

# An Evaluation of the Islamic State's Influence over the Abu Sayyaf

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## Abstract

*The Abu Sayyaf has engaged, at different moments in time in its long existence, sometimes more in criminal activities and sometimes more in acts of terrorism. After declaring its allegiance to the Islamic State in mid-2014, there has been a sharp rise in the group's terrorist activities. This article uses empirical data to evaluate the influence that the Islamic State had on the Abu Sayyaf. Using data from the Global Terrorism Database, over 350 attacks carried out by the Abu Sayyaf during the pre-allegiance and post-allegiance periods are analysed. A Chi-Squared analysis shows that the relationship between the Abu Sayyaf's allegiance to the Islamic State and the increase in terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf are statistically significant. The pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State influenced the targeting policies of the Abu Sayyaf: the odds that the group engaged in a terrorist attack in the post-allegiance period was approximately 1.75 times higher compared to the pre-allegiance period. Such fluctuations rather than a crime-terror nexus explain the extensive criminality displayed by the Abu Sayyaf at particular points in its history.*

**Keywords:** Abu Sayyaf, Crime-Terror links, Islamic State, Marawi, Philippines

## Introduction

The capability and strength of the Abu Sayyaf, which had been sidelined as a criminal syndicate or a group of bandits, has grown. Following the declaration of a Caliphate by the Islamic State and its demand of allegiance from Islamic extremist groups around the world, the Abu Sayyaf was one of the militant groups from South East Asia that pledged its loyalty. The Abu Sayyaf was also a key player during the Marawi siege in Southern Philippines in early 2017. At that time, the group mounted sustained attacks on government forces and proclaimed the territories it captured as a *wilayat* (province) of the Islamic State. Although the Abu Sayyaf has been a notorious and violent organization since its inception, its recent activities and goals signal a significant departure from the past. It will be argued here that crime-terror fluctuations rather than a nexus explain the Abu Sayyaf's transitions between two phases, namely an "extensive criminality" phase and a "terrorist leaning" phase, with the group displaying a relatively and proportionately lesser level of criminal activity in the latter.

Prior to the Marawi siege, the Abu Sayyaf was popularly perceived as an amateurish militant group that was devoid of an ideology or a clear set of goals. The Philippines' media depicted the Abu Sayyaf as both a loose network of criminal gangs that were involved in hijacking, kidnapping-for-ransom and piracy, as well as a religiously motivated terrorist organization. A minority of the academic literature questioned if the Abu Sayyaf could even be considered an organization in the conventional sense. In Ugarte's work, *In A Wilderness of Mirrors: The Use and Abuse of the 'Abu Sayyaf' Label in the Philippines*, the author argues that the Philippines media has been susceptible to distortion of facts by the Philippines government which has affected its reporting and contributed to a skewed depiction and appreciation of the group.[1] In *What is the 'Abu Sayyaf'? How Labels Shape Reality*, Ugarte and Turner further problematize the characterisation of the Abu Sayyaf as a terrorist outfit using organization theory and network analysis. The authors object to the attribution of the label 'Abu Sayyaf,' which takes on an "organic or structural mode of organizational representation" and argue that the "phenomenon" is best understood in alternative ways.[2] One alternative way of understanding the organization that was suggested is using the "flux and transformation" model that show organizations as highly complex structures whose actions are essentially unpredictable for they lack semblance of a coherent body.[3]

While there were some scholarly disagreements on how the entity should be labelled, after the group's allegiance to the Islamic State, the Abu Sayyaf underwent a remarkable transformation, redeeming itself as an indisputable

terrorist organization. As an Islamic State affiliate, it possessed a semblance of a coherent organization with a functioning hierarchical structure, sub-units and the ability to forge alliances with other groups such as the Maute group and the Ansarul Khilafah to fight the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). In other words, the Abu Sayyaf's activities in the period after its allegiance to the Islamic State indicate that it acted very much like a terrorist organization rather than a criminal syndicate or a group of bandits as it was perceived before its allegiance to the Islamic State. The group's new avatar as a capable terrorist fighting force, gained within a short span of time, warrants an in-depth analysis, which this article provides. The article seeks to answer the following two inter-related questions:

- (i) Are the increased terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf a result of the influence of the Islamic State?
- (ii) What can be inferred from the changes in Abu Sayyaf's activities after its allegiance to the Islamic State?

