

Philippines – Emergent Epicentre to Islamic State’s Southeast Asian Ambitions?

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the future prospects of ISIS in Southeast Asia, contending that the Southern Philippines is emerging as the epicenter of Islamic extremism in the region and will likely serve as the regional headquarters for ISIS. This base will aid in facilitating personnel movement, attack planning, fundraising, and alliance-building between local terrorist groups.

Key findings include:

- The majority of Southeast Asian terrorist groups maintain training camps in the Southern Philippines, which has become a major transit hub for regional jihadists traveling to Syria.
- **The Philippine government continues to underestimate the influence of ISIS**, and routinely labels local extremist networks as “criminal gangs” or “bandits,” rather than Islamic extremists.
- With other regional governments seeking to impede travel of their citizens to Syria, **the Philippines may become an alternate destination for ISIS jihadist training**. With the Philippine government committed to launching a military counter attack in its southern regions, this alternate destination may also serve as a frontline for jihadists to gain combat experience.
- **Challenges ISIS will have to overcome** before establishing a headquarters in the Philippines include the **lack of unifying leadership** among its disparate local affiliates and the **inability of these affiliates, thus far, to produce a steady flow of income**. We attribute the increase in kidnappings, ransoming, piracy, and extortion across the Philippines as an effort of these groups to attain this flow.

For access to the full special report please contact robbie.vankampen@issrisk.com or jillian.claunch@issrisk.com