



THREATWATCH

EAST ASIA

Philippine soldiers standing guard next to an armoured personnel carrier

GROUPS

MATTHEW HENMAN, HEAD OF JANE'S TERRORISM AND INSURGENCE CENTRE, IHS MARKIT

ASG

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is a Sunni Islamist militant organisation based and operating in the Southern Philippines off the island of Mindanao, primarily on the islands of Basilan and Jolo in the Sulu archipelago.

ASG militants sometimes operate in mainland Mindanao, including in Lanao del Sur province. While the ASG's stated goal is the establishment of an Islamic state independent of the Philippines, across the 2000s and early 2010s it has mainly been involved in criminal activities, typically

kidnap-for-ransom, including raids on resorts and fish farms off the East coast of Sabah in Malaysia and kidnappings in the Sulu Sea and surrounding areas. The ASG is also capable of conducting armed attacks and large IED attacks beyond Mindanao. Several ASG factions declared their allegiance to the Islamic State between 2014 and 2016, which were recognised by the group in early 2016, and the leader of its Basilan faction, Isnilon Hapilon, was appointed as the head of Islamic State fighters in the Philippines by the Islamic State in June 2016, though he was reportedly killed in October 2017 after a months'-long offensive on Marawi city. The ASG has survived numerous attempts by the Philippines to defeat it despite the fact that the group's fighters are estimated to be only several hundred strong.

BRN

The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) is a militant Malay-Muslim group operating in the South of Thailand, aiming to establish an independent Islamic state based on the local predominantly Malay-Muslim population. Since 2001, the BRN, and specifically a faction of the group known as the BRN-Coordinate, has emerged as the core group – ideologically, organisationally, and militarily – in a resurgence of Southern separatist violence. The insurgency constitutes the most serious and violent separatist campaign in Southern Thailand's history of unrest that dates back at least a century. It has been marked by attacks on state institutions and security forces, as well as by operations targeting civilians, both Buddhist and Muslim. The emergence of an independent state remains unlikely, but insofar as any resolution of the conflict will almost certainly demand significant concessions towards autonomy, the insurgency does pose a direct challenge to Thailand's highly centralised administrative status quo. Although the BRN rarely claims responsibility for attacks, its insurgency continues in Thailand's Southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala largely in the form of IED attacks and ambushes, predominantly against security forces.

NPA

The New People's Army (NPA) is the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Since being founded in 1969 it has sought to establish a communist state by waging a rural-based insurgency according to the Maoist doctrine of people's guerrilla war. The Government of President Rodrigo Duterte previously made making peace with the CPP/NPA a policy priority and both sides conducted negotiations since Duterte assumed power in June 2016. However, the cancellation of peace talks by Duterte in November 2017 has undermined the likelihood of an agreement towards the end of his term in 2022. Nevertheless, the absence of a durable ceasefire agreement and cancellation of talks means that local NPA units are likely to continue to attack security forces, mainly using small arms, and conduct extortion activities targeting business. The NPA has a nationwide presence, but the threat it poses is highest in Mindanao region.

ARSA

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is a Rohingya Muslim militant group based in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The group was initially known as Harakat al-Yaqin, or Movement of Faith, before rebranding as the ARSA. The group came to wider prominence in 2016 when, on 9 October, ARSA militants attacked three border guard stations in Rakhine, killing nine personnel and seizing 60 firearms. The resulting crackdown by Government forces, targeting the Rohingya population, drew widespread international condemnation and increased support for the group among its base population. Just under a year later, the ARSA conducted another co-ordinated attack, this time targeting 30 police checkpoints in the Northern townships of Rakhine in late August 2017. The attack was reported to have involved IEDs, small arms and local villagers armed with spears. At least 11 security forces personnel and 70 militants were killed. Following an operational hiatus, the ARSA conducted an ambush targeting an army convoy in early January 2018, wounding three people. The attack,

involving a remote-controlled IED, suggested an increased capability compared with the previous two attacks. Despite the military offensives against the group and significant losses incurred during their attacks, the ARSA's significant support along with its increased operational capability illustrate its continued intent to conduct further attacks on security forces in Rakhine state.