The article is organised as follows. First, it establishes the Abu Sayyaf as an organization that has been involved in a disproportionate level of criminal activities for a self-proclaimed terrorist organization. In particular, the Abu Sayyaf as a corrupted terrorist organization whose members were in pursuit of financial goals, sometimes at the cost of the group's political ideology, will be discussed with reference to the literature on the crime-terror nexus. Second, the article discusses the Islamic State's tactics, methods, and motives in influencing regional terrorist organizations such as the Abu Sayyaf. Third, the methodology and the rationale for employing the Chi-Squared test to demonstrate the relationship between the Islamic State and the Abu Sayyaf are discussed. Fourth, the results of the Chi-Squared test are analysed and the findings discussed. Finally, recommendations for further research are offered.

### ***The Abu Sayyaf and the Crime-Terror Nexus***

From the literature on the crime-terror nexus it could be surmised that it would be a fallacy to assume criminality and terrorism to be mutually exclusive of each other. In fact, the literature shows considerable overlaps between the two.[4] Criminal activities form an important aspect in the political economy of terrorist organizations and determines a group's ability to finance itself. Terrorist financing plays an important role in determining whether the terrorist organization is able to sustain itself. The scholarship on the crime-terror nexus elucidates terrorist organizations' costly transactions which involve, among other things, the promotion and protection of the organization, training, compensation to families of martyrs, attracting new members, and the maintenance of bases.[5] In fact, contrary to popular belief, the price tag from the aforementioned payments (and not the terrorist attacks themselves) form the bulk of terrorist organizations' expenditures.[6]

With there being a great demand for finances and with access to lawful channels to finance the movements unavailable, criminal activities become the primary mode through which terrorist organizations have been able to finance themselves. There is a growing scholarly consensus suggesting that terrorist organizations engage in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, money laundering, kidnapping for ransom, illegal goods trafficking, among others, to finance their political campaigns.[7] In this light, the Abu Sayyaf's extensive criminal activities may seem more like a norm than an aberration. However, there are certain characteristics of the Abu Sayyaf that cannot be explained using the crime-terror nexus. An examination of the Abu Sayyaf's history would reveal that although the crime-terror nexus discourse can be helpful in understanding certain aspects of the group's activities, there are some ways in which the Abu Sayyaf deviates from this model.

One such notable deviation of the Abu Sayyaf is in its extensive involvement in criminal activities during particular phases. Based on the crime-terror nexus, one would expect to see consistencies in the extent of criminal and terrorist activities carried out by the Abu Sayyaf throughout its existence. However, the group was involved in proportionately greater levels of criminal activity at particular time periods. Although the group was involved in both terrorist and criminal activities throughout its existence, as the study shows, there were

significant variations in the extent of criminality during particular phases. From 2006 to 2014 for instance, 48% of all attack types of the Abu Sayyaf were criminal in nature. This is substantially higher when compared to the Abu Sayyaf's criminal activities in the post-allegiance period studied in this article from 2014 to 2017, during which the Abu Sayyaf's criminal attack types constituted 33% of all its attack types. There is a significant change in the pattern of attack types which problematise the use of a traditional crime-terror nexus model to explain the case and call for a context-specific analysis on the criminal and terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf.

In fact, the variations observed could be characterised as fluctuations between “extensive criminality” and “terrorist leaning” phases rather than a crime-terror nexus. Understanding them as fluctuations enables the identification of factors that render the group to be in either of the phases at any point in time. One factor, which this article deems central to the fluctuations observed, is the presence or absence of influence from international terrorist organizations. In other words, it is argued here that influence from external actors served as an impetus for the Abu Sayyaf to transit between the two phases and contributed to whether the Abu Sayyaf was in an “extensive criminality” or “terrorist leaning” phase. Table 1 shows the Abu Sayyaf's fluctuations between the two phases.

