



Country Reports on Terrorism 2008
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Chapter 2 -- Country Reports: East Asia and Pacific Overview

Philippines

As in recent years, terrorist groups active in the Philippines included the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Jemaah Islamiya (JI), the New People's Army (NPA), and the Rajah Solaiman Movement (RSM). U.S. intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance supported Armed Forces of the Philippines' operations against terrorist elements in the southern Philippines, while U.S. Department of Justice criminal-investigation and antiterrorism programs trained approximately 5,000 police and other security personnel. Implementation of the Coastwatch South program continued to move forward; its radar stations and sea-surface and aerial assets will dramatically improve the government's oversight of the "Terrorist Transit Triangle" region bordered by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement's newly-developed Philippine Biometric Initiative has provided Philippine National Police with fingerprints, photographs, and other information on 130 suspected terrorists. Philippine security forces continued to make progress against terrorist groups, killing 35 terrorists and capturing another 16 during the first half of the year. Those apprehended included an RSM cofounder and two bomb makers in Mindanao. The U.S. counterterrorism strategy of offering development opportunities in areas at risk for terrorist recruitment continued to marginalize the small remaining numbers of ASG and JI terrorists from Muslim insurgents in the southern Philippines. While the 5,000-strong NPA continued to disrupt public security and business operations with intermittent attacks on communication and transportation infrastructure throughout the Philippines, it continued to decline in personnel and effectiveness. However, the NPA remained steadfast in its refusal to accept President Arroyo's broad amnesty overtures, turning down offers to negotiate unless its U.S. and international designations as a terrorist organization were rescinded. RSM maintained close links to ASG and JI, and was alleged to have been responsible for multiple attacks in the Philippines. In early 2008, RSM was included on the UN 1267 Committee sanctions list. This led to the freezing of RSM bank accounts and real estate. Philippine military and law enforcement agencies conducted intensive civil-military and internal security operations to eliminate terrorist safe havens in the Sulu Archipelago and central Mindanao. In July, Ruben Pestano Lavilla, Jr., a leader and founding member of the RSM, was arrested in Bahrain and deported to the Philippines. In December, the Court of Appeals ordered the trial of RSM founder Hiliarion "Ahmad" Santos and other suspected RSM members for their

alleged involvement in multiple bombings and kidnappings in the Philippines during 2005 and 2006. The 2007 passage of the Human Security Act (HSA) was an important step in the modernization of tools available to Philippine law enforcement for use against terrorists. The Act permits wiretapping of members of judicially-designated terrorist organizations, and financial investigations of individuals connected to terrorist organizations. However, the law's tight restrictions have limited its actual application. The key difficulty in implementing the law is that stiff fines will be imposed on the law enforcement agency for violating a suspect's rights if the accused is later acquitted or the case is dismissed (fines are approximately USD 10,000 per day for the entire period of detention). The Act did, however, provide for the establishment of an Antiterrorism Council to effectively implement counterterrorism efforts in the country and ensure interagency cooperation. The Council focused its first year's efforts in building the organizational and administrative infrastructure necessary to facilitate closer cooperation between Council members and supporting agencies. The United States had excellent cooperation from Philippine law enforcement officials in obtaining access to terrorist detainees and witnesses for FBI interviews, and access to criminal, immigration, financial, and biographic records via the mechanisms established in the U.S. - Philippine Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). The Philippine Security Engagement Board was the primary mechanism for the planning and coordination of nontraditional security issues, including counterterrorism and maritime security. Throughout the year, the Embassy continued to achieve significant progress in supporting the counterterrorism efforts of the Philippine government, including well-coordinated Embassy programs aimed at strengthening security forces and promoting peace and development in Mindanao. This pro-active partnership with the Philippine government has yielded solid results in combating terrorist elements, including ASG, JI, and the NPA. The Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) Program continued to increase the capabilities of Philippine law enforcement agencies to detect, deter, counter, and investigate terrorist activities in the Philippines through carefully-targeted and sequenced delivery of training courses and equipment grants. During 2008, ATA increased its focus on Mindanao by providing valuable training in a wide range of areas including Interdicting Terrorist Activity, Explosive Incident Countermeasures, Post-Blast Investigation, Advanced Computer Forensics, and Cellphone Forensics. ATA instituted a K-9 program of bomb-detection dogs with the Philippine National Police (PNP) by funding U.S.-trained dogs, their handlers, veterinarians, and kennel facilities. ATA assistance has also focused on training in response mechanisms to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism. On the prevention end of the spectrum, U.S. assistance under the Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) has received strong cooperation from the GRP in securing laboratory infrastructure, dangerous pathogen collections, and raising awareness on biological threats in order to prevent bioterrorism in the Philippines, a place where burgeoning biotechnology, infectious diseases, and transnational terrorist threats coexist. The U.S. Department of Justice/International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (DOJ/ICITAP) trained 4,197 police personnel and pursued police development primarily through the Model Police Station Program, which trained PNP personnel at 10 stations in 15 critical subjects; the Maritime Police Project, which when completed will equip maritime police in Palawan Province with special patrol boats to monitor the western Sulu Sea bordering Malaysia; and the Southern Philippines Law Enforcement Development Project, which entailed training PNP personnel in basic police operations and investigation techniques in Sulu Province. Other programs have included the DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement (DHS/ICE) development of the Philippine Biometrics Initiative, whereby fingerprints, photographs, and other information on suspected terrorists were collected and provided to the appropriate Philippine authorities. The Coastwatch South program will dramatically improve oversight of the tri-border "Terrorist Transit Triangle" with the use of 12-17 coastal radar sites connected by a string of air, ocean, and ground surveillance and interdiction assets,

including Forward-Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR) pods for Philippine Navy aircraft and 10 rigid-hull inflatable boats (RHIBs). The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued digitized, machine-readable passports at all its locations.