



## Militancy/Terrorism

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### **Philippines Alert (UPDATE): Security heightened across Mindanao on August 3 as investigations into second suspected militant plot ongoing; Basilan likely target**

#### **Please be advised**

- Sources indicate that security was raised across the southern region of Mindanao on August 3 as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is reportedly investigating claims that the Islamic State (IS)-affiliated Abu Sayyaf group is plotting an additional militant attack involving a second van containing explosives. The AFP stated that operations are ongoing against persons of interest. Locals in the region have been called to remain vigilant and inform security forces about suspicious activity. Specific details regarding the plot have not been published as of writing.
- In Zamboanga City, Mindanao, security measures have been increased, including a new requirement for identification at checkpoints when entering the city. The Zamboanga City Mayor suggested that checkpoints will be the targets of militant attacks and that stringent measures are being taken to protect civilians and troops.
- Reports indicate that one individual was arrested from his home in Lamitan City, Basilan on August 1 for allegedly aiding militants involved in an attack in the same location on July 31. Authorities believe that the individual, a Muslim cleric, helped facilitate the bombing. A grenade was recovered from his possession at the time of the arrest.
- On [July 31](#), at least 11 were killed during a vehicular IED attack in Lamitan City, Basilan. The AFP alleged that Abu Sayyaf was responsible for the attack, while the Islamic State (IS) claimed it the following day. The attacker is believed to have sought to target a children's public event but was intercepted at a checkpoint. The group is also alleged to have staged the attack after Lamitan's local government refused to pay extortion money for protection to its members.
- Reports from [August 2](#) indicated that the National Capital Region Police Office placed Metro Manila on heightened alert in response to the July 31 attack in Basilan.



## Assessments

1. While details about the alleged plot remain limited as of publication, the call for public vigilance is reflective of the significant concern that security forces have ascribed to the threat. The particular call for vigilance among hardware store owners may signal concerns regarding attempts by Abu Sayyaf's bombmakers to scale up explosives plots during the current regrouping efforts. We assess that Basilan Province is likely to be the focal point of such an attack, based on the group's recent sphere of operational activity. Apart from checkpoints, recent investigations point to the possibility of civilian public events being targeted, similar to the alleged initial plot of the previous explosives attack on Lamitan on July 31. AFP raids in the vicinity of cities like Lamitan are likely over the coming hours, with a heightened threat of armed exchanges with suspects. As of publication, though, there is no indication of an imminent threat in Manila stemming from the suspected second van plot.
2. The Basilan group's recent attack, coupled with a growing focus on explosives operations, are early signs of a potential shift away from the more characteristic hostage-taking operations. The declining monetary gains from such plots and the potential for hostages to slow down the group's island-wide movements may further reinforce this direction over the coming months. The group also appears to be focusing on bigger extortion targets. This is based on the alleged attempts to coerce Lamitan City's local government to pay local protection money, the failure of which reportedly resulted in the attack. **FORECAST:** In addition, the frequently recorded surrenders of Abu Sayyaf members in Basilan may further prompt the group to scale up attacks on military targets in the coming weeks and months to project operational relevance.

## Recommendations

1. Travel to Metro Manila may continue at this time while adhering to standard security protocols given the latent threat of militancy, crime, and unrest.
2. We advise against all travel to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Cotabato,

Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga Siburgay, Zamboanga del Sur, and the Sulu Archipelago, including the islands of Basilan, Jolo, Tawi Tawi, given the high threat of militancy, criminality as well as the elevated risk of kidnapping of foreign travelers. Those continuing to operate in Mindanao are advised to limit movement outside major cities such as Davao and General Santos.

3. Remain cognizant of your surroundings, including any suspicious behavior of individuals, which may include a person wearing winter clothing during warm weather and/or seemingly wandering around, as well as items that look out of place, such as bags or containers.
4. Immediately alert authorities of any suspicious behavior or items.
5. Ensure that places of stay are properly secured, alter travel routes, and avoid disclosing sensitive itinerary information to unknown individuals.