### ***Abu Sayyaf's Fluctuations between Criminality and Terrorism***

The Abu Sayyaf, founded in 1989 by Abdurajak Janjalani who had ties with the Al-Qaeda Core, started off as an ideologically driven terrorist organization.[8] The Abu Sayyaf's activities and attacks were primarily undertaken to support its political campaign of seceding from the Philippines to establish an Islamic State for the Muslims of the region.[9] During this period, the Al-Qaeda trained and infused the Abu Sayyaf with its ideology of radical Wahhabism, an ultraconservative Islamic doctrine. Due to its close ties with Al-Qaeda, the Abu Sayyaf received funding through a network of Islamic charities created and operated by individuals and organizations linked to Al-Qaeda.[10] Following the death of Abdurajak during an encounter with the Philippines army in 1998, the Abu Sayyaf's ties to the Al-Qaeda were severed and the latter's influence over the Abu Sayyaf was effectively lost.[11] Without external support and lacking a strong leader, a shift to criminality was the logical trajectory for the Abu Sayyaf. This ensured the continuity of the movement and provided a means for its members to sustain themselves.

**Table 1: Abu Sayyaf's Fluctuations between Criminality and Terrorism**

Sources: The time periods and the associated phases were obtained from the CNA ([https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/DIM-2017-U-016122-2Rev.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DIM-2017-U-016122-2Rev.pdf)) and from studying the activities of the group from the data obtained from the Global Terrorism Database. The

Time period	1989 – 1998	1998 – 2002	2002 – 2006	2006 – 2014	2014 - Present
Phase	Terrorist	Extensive Criminality	Terrorist Leaning	Extensive Criminality	Terrorist Leaning
Affiliation/ External Influence	Al-Qaeda	•	Jemaah Islamiyah (Al-Qaeda's regional affiliate)	•	Islamic State
Leader	Founded by Abdurajak Janjalani	•	Khadaffy Janjalani	Raddulan Sahiron	Isnilon Hapilon
Factions	Factions absent	2 major factions (Basilan and Sulu Factions)	Factions consolidated	Multiple factions	2 major factions (Basilan and Jolo factions)

affiliation, leadership and the number of factions were counter verified from newspaper articles, the Philippines government's official records and academic sources.

During this period in which the Abu Sayyaf displayed extensive criminality, the ideological foundations of the group were side-lined and the group's activities were carried out for the "express purpose of meeting the group's basic financial needs, as opposed to progressing a Jihadist agenda." [12]

It was only in the period after the 9/11 attacks in the United States that the Abu Sayyaf, under the leadership of Khadaffy Janjalani, the brother of Abdurajak Janjalani, shifted its attention back to engaging in large scale terrorist activities. The 9/11 attacks and the renewed international terrorist movement at the behest of Al-Qaeda and its southeast Asian affiliate the Jemaah Islamiyah had the effect of motivating the Abu Sayyaf back into the path of Islamic extremism. This period was marked by some of Abu Sayyaf's most prolific terrorist attacks, such as the sinking of the Superferry 14 in 2004 and the Valentine's day bombing in 2005. [13] However, after the international terrorist movement subsided and with the lack of effective leadership, the group once again descended into near-anarchy and began to predominantly engage in criminal activities. This remained the case till the group proclaimed its allegiance to the Islamic State in mid-2014, following which the group fluctuated back into a "terrorist leaning" phase during which it engaged in relatively and proportionately more terrorist and politically motivated attacks than in the previous phase.

