

**Analysis: Suicide Bomb Attack on Philippines Ferry Kills 100**  
*al Qaeda linked group Abu Sayyaf Claims Responsibility*

**Summary**

- Explosion aboard a 10,192-ton (about 3 to 5 times the tonnage of the average Staten Island Ferry) passenger ferry just before midnight, 2 hours after departing Manila
- Explosion was powerful enough to roll ferry on its side
- Route was a regular run between Manila and the Central Philippines
- Abu Sayyaf claimed responsibility on Radio Mindanao, a regular channel for their communications
- The government initially denied this report, claiming explosion resulted from an electrical fire
- Filipino Defense Minister later expressed his opinion that Abu Sayyaf was responsible; however the official government investigation is still ongoing
- If Defense Minister is correct, the scale of this suicide bombing is unprecedented in the Philippines
- Of the 899 passengers on board, at least 2 died directly from the explosion, 98 others were either blown overboard or jumped in an attempt to flee the burning ship

**Local Response**

- Police arrested Redendo Cain Dellosa, an alleged participant, after he was overheard bragging about his role in the bombing
- Five militants connected with Dellosa were subsequently arrested. Police recovered 80 lbs. of explosives, leading authorities to claim that this cell was planning a “Madrid-level” attack in Manila on soft targets such as trains and shopping malls
- Some of the other cell members arrested include: cell leader Alhamser Manatad Limbong who allegedly beheaded American Guillermo Sobero in Southern Philippines in 2002. Limbong is also the cousin of Abu Sayyaf leader Khaddafy Janjalani; Radzmar Sankula Jul, an explosives expert and suspect in kidnapping of 53 people on Basilan Island; and Abdulrasid Lim, a leader of an Abu Sayyaf urban commando team
- All the arrested suspects were Muslim converts of Moro extraction, a tribe found on the remote southern islands of Jolo and Basilan



### **Tactics**

- Dellosa and another unnamed operative boarded the ferry with the explosives
- Dellosa used an alias of a wanted Abu Sayyaf leader when purchasing his ticket
- According to the crew, the operatives were the last two passengers to board the ferry
- The two men quickly boarded moments before departure, immediately after security guards completed a sweep with bomb sniffing dogs
- The explosive smuggled aboard was 8 lbs. of TNT hidden inside a television
- The device was placed in a cabin located in the passenger bunk level of the ship
- The unnamed operator detonated the device; Dellosa escaped during the post-explosion confusion

### **Implications for Local Law Enforcement**

- This is another example of an attack on surface transportation systems
- Attack demonstrates small amount of explosive can cause great destruction on maritime vessel
- Premature and uncoordinated pronouncements of government officials can increase terror effects by undermining public confidence in security measures
- Incidence of attacks by Filipino Muslims is noteworthy; al Qaeda has reportedly planned to use Moro converts for suicide attacks in the West in order to avoid security forces focused on Arabs
- It is an interesting coincidence that, like Spain, the Philippines has contributed troops to the US led effort in Iraq and has upcoming national elections in May



### **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

The Center for Policing Terrorism

- 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

**For more information please contact Georgia Pellegrini, Associate Director of the Center for Policing Terrorism, at (212) 599-7000 or via email: [gpellegrini@manhattan-institute.org](mailto:gpellegrini@manhattan-institute.org)**