

hit-and-run attacks by insurgents.

The underfunding of counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations is a partial explanation. Although the government has committed to increasing military funding under the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Act, the vast majority of these resources appear to be earmarked for naval improvements and contesting incursions in its territorial waters. Given the high stakes nature of the South China Sea dispute, operations in the southern Philippines to contain these sporadic and low-level attacks have received comparatively less funding.

In addition to reduced domestic support for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, US support has also been scaled back, with the focus again shifting to the Philippines' naval capabilities. In June 2014, the United States withdrew its Joint Special Operations Task Force, a crucial source of training and expertise for Philippine special forces combatting rebel groups and militants.

Although the move appears to reflect the lower threat level that Southeast Asian groups pose internationally, the Philippine forces alone appear unable to tackle the threat effectively. Since the drawdown of US personnel,

the ASG has increased the frequency of its operations, including the abduction of four foreigners in October and August 2015.

The government's high profile operations against the BIFF, such as Operation Darkhorse in January 2014 and an 'all-out offensive' against the group in February 2015, have done little to lower attack rates. Although the Philippine military is capable of clearing areas and detaining militants, police forces have historically struggled to secure towns and surrounding areas. Without better police training and enhanced co-operation between the two sides, Duterte's new government is unlikely to improve the security situation significantly.

NPA talks

Although fighting involving the BIFF is likely to continue at similar rates to those experienced since the start of 2015, Duterte has voiced his support for restarting negotiations with the NPA. The talks with the Maoist rebels broke down in 2011 but are scheduled to take place in Oslo as early as the third week of July 2016 with the group's exiled leaders. Duterte's advisers also recommended the release of political prisoners as a good will gesture prior to his assumption of office on 30 June.

Based on negotiations with the MILF, any talks with the NPA are likely to last for several years at least. The conflict between the Philippine state and the NPA also predates that between the state and the Mindanao separatists, which spans 47 years. This suggests that reaching agreements over political prisoners, land use, reparations, and the decommissioning of arms will be difficult to quickly resolve and subsequently implement.

Regardless, the NPA remains a limited threat to civilians – particularly in comparison with the BIFF and the ASG – choosing to predominantly target infrastructure, farm equipment, and machinery in agricultural areas of Mindanao. Until a framework agreement can be reached between the two sides, small-scale NPA attacks are likely to continue.

ASG threat

The rise in attacks by the ASG followed a pledge of allegiance by several ASG leaders to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State. Isnilon Hapilon, an ASG ideological leader and battalion commander, and a small number of BIFF members made proclamations of support in August 2014.

In January 2016, after a prolonged delay,

Replicating Davao's security policy nationwide

During Duterte's time as mayor of Davao, the fight against crime in the city became associated with the existence of the Davao Death Squad (DDS). A 2009 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions noted that Duterte had "done nothing to prevent these killings, and his public comments suggest that he is, in fact, supportive".

In April 2016, the Philstar website reported that the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) was "pursuing its investigation of [Duterte's] alleged involvement... in unexplained killings purportedly perpetrated by [the DDS]" but had yet to release its findings. In April 2016, Duterte denied any connection to the killings, saying, "I never did that," according to a Reuters report.

According to a July 2015 article by Phelim Kine, the deputy director of the Asia division of international non-governmental organisation (NGO) Human Rights Watch (HRW), the DDS killed more than 1,000 people during Duterte's mayoral tenure.

The victims – mostly street children, petty criminals, and low-level drug dealers – were usually included on weekly lists of criminals published by local-level officials and subsequently handed over to the DDS, according to a 2009 report by the HRW entitled *You can die any time*.

A long-time peace advocate in the Philippines resident in Davao for more than 20 years told *IHS Jane's* in June 2016 that she had fought against these extra-judicial killings at the time. Nevertheless, she did not wish to comment on Duterte, rather wishing to "give him the benefit of the doubt". In her opinion, the fact that the DDS could operate with such impunity for so long was also down to lack of action from the national government, "They had all the means and power to prove who is responsible[...] yet they did nothing."

Another long-time resident of Davao who spoke to *IHS Jane's* was more critical, arguing that replicating Duterte's "iron fist approach [at the national level] would create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust

[breaking] the fabric of the nation". He also questioned whether Duterte's hard-line approach had been effective in bringing more security to Davao City. For him, "[Duterte's] approach may have instilled fear among criminals but it [did] not deter them from committing crime".

Philippine National Police (PNP) statistics, as reported by media outlets, highlight a paradox that would seem to support this assessment. In 2015, the crime rate in Mindanao overall had gone down by 28.38% compared with 2014. However, Davao City continued to show the highest murder rate in the country between 2010 and 2015, as cited in a report on the Philstar website on 2 April 2016. Even if Duterte is able to garner domestic political support for a tougher approach to crime at a nationwide level, there remain reasons to doubt whether it would be effective in reducing violence.

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