The Abu Sayyaf's history shows that it had fluctuated in and out of phases during which it engaged in proportionately more terrorist activities than criminal activities and vice versa. During the phases in which it displayed greater proclivities towards terrorist activities, it was led by individuals who had direct links with international terrorist organizations and who sought to align the Abu Sayyaf with the ideology of those organizations. A study of the group's history shows that strong leadership within the Abu Sayyaf could have contributed to the fluctuations. However, as will be explained later, the leaders' capabilities in forging unity among cadres and ideologically disciplining the movement, was dependent on Abu Sayyaf's association and links with international terrorist organizations. This is evident from the periods where the Abu Sayyaf had strong leadership but was still engaged in extensive criminal activities. It was only during the periods where there was affiliation with more influential terrorist organizations such as the Al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah and the Islamic State that the Abu Sayyaf engaged in proportionately lesser criminal activities and more terrorist attacks. One of the objectives of this study is to demonstrate the connection between the Islamic State's influence and the fluctuation in the Abu Sayyaf's attack types following its allegiance to the Islamic State. In other words, the study seeks to show that the level of criminal or terrorist activities engaged in by the Abu Sayyaf could be attributed to the presence or absence of influence from international terrorist organizations.

### ***The Islamic State's Influence over Regional Islamist Movements***

The Islamic State's quest to influence regional militant groups is somewhat different from its predecessor, Al-Qaeda, and goes beyond arms training and funding. The terrorist attacks by the Abu Sayyaf in the post-allegiance period, particularly its role during the Marawi siege, were undertaken in support of the global jihadist movement that was promulgated by the Islamic State. The Islamic State supplanted Islamist militant groups that erstwhile had divergent goals with the idea that establishing and safeguarding the Caliphate was the primary duty of being a Muslim fighting force. By invoking the Caliphate, it inspired and attracted Islamists toward an Islamic utopia centred around the Caliphate. To streamline the goals of regional Islamist militant groups with its own, the Islamic State adopted two main strategies.

First, the Islamic State provided an overarching narrative of a global jihad that incorporated the aspirations of various regional Islamic movements. This is unlike Al-Qaeda, which, while sharing aspects of the ideology of regional movements and rendering them support in the form of funding and training, did not closely align itself with the immediate goals of those movements which in most cases was state formation through secessionism. The Islamic State's broad appeal of a global jihad was one which regional Islamist movements of different constitutions and goals were able to orientate themselves towards and was compatible with the militant activities that they were already engaged in their home regions. As part of its global jihad, the Islamic

State hijacked secessionist movements that had an Islamic character to fight for its global Caliphate. As with its mission in the Middle East which was one of dismantling states created by the West and in their place building a pristine Islamic Caliphate, the Islamic State proclaimed Muslim secessionist states around the world as its provinces.[14]

Second, the Islamic State, by proclaiming itself to be the sole Islamic political authority, was uncompromising in demanding allegiance and loyalty from all Muslim militant groups. It encouraged allegiance by providing funds, training, and protection, which turned out to be attractive to weak and disorganised militant groups such as the Abu Sayyaf. To prevent fratricides among its affiliates, the Islamic State, as a prerequisite to accepting a group's allegiance, required a group to "unify with other jihadist groups in the territory".[15] While unifying groups that were affiliated with it, the Islamic State delegitimised other Muslim militant groups that were opposed to it by labelling them as apostates and as enemies of Islam.[16] The coalition of Islamist groups helmed by the Islamic State ensured that its authority was not questioned, buttressing its position as the ultimate Islamic political authority.

### **Methodology**

An evaluation on the extent to which the Islamic State influenced the Abu Sayyaf is made difficult by factionalism and the seemingly amorphous nature of the group. However, there are certain characteristics of the Abu Sayyaf that also render it ideal for this research.

One characteristic that makes the Abu Sayyaf a suitable case for this study is, as was shown earlier, its disproportionate level of involvement in criminal activities for a group that projects itself as an ideologically driven terrorist organization. The group's activities had fluctuated between "extensive criminality" and "terrorist leaning" phases, that appear to correspond with whether there had been external ideological support for the group from international terrorist organizations. These fluctuations make it a suitable case to test whether the group is under external influence at any particular point in time.

The quantitative data for the study was obtained from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The GTD provides data on terrorist attacks in conflict zones across the world and is assembled and made accessible by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).[17] As the variables used in the study, the "Timeframe" variable and the "Attack type" variable are both categorical variables, a Chi-Squared test was adopted. The Chi-Squared test was used to test the relationship between the two categorical variables and determine the likelihood of the distribution observed resulting from chance. The following are the null hypothesis,  $H_0$ , and the alternative hypothesis,  $H_1$ , of the study.

