

Analysis: Bombing City Market in Philippines Kills 16
Al Qaeda associate group Abu Sayyaf suspected

Summary

- Bomb detonated near market stall in General Santos City (“GSC”) at 3:50 p.m. on December 12, 2004, killing 16 and wounding more than 70; Christian meat merchant owned the stall
- Flying shrapnel and force of the explosion cause majority of deaths and injuries
- GSC, one of the largest cities in Central Mindanao, is majority Christian, making it a frequent target for Abu Sayyaf, Jemaah Islamiyah, and various Moro rebel groups.
- Police officials initially focused on a possible connection between bombing and a long-running business feud between Christian and Muslim vendors
- Three Abu Sayyaf members arrested in connection with bombing
- Investigators believe local business owners may have paid Abu Sayyaf to carry out the attack; alternatively attack may be in retaliation for the killing of MILF commander Jack Andatuan and/or senior Jemaah Islamiyah member Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi.



Local Response

- Because bomb was not detonated at other, more crowded locations, authorities suspect that attack linked to feud between Christian and Muslim street vendors over ownership of Stall 82
- Feuding groups had exchanged gunfire on at least one occasion
- Police searched home of Muslim vendor who threatened to burn Christians out of Stall 82 a week prior to the attack
- Security tightened in GSC after police received reports that the MILF was planning retaliatory attacks following the killing of their leader Jack Andatuan
- Although MILF has condemned the bombing, authorities suspect the group may be involved
- Australian forensic experts sent to GSC to assist in the investigation
- Task Force established, which includes GSC police, Filipino military, local government, and other relevant agencies; task force to investigate bombing and secure civilians in Central Mindanao
- Abu Sayyaf members Sali Miguel Tasil (aka “Salili”), Karias Lik Kamad (“Elias Kamad”), and Roland Samuel (“Allan”) arrested for illegal possession of explosives
- Suspects found in possession of mortar round, fragmentation grenade, detonation chord, and a package of explosive powder
- Four other suspects taken into custody in the village of Labangan, just outside of GSC; a number of additional suspects remain at large
- One of those arrested is believed to have taken part in a kidnapping led by Abu Sayyaf’s leader Khadaffy Janjalani

Tactics

- Abu Sayyaf is believed to have been planning a bombing in GSC since at least September 2004
- Bomb composed of TNT, nitrate ingredients, and timer, and was packed with chunks of metal that served as shrapnel.
- Man with a Visayan (Moro) accent left bomb at stall 82 in a basket containing eggs and vegetables, after first purchasing meat from a stall vendor and then telling the man that he was leaving the basket while he went to purchase other goods
- Muslim vendors may have hired Abu Sayyaf in an effort to wipe out their Christian competitors

Implications for Law Enforcement

- Street markets and similar venues are attractive targets, especially at high traffic times
- Police should encourage vendors to be suspicious of unattended packages, and review policies regarding customers who ask to leave packages or shopping bags
- Yet another example of terrorists possibly conspiring with people having criminal intentions (e.g., violent harassment of economic competitors); criminal conspiracy unrelated to terrorist fund raising and support efforts
- Noteworthy that criminal motivation (harassment) and terrorist motivation (destruction of Christian owned business) are dissimilar but the operation achieves both of their objectives
- Example of sectarian business dispute that escalated and involved members of terrorist group

Philippines Terror Groups

- There are three main Philippine terror groups currently active: Abu Sayyaf, Moro Islamic National Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). All of these groups have ties to al Qaeda
- These groups also have strong ties with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), al Qaeda's Southeast Asia arm
- The area of operations for these groups is located in the southern islands of the Philippines: Jolo, Basilan, and Mindanao. US Special Forces have been assisting government troops in fighting these groups in these islands. To date, they have been successful in reducing the number of Abu Sayyaf fighters from 1,200 in 2003, to 400 present day fighters
- These groups want to establish an Islamic state in the Philippines, known as a *Bangsa Tungga* (Single Nation). Many Islamic converts in these areas, specifically amongst the Moro tribe
- According to Rohan Gunaratna, after al Qaeda was driven out of Afghanistan, it relocated its major training to the southern Philippines in areas controlled by Abu Sayyaf, MILF, and MNLF
- The main training camp on the island of Mindanao, Camp Abubakar, once housed facilities for Arabs (Camp Palestine), Jemaah Islamiyah (Camp Hodeibia), and Camp Vietnam. Government troops captured the Camp in 2002
- Training camps were subsequently established throughout Jolo, Basilan and Mindanao
- JI recently trained 40 Abu Sayyaf members to make bombs that could be set off by mobile phones
- Some intelligence analysts worry that the Philippines is a greater threat than other areas, because these groups can still train on remote islands and then deploy in the region or to other areas

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