REGIONS AUSTRALIA

MARIA HARRISON, SENIOR ANALYST, ASIA PACIFIC, IHS MARKIT

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's ruling Liberal-National coalition faces a difficult senate, a slim majority in the House of Representatives and dissent within his own party. Minor parties hold power in the senate, and will continue to amend Government legislation heavily. However, the outlook for Government stability has improved following several Parliamentarians' resignation over dual citizenship in 2017. Barring another political crisis the Government is likely to complete its term until

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN THAILAND ARE MORE LIKELY TO TARGET CIVILIAN TARGETS

the next federal election, which must be called on or before 2 November 2019.

The Government judges the risk of a terrorist attack to be probable. This follows arrests in July and November 2017 in connection with two separate terrorist plots. Further bombing attempts are likely, but police counter-terrorism capability is robust, and plots will probably be disrupted during planning stages. Attack targets include the security services or people in public spaces in cities such as Sydney or Melbourne.

INDONESIA

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President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo enjoys a strong Parliamentary majority after Indonesia's second-largest party, Golkar moved to the Government coalition in May 2016. In November 2017, the arrest of then speaker of the Parliamentary lower house, Setya Novanto, on charges of corruption increased the internal instability within the Government. Despite these charges, Jokowi continues to remain popular.

Most likely to stem critique from opposition groups and to limit the prosecution of senior politicians, in March 2018, Jokowi assented to recently passed amendments to widen the powers of the Parliamentary lower house's Ethics Council. These allow the Council to take legal or criminal action against an individual or legal entity that disrespects the house or its members. Furthermore, they allow the Council to confer with the President's office before permitting law enforcement to summon a Parliamentarian accused of a crime.

MALAYSIA

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The incumbent Government coalition, Barisan Nasional, has been in power since 1974, but lost its two-third majority for the first time in 2008 and its seat share reduced further in 2013. For the August 2018 election, Prime Minister Najib Razak's Government's seat share is further threatened by the nomination of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as the candidate for the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan.

As a likely measure to arrest its reducing seat share, in February 2018, Malaysia's Election Commission announced it would redraw boundaries of more than 150 of Malaysia's 222 Parliamentary constituencies. If the EC completes the process of redrawing the boundaries before the election, it increases the likelihood of Razak remaining in power: Pakatan Harapan has filed objection statements suggesting the redrawing of boundaries most likely concentrates a significant number of opposition voters in fewer constituencies; thereby favouring the incumbent Government.

PHILIPPINES

MARIA HARRISON, SENIOR ANALYST, ASIA PACIFIC, IHS MARKIT

Resumption of President Rodrigo Duterte's signature anti-narcotics operations in January 2018 is likely to intensify violent confrontations between police and drug offenders using small arms, raising risks to individuals across Philippines after a year-long hiatus. In December 2017, the Congress approved a one-year extension of martial law in Mindanao amid fears that the Islamic State-linked insurgents were regrouping following the end of the group's

five-month long occupation of Marawi city. Counter-terrorism operations have weakened Islamist insurgents in the Southern Philippines, however, they likely possess sufficient weapons and personnel to maintain the momentum of attacks particularly in Western Mindanao. Similarly, the National People's Army communist insurgents will continue to target security forces, mining assets, construction sites, mobile phone towers, power assets, and foreign agricultural firms in IED and arson attacks.

THAILAND

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While the frequency of terrorism attacks in four Southern provinces (Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and Songkhla) has significantly decreased over 2017, as Thailand goes through a likely transition from military rule to civilian-led democratic Government, there is increased likelihood that attacks will occur. There are signs that the attacks are more likely to target civilian targets, as opposed to Government and military assets and personnel. However, the scale of attack will likely be small, and capabilities low.

Aside from terrorism risks, Thailand's military Government has announced plans to hold general elections in February 2019 and local-level elections some time in 2018. Among major political parties there remains scepticism on whether the junta can keep its promise. There will likely be increased frequency of small-scale protests by pro-democracy activists closer to the election date. Student-led activist groups such as the New Democracy Movement have gained popularity and will likely see increased support. The protests will be concentrated around Bangkok, near Government buildings in Phra Nakhorn and business areas of Phatum Wan and Phaya Thai ●

Members of the Thai bomb squad unit work at the scene of a roadside bomb blast by suspected separatist militants