$H_0$ : Allegiance to the Islamic State and Abu Sayyaf's terrorist attacks are not associated

$H_1$ : Allegiance to the Islamic State and Abu Sayyaf's terrorist attacks are associated

#### *Timeframe Variable*

The timeframe variable is an independent variable that separates the attacks of the Abu Sayyaf into two equal time periods, before and after the Abu Sayyaf's allegiance to the Islamic State. Attacks by the Abu Sayyaf that took place for around three and a half years before and after its allegiance were studied. The timeframes are separated before and after 23/07/14, the date Abu Sayyaf pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State[18] which was subsequently accepted by the Islamic State.[19]

The pre-allegiance and post-allegiance time periods, from 11/02/11 to 22/07/14 and 23/07/14 to 31/12/17 respectively, were chosen for two reasons. First, these enable the study to incorporate the most recent data

available on the group. The data from the Global Terrorism Database at the time of this study was available until 31/12/17, which was chosen as the last date for the post-allegiance time period which is 1,258 days from the date of allegiance. The days prior to the date of allegiance forms the pre-allegiance time period. Second, the duration of each period spans around three and a half years, providing a sufficiently large window that captures a sizeable number of attacks by the group that gives the statistical analysis true premises. A value of “0” is assigned for every attack during the pre-allegiance period and a value of “1” was assigned for every attack during the post-allegiance period in the dataset.

#### *Attack Type Variable*

The attack type variable is the dependent variable. The data was analysed to determine if an attack carried out by the group was criminal or terrorist in nature. To ensure that the data used was sound, eight attack types that were “unknown,” in other words, the mode of attack could not be determined, were omitted from the Chi-Squared test.

#### *Abu Sayyaf’s Criminal Activities*

The following attack types of the Abu Sayyaf in the Global Terrorism Database’s dataset were determined to be criminal in nature: Kidnapping, Hostage Taking and Hijacking. These acts were deemed as criminal in nature as they were carried out primarily for financial gains of the group’s members as opposed to advancing political goals.[20] Some of the more commonly engaged in criminal activities of the group, namely Kidnap-for-ransom, piracy, and hijacking, are discussed below. Criminal activities were assigned a value of “0” in the dataset.

*Kidnap-for-ransom:* Similar to its other criminal activities, the ideological motives are weak in the Abu Sayyaf’s kidnap-for-ransom activities. The Abu Sayyaf has engaged in kidnappings primarily for financial gains as opposed to other terrorist groups that have kidnapped individuals in which there was a strong ideological motive. This is apparent when the kidnappings by the Abu Sayyaf are compared with that of the Islamic State. The Islamic State was notorious for its gruesome beheading of captured Western hostages. Unlike the Abu Sayyaf, the Islamic State’s kidnapping and execution of hostages were considered as a “terrorist attack” and as a “declaration of war”[21] against the United States and its allies for several reasons. First, the Islamic State though demanding ransom to release hostages had also engaged in kidnappings and executions as a form of retaliation to military actions of Western countries.[22] Second, the Islamic State kidnapped nationalities whose governments adhered to a well-established and consistent policy of not paying ransom to free their citizens kidnapped overseas.[23] Third, even on those occasions where a demand for ransom had been made, it was too large an amount that could not realistically be raised by the families of the victims. The Islamic State’s kidnappings were fundamentally political in nature and “had a substantial impact on American and British foreign policy.”[24] In the case of the Abu Sayyaf, however, kidnap-for-ransom did not serve an ideological or political purpose. As O’Brien writes, “Abu Sayyaf kidnaps mostly for financial reasons, as opposed to political reasons,”[25] and unlike its counterparts the group has demonstrated that it is negotiable in its ransom demands and has only resorted to executing its victims when it is apparent that there is no financial incentive to be gained.

