

Philippines' counter-terrorism strategy still stalled after 7 years since the 'ISIS siege' on Marawi

April 25 2024



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Following the 2017 siege of Marawi, the Philippines' counter-terrorism efforts have faced an increasingly complex and unpredictable landscape.

While authorities have claimed victory, one which garnered [global media attention](#) during the peak of ISIS reign in Syria and Iraq, the aftermath of Marawi highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive reassessment of the country's counter-terrorism strategy.

A new study, led by experts in security and terrorism studies at the University of Portsmouth, provides a thorough examination of the terrorist environment following the [armed conflict](#) between Philippine forces and Islamist militants who seized the southern city of Marawi for five months, in which over a thousand people died and a million were displaced.

The research is published in the [Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism](#).

The study evaluated the effectiveness of strategies implemented by Philippine security forces since the battle and found that while steps have been taken in the right direction, the opportunity to fundamentally reset counter-terrorism has been squandered.

The analysis reveals that, seven years after Marawi, the focus on combating the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu has overshadowed persistent security threats posed by long-standing insurgent groups such as the MNLF, MILF, and the NPA. The proliferation of these other rebel groups and the resurgence of terrorism pose significant challenges that demand commitment and capability to a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to peace in the region.

Other key findings from the paper include the politicization of US security assistance to the Philippines in wake of confrontation with China in the South China Sea dispute. Similarly, the concerning ongoing struggles with anti-corruption and human rights issues; the ineffectiveness of the National Action Plan for Preventing and

Countering Violent Extremism (NAP-P/CVE); and an in-prepared judicial system that has struggled to implement The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020.

Study co-author, Ann Bajo from the University of Portsmouth and former National Defence Analyst from the Philippines, said, "Our findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic issues such as governance and community neglect in Marawi. Failure to address these issues risks undermining the progress made in counter-terrorism efforts and perpetuating instability in the region.

"Philippine security forces must be receptive to developing softer skills and collaborating with civil society and international partners to gauge their impact on communities and strike a balance in their approach. This necessitates a commitment to ongoing training and reforms, particularly in community engagement and welfare operations.

"Moreover, addressing generational grievances requires sustained effort and a long-term perspective, with a focus on cultivating trust and respect within communities being paramount."

The authors argue that heavy handed military attention centered around local militants branding themselves "ISIS" must be measured by an approach targeting the symptoms of extremism, risks exacerbating grievances and further alienating communities, rather than addressing the underlying causes of violence.

Co-author Dr. Tom Smith, Associate Professor in International Relations at the University of Portsmouth and Academic Director of the Royal Air Force College, said, "The international media attention Marawi received at a time during the height of the global campaign against ISIS in Syria and Iraq has diminished. Yet the city is still in ruins, along with the lives of hundreds of thousands who have no homes to return to.

"Seven years later violence in Marawi is flaring up again from the very same groups thought extinguished at great cost. We show how, despite changes, the opportunity to build peace in the rubble of Marawi has been squandered.

"While changes in strategy, [resource allocation](#), and legal frameworks have been initiated, their tangible outcomes on the ground remain to be seen in terms of a reduction in terrorist violence across the country's complex landscape.

"As such, the journey towards effective counterterrorism in the Philippines post-Marawi is one that demands an as yet unseen perseverance and adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to rebuilding the city and lives destroyed."

Bajo added, "The release of our paper comes at a critical juncture for the Philippines, as it grapples with ongoing security challenges and seeks to chart a course for sustainable peace and stability. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations outlined in the paper will inform policy discussions and contribute to the development of more effective counterterrorism strategies."

More information: Tom Smith et al, The false dawns over Marawi: examining the post-Marawi counterterrorism strategy in the Philippines, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/18335330.2024.2346472](https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2024.2346472)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: Philippines' counter-terrorism strategy still stalled after 7 years since the 'ISIS siege' on Marawi (2024, April 25) retrieved 6 August 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-04-philippines-counter-terrorism-strategy-stalled.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.