



Global Islamism Monitor No. 84

January 29, 2021 **Jacob McCarty, Ilan I. Berman, Jessie Kaplan**

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ISIS ADAPTS IN THE PHILIPPINES...

In the nearly-two years since the collapse of its *caliphate* in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has undergone a "repositioning" of sorts, as the group and its affiliates have progressively migrated to other global regions. Asia is prominent among them, and the Philippines has emerged as a particular stronghold for the radical organization and its followers. A new report from West Point's Combatting Terrorism Center - part of a series on ISIS activity in Southeast Asia - details that the organization's presence in the Philippines has undergone a significant metamorphosis in recent years, following the infamous "Battle of Marawi," in which the group experienced significant strategic setbacks.

The report, entitled *Rising in the East*, contains a number of key findings relating to the group's presence in the Philippines, including that "[o]ut of the 50 Islamic State-linked attacks in the Philippines from 2014 to 2019, only four occurred outside of the southern region of Mindanao." Similarly, the study authors note, ISIS underwent a significant shift in tactics following Marawi - a pitched conflict with government forces in which many militants and key group leaders perished. Beginning in 2018, ISIS started to rely on suicide attacks by foreign fighters against both civilian and state targets in order to achieve its objectives - something that had previously been rare in the Philippines. Finally, Marawi "deeply changed the structure of Islamic State-linked militancy in the Philippines," the report concludes, with ISIS affiliates like the Maute Group shifting from coalition activities to their current, "increasingly decentralized structure" in the country. (Combatting Terrorism Center, December 2020)

...AND REARS ITS HEAD IN RUSSIA

In late December, Russia's main security service, the FSB, announced publicly that it had foiled an attack by militants affiliated with the Islamic State in the restive Caucasus republic of Dagestan. The plot allegedly entailed plans to bomb administrative buildings belonging to state law enforcement authorities as well as an assault on interior ministry personnel in Makhachkala, the regional capital. The raid, which reportedly led to the arrest of four militants who were coordinating with "organizers" outside the country, follows a November attack on security forces in neighboring Chechnya, and an October counterterrorism operation in Chechnya's capital, Grozny, in which six individuals - including two Russian operators - were killed. (*Deutsche Welle*, December 26, 2020)

JORDAN'S IAF FALLS SHORT

The Islamic Action Front (IAF), Jordan's main Islamist party and the political arm of the kingdom's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, lost nearly half of its seats in the national parliament as a result of elections in November. Once the most powerful member of a coalition of reform parties, the IAF's representation in the Jordanian legislature dropped by nearly half, from 15 members to just 8, as a result of the November polls. The poor showing by the party is attributable in part to coronavirus-related restrictions in the kingdom, which contributed to a further reduction in the country's historically low electoral turnout. Just 29 percent of eligible voters turned out to cast their ballots in November. (*Washington Post*, November 20, 2020)

HOW ISIS WON HEARTS AND MINDS

A recent report from George Washington University's Program on Extremism (PoE) has shed fresh light on the mechanisms and methods by which the Islamic State proselytizes and spreads its radical message. The study, entitled *My Beloved Brothers in God, This Is An Invitation* and authored by Aaron Zelin of The Washington Institute, maps out how the world's most notorious terrorist group relied on *da'wa* (proselytization) to garner supporters prior to the establishment of its self-declared state in Iraq and Syria. Activities such as "giving lectures, distributing gifts to children, and reciting the Qur'an in competitions," Zelin notes, "allowed IS to ingratiate itself with locals and dispel negative views many had of the group as a result of its conduct during the Iraq jihad." Through such measures as well as propaganda and indoctrination, the group laid the groundwork for its eventual creation of a state and "gradually socializing Syrians to the concept."

In turn, once the group established its state, *da'wa* became a central component of how it maintained its legitimacy and hold on power. The Islamic State created a dedicated agency for *da'wa* and mosques, known as the Diwan al-Dawa wa-l-Masajid, to "assume the maintenance of public interests" and "protect the people's religion and security." It did so through methods like the enforcement of austerity in mosques on its territory, the shaping and oversight of sermons, staging Quranic recitation competitions, and the training of *imams*. These means allowed the group to greatly control the daily lives and practices of citizens under its control, as well as to project a model of "just" governance that served to attract other adherents to its ranks, Zelin notes. (George Washington PoE, December 2020)