*Piracy and Hijacking:* Other criminal activities that the Abu Sayyaf is notorious for are piracy and hijacking of vessels in the Celebes and the Sulu seas. These activities involve the Abu Sayyaf taking over commercial vessels with criminal threat of force, ransacking the cargo and robbing the sailors.[26] The frequently hijacked vessels are soft targets such as fishing boats and cargo barges. These acts have no political significance and are solely for the purposes of financial gain of Abu Sayyaf’s cadres.

**Abu Sayyaf’s Terrorist Activities**

The following attack types of the Abu Sayyaf were determined to be terrorist in nature: Bombing, Armed Assault, Assassination, Facility/ Infrastructure Attack. The attacks were identified as terrorist as they were carried out primarily for political and ideological purposes. In these attacks the Abu Sayyaf had demonstrated that it is guided by the Islamist ideology that it shared with the Islamic State and other ideologically driven terrorist organizations.

In its terrorist attacks, the Abu Sayyaf has used Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), grenades and other forms of explosive devices to bomb civilian and military targets in Southern Philippines. The Abu Sayyaf’s bombing of a crowded market in Davao City on September 2, 2016, that killed 14 people and injured 70, is an example of a terrorist attack by bombing by the group.[27] In an incident that involved armed assault, 21 soldiers were killed after they were ambushed by Abu Sayyaf militants.[28] These attacks were aimed at civilians and the Philippines military, targets which are compatible with the ideology of the Islamic State. They were directed at inflicting damage and casualties with no possibility of financial gain; these were therefore treated as “terrorist” attack types in the study. In fact, these attacks imposed a financial cost on the group. Attacks that were terrorist in nature, were assigned a value of “1” in the dataset.

**The Chi-Squared Test Results**

Table 2 summarizes the data for the two variables. A Chi-Squared test was subsequently carried out, the results of which informed the main findings of this article. The test includes 356 of the 364 attacks carried out by the Abu Sayyaf during the time period studied. Eight attack types that were “unknown” in the dataset were assigned the label “NA” and omitted from the study.

Table 2: Time Frame and Attack Type Distribution Table

Attack Type	Time Frame			Total
		Pre-allegiance <sup>a</sup> “0” value	Post-allegiance <sup>b</sup> “1” value	
Criminal “0” value		48	83	131
Terrorist “1” value		56	169	225
Total		104	252	356

<sup>a</sup> 2 cases where the attack type was an “unknown” were excluded from the pre-allegiance period

<sup>b</sup> 6 cases where the attack type was an “unknown” were excluded from the post-allegiance period

From the data given in the table above, the Chi-Squared statistic can be calculated as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=0}^n \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} = 4.976$$

The Chi-Squared test shows that the relationship between Abu Sayyaf's allegiance to the Islamic State and the terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf is statistically significant (Chi-Squared = 4.98, df = 1, p-value = 0.0257).

The Chi-Square test determines the likelihood that the observed distribution in attack types across the two periods results from chance and whether the two variables studied are independent. The Chi-Squared test results indicate that there is an association that the patterns of responses are significantly different, where the pledge of allegiance to Islamic State does influence the intent of attacks that the Abu Sayyaf carried out post-allegiance.

Using the table above, the Odds Ratio can be calculated as:

$$\text{Odds Ratio} = \frac{\frac{\textit{Terrorist Attack Type, Post - allegiance}}{\textit{Criminal Attack Type, Post - allegiance}}}{\frac{\textit{Terrorist Attack Type, Pre - allegiance}}{\textit{Criminal Attack Type, Pre - allegiance}}} = 1.754$$

The Odds Ratio provides the ratio of the odds that the Abu Sayyaf engages in a terrorist attack after its allegiance to the Islamic State to the odds of it engaging in a terrorist attack pre-allegiance. The Odds Ratio enables a determination on the degree to which the possibility of an attack by the Abu Sayyaf has increased or decreased during the post-allegiance period. The Odds Ratio of 1.75 indicates that the odds that the Abu Sayyaf engages in a terrorist attack in the post-allegiance period is approximately 1.75 times higher when compared to the pre-allegiance period.

### ***Interpretation of Results***

The study, based on empirical data, establishes conclusively that allegiance to the Islamic State is strongly associated with the increase in terrorist activities of the Abu Sayyaf. What follows is a discussion on how the results could be interpreted.

