG sub-leader Sansibar Bensio, Firdaus Omar, Munimar Binda, Ladin Mujahirin Faizal, Hamzah Faizal, Sansis Mohammad, Halim Akhir, and Yusuf Akram. ESSCOM handed them over to the Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom) in Taganak, Tawi-Tawi on 28 May 21. It is believed that they have been hiding in the state since March this year amidst military operation against ASG in Southern Philippines. Some of them also admitted to have involved in the Kidnap for Ransom Activity (KFR) in Southern Philippines and Sabah.

The raids have shown high security alert in Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZONE) areas by ESSCOM without compromising terrorist group like ASG who later escaped to Western Sabah for refuge. The enhanced intelligence cooperation between Malaysia and the Philippines in the recent arrest of ASG members provided an optimistic outlook on the counterterrorism efforts on Malaysian shores. Malaysia remains serious in maintaining a cooperative security relationship with partnering countries. Malaysian authorities continue to exercise vigilance against any threats of terror-related activities.

## What Can Be Expected

The ongoing Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria, with the support of the international coalition has helped reduce Daesh presence in these areas. Daesh continues to carry out sporadic attacks to try reasserting themselves. However, these feeble attempts suggest that the organisation has weakened with a waning leadership. The group is struggling to employ effective guerrilla tactics that could help buy them time to rebuild themselves. In the meantime, local SF continue to exert strong security pressure to eliminate the presence of these militants and frustrate their attack capabilities. The coalition will continue to support Kurdish Peshmerga forces and strengthen security coordination with the Iraqi military to counter any immediate Daesh threats.

Although Daesh central is on the decline in Iraq and Syria, however Daesh-affiliated activities across the world suggested that their franchise groups are determined to remain active. The latest violent rivalry between Boko Haram and ISWAP in Nigeria that resulted in the death of Shekau may be a prognosis of ISWAP's longevity and staying power, making the current situation look even bleaker. To thrive, terrorist organisations rely on popular support to remain appealing so they can drive recruitment. Governments should be more concerned about terrorist group longevity and be proactive with their counterterrorism approaches by preventing interorganisational rivalries. There is a latent risk that ISWAP's victory may encourage civilians to take sides, or worse, join them.

The latest string of attacks carried out by ISKP in Afghanistan suggests that ISKP is persistent in trying to ignite sectarian violence in the country that can spoil the ongoing peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Presently, the Afghan government is discussing with the Taliban about holding fresh elections and forming a government in a democratic manner. But Taliban's insistence on the supremacy of Sunni Hannafism renewed fears that minority Shiites will be marginalised even more. Unsurprisingly, ISKP sees this as an opportunity to assert their presence by targeting Shiite-Hazara minorities to escalate tension, delegitimise the Taliban and weaken the Afghan government.

Meanwhile, terror activities remain focused in the Southern Philippines and Indonesia. Religious extremism remains to be the primary driver of political violence in the Indonesia. However, in Indonesia's case, the heightening separatist rebellions threaten to complicate matters even more. Although Indonesian authorities are actively suppressing pro-Daesh militants in their country, they must also consider the possibilities that for terrorists to escape, they will not hesitate to take advantage of a spiralling conflict between the government and anti-government secessionists to provoke tension while seeking a new hideout for themselves where they can evade capture.

In the Philippines, the government and military are very persistent in targeting the local militant groups. The relentless military actions against the terrorist groups appear to bear fruit as the militants grow increasingly fatigued by the security campaigns. The number of surrenders is encouraging as more and more militants decide to disarm themselves. The government should continue offering stimulus to entice more militants to leave a life of violence behind and re-join society. This impetus should also be enhanced by a comprehensive rehabilitation and deradicalisation program through PCVE that can help rebuild former militant's resilience and restore their emotional and mental well-being to help prepare them to return to a normal civilian life.

## Conclusion

In summary, aggressive military operations can be successful in diminishing extremist groups' capabilities and lethality. However, military forces is not a total solution to eradicate terrorism. There

should be a balance between hard and soft approach against terrorism. Additionally, governments must also engage former militants through meaningful actions by being more proactive and empathic in their counterterrorism approaches. Local violent actors will seek any opportunities that can offer them strategic and tactical advantage, even if that demands finding sanctuary outside of their usual homebase, therefore government and military must disrupt any potential alliance that can be forged to subdue them.