#### *Refurbishing the Abu Sayyaf with an Ideology*

The significant change in the intent of attacks by the Abu Sayyaf during the post-allegiance period could be interpreted as an expression of the shift in the ideology of the group as a result of its allegiance to the Islamic State. The Islamic State, like its predecessor Al-Qaeda, could have rekindled the ideological sentiments of segments of the Abu Sayyaf, providing the group a grander purpose of fighting to establish a province of a global Islamic Caliphate. Although the Abu Sayyaf already possessed a rudimentary form of Islamist ideology from the *Jumaah Abu Sayyaf*, a passage written by its founder Abdurajak Janjalani [29] and the group's initial ties to Al-Qaeda and Jemmah Islamiyah, this was often superseded by its proclivity to engage in criminal activities for short-term financial gains. In the absence of an external stimulus, the Abu Sayyaf became undisciplined and effectively lost its direction.

In this regard, the proclamation of an international jihad helmed by the Islamic State revitalised the erstwhile dormant ideological elements within the Abu Sayyaf. Becoming an affiliate of the Islamic State meant that the Abu Sayyaf had to abide by certain conditions such as cooperating with the other affiliates of the Islamic State in Mindanao and prioritising the political campaign of setting up a Wilayat. As such, the ideological influence from the Islamic State was critical in disciplining the group and nudging it more firmly towards becoming a



more ideologically disciplined terrorist organization. As was mentioned earlier, the Abu Sayyaf's affiliation to international terrorist organizations also coincided with the group being led by ideologically oriented leaders with connections to international terrorist organizations. The Abu Sayyaf's leaders, by declaring allegiance to the Islamic State were able to legitimise their own leadership and overcome the fragmentation within the Abu Sayyaf to some extent. Fragmentation within the Abu Sayyaf was a serious issue that ensued during most of the group's existence, particularly during the "extensive criminality" phases, undermining its capabilities as a terrorist organization. As segments of the Abu Sayyaf were sympathetic to the Islamic State even before the group became affiliated,[30] the declaration of allegiance by Isnilon Hapilon could have had the effect of patching up the fragments of the group. The increased inner-group coherence could have facilitated its transition to a phase where its terrorist activities were relatively and proportionately higher when compared to the pre-allegiance period.

Having said that strong leadership in the Abu Sayyaf was a contributing factor, leadership on its own does not explain the group's transition between the "terrorist leaning" and "extensive criminality" phases. Even during certain points in its history, when the Abu Sayyaf had strong and ideologically oriented leaders, the group remained extensively criminal. Raddulan Sahiron for instance helmed the Abu Sayyaf after Khaddaffy Janjalani's death in 2006 and at various other points figured as the group's leader or one of its major factions. [31] However, without external support, the group's terrorist activities were relatively and proportionately lower compared with its other phases. Regardless of the leadership in the Abu Sayyaf, an external stimulus, in the form of ideological influence from international terrorist movements, was necessary to motivate the ideologically inclined elements in the Abu Sayyaf to launch concerted terrorist campaigns.

Also, it is notable that the concept of a Wilayat, though broadly compatible with the Abu Sayyaf's campaign to create a separate homeland for Muslims of Southern Philippines, is qualitatively different from the group's original goal. Secessionism was a foundational ideology and a non-negotiable doctrine of the Abu Sayyaf. In fact, the group's splintering from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was due to the latter's compromise with the Philippines government on the secessionist demand in exchange for regional autonomy for the Muslim region in South Philippines. As such, the Abu Sayyaf's campaign to establish a Wilayat of the Islamic State's global Caliphate in the Philippines signals a departure from its earlier campaign to form a theocratic yet Westphalian styled independent nation state for the Muslims of the region. The 1.75 times increase in the odds that Abu Sayyaf's attack types are terrorist in nature following the group's allegiance to the Islamic State could be due to the group in effect fighting to set up a province of the Islamic State. Based on the Chi-Squared statistic and the Odds Ratio of 1.75, it could be interpreted that the Caliphate and the Wilayat were more attractive to Abu Sayyaf's militants as a rallying call to engage in terrorist attacks than the previous goal of seceding to create a nation-state for the Muslims of the region.

#### *Not a Puritan Islamist Movement*

Another observation to be made in the Abu Sayyaf's fluctuations is that during the post-allegiance "terrorist leaning" phase, the group continued to engage in a proportionately reduced but still considerable level of criminal activity. Compared to the pre-allegiance period, there is an overall increase in the number of attacks carried out by the Abu Sayyaf with the criminal and terrorist attack types increasing by 73% and 104% respectively. In other words, even while accruing characteristics of a conventional terrorist group and ideologically aligning itself with the Islamic State, the Abu Sayyaf had concurrently engaged in a considerable level of criminal activity for a self-proclaimed terrorist organization. A proportion of the finances accrued from these criminal activities could have been used to support its political campaign. However, given the nature of most of its criminal activities such as kidnapping and piracy which the group's members had traditionally engaged in for their personal financial gains and as the Abu Sayyaf's Jolo faction had continued to function as a criminal entity in the post-allegiance period, there is reason to believe that allegiance to the Islamic State has not had the effect of making the Abu Sayyaf a puritan Islamist movement. That is, the Abu Sayyaf, in spite of accruing and displaying tactics of conventional terrorist organizations which was evident during the Marawi

siege, the group continued with its criminal activities that had little to do with the terrorist campaign it was involved in. There are two explanations for this observation:

First, it shows a strong culture of criminality that has become entrenched in the membership of the Abu Sayyaf; it continued even in periods where the Abu Sayyaf became largely ideologically driven. The strong culture of criminality also explains why the Abu Sayyaf had not been able to establish itself as an ideologically driven terrorist organization in its own right as the criminal proclivities of the group supersede its ideology as soon as allegiance to an international terrorist organization ends. Based on the findings, it could be expected that after the external ideological influence the Abu Sayyaf receives from the Islamic State ends, the group is likely to transit back to an “extensive criminality” phase just as it was prior to its allegiance to the Islamic State.

Second, the retention of high levels of criminality could also be due to widening factionalism within the Abu Sayyaf, with some factions finding it lucrative to continue with criminal activities rather than orientate themselves toward political terrorism. The faction led by Isnilon Hapilon, also known as the Babilon faction, has mainly been engaging in terrorist activities while the Jolo faction had been involved primarily in criminal activities.[32] The increased terrorist attacks amidst the unabated criminal activities could imply that the rift among the factions have widened further.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the Chi-Squared test and an analysis of the activities of the Abu Sayyaf from the literature, it has been shown that allegiance to the Islamic State has led to important changes in terms of the group’s ideology, target types and inner-group dynamics. The Abu Sayyaf, due to the disproportionate level of criminal activity it was involved in and its fluctuations, serves as a good test case to show how allegiance to the Islamic State can affect a regional terrorist organization’s attack types. It was found, as was mentioned earlier, that the Abu Sayyaf’s criminal and terrorist activities, particularly its fluctuations, cannot be explained using the crime-terror nexus alone as the group was involved in relatively and proportionately greater level of criminal activity at particular time periods. The present text provided a context-specific examination of Abu Sayyaf’s activities that accounted for the fluctuations in the group’s terrorist and criminal attack types. The current evaluation of the Islamic State’s influence over the Abu Sayyaf can be helpful in identifying how the latter’s activities could change in the future depending on whether or not it is affiliated to international terrorist organizations.

The findings can also be helpful to policymakers in the Philippines government and strategists in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to broadly anticipate the nature of the activities of the group, particularly its attack types. The findings could also be extrapolated to explain other regional terrorist organizations’ patterns of behaviour and attack types before and after their allegiance to international terrorist organizations. The Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM), for instance, has also been engaged in a mix of criminal and terrorist attacks that varied over time and with the context it found itself in.[33] Future research on cases such as the Abu Sayyaf and the AQIM could lead to a more refined understanding of the crime-terror nexus and fluctuations observed among regional terrorist organizations.

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## Notes

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