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# Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: The Case of Abu Sayyaf's Kidnapping Activities

McKenzie O'Brien

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## Abstract

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines is often labeled a terrorist organization, yet there are periods when the group has engaged in far more criminal activity than terrorism. Specifically, this article describes phases in which organized criminal activity far exceeds any terrorist activities before returning to a more predominant focus on terrorism. This study explores reasons for these temporal fluctuations in criminal versus terrorist activity from 1991 thru August 2011, identifying four categories of explanatory factors: leadership, structure, membership and grievances, and linkages to other actors. The study concludes by highlighting some implications for policy, research, and the future of ASG.

Keywords:

Abu Sayyaf

kidnapping

Philippines

terrorism

transforming threats

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## Notes

Frank Zuccarello, "Kidnapping for Ransom: A Fateful International Growth Industry," Insurance Journal, June 20, 2011, <http://www.insurancejournal.com/magazines/features/2011/06/20/202864.htm>. This is also according to statistics from insurance companies, such as BWD Group, which provide Kidnapping and Ransom (K&R) Insurance to clients with an international presence.

Estimates taken from Soliman M. Santos, Jr., Paz Verdades M. Santos, et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines* (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey and South-South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement, 2010), 368; and the United States Department of State, [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

This number comes from the author's own research. "Documentable" kidnappings are those for which the following information can be detailed from multiple sources: name or identifiable description of kidnapping victim; date of kidnapping; location of kidnapping; verification that ASG was the perpetrating entity; and verification or strong belief that financial motivation was the ultimate objective of the kidnapping (as opposed to ASG kidnappings that might be for personal or more ideological reasons, such as those ending in forced marriage and conversion to Islam or kidnappings to make a political point, which usually end with the beheading of the kidnap victim). The author acknowledges that distinguishing the actual motive(s) of each kidnapping can be murky in practice, but has taken care to use for this article only those kidnappings in which ransom was indeed paid out to the ASG or financial motivations were cited or highly suspected by Philippine sources.

Associated Press, "Abu Sayyaf's New Generation Threatens Philippines," *The Philippine Star*, 23 February 2009, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?>

[articleId=442769&publicationSubCategoryId=63](#). See the end of the “Background” section for further detail on ASG profits amassed from kidnapping-for-ransom activities.

These peaks are further explained and represented graphically below.

Rommel C. Banlaoi, *Al-Harakatul al Islamiyyah: Essays on the Abu Sayyaf Group* (Quezon City: Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research—PIPVTR, 2008), 12.

Soliman M. Santos, Jr., *Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front* (Quezon City, Philippines: Human Development Network Foundation, Inc., 2005), 1.

Banlaoi (see note 6 above), 21.

Soliman M. Santos, Jr. and Octavio A. Dinampo, “Abu Sayyaf Reloaded: Rebels, Agents, Bandits, Terrorists,” in *Primed and Purposeful* (see note 2 above), 118.

*Ibid.*, 117–118.

*Ibid.*, 117–118.

This includes, for instance, the Pentagon Gang and Abu Sofia.

MILF has only seventeen Base Commands, and it appears that these are simply designated names.

Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities. Online at: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI18004E.shtml>.

Zachary Abuza, *Balik-Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, September 2005), 2.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 13.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 3.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 2.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 6.

Quoted in *Ibid.*, 6.

For a full account of this plot, see Rohan Gunaratna, "The Trajectory from Oplan Bojinka to 9/11," in *Teaching Terror*, ed. James Forest (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 171–188.

Joel Guinto, "Abu Sayyaf Reduced to 'Plain Bandits'—Armed Forces Chief," *Makati City Inquirer.net*, 26 June 2008, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20080626-144893/Abu-Sayyaf-reduced-to-plain-bandits--Armed-Forces-chief>. The P1.4 billion exchanges to roughly \$34 million (USD).

Associated Press, "Abu Sayyaf's New Generation Threatens Philippines," *The Philippine Star*, 23 February 2009.

These early attacks are described from a chart in Zachary Abuza's *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (see note 15 above), 5.

Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Sources of the Abu Sayyaf's Resilience in the Southern Philippines," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 5 (2010):19.

*Ibid.*

See the article by James Forest in this issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence*.

There are allegations, although few, that the SuperFerry 14 bombing was an "extortion bombing," carried out when the SuperFerry management either failed or refused to pay ASG extortion demands.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 5.

Quoted in Banlaoi (see note 6 above), 11. These come from Khadaffy Janjalani's own written words.

For instance, Khadaffy begins with the group's formation, but immediately follows that with a description of the second kidnapping: "1993 was the year when al-Harakatul Islamiyyah was born ... . Also in 1993, the group of Ustadz Abdur-Razzaq Janjalani launched their second kidnapping operation. They held the son of one of the prominent businessman in Basilan and again was successfully ransomed." Quoted in Banlaoi (see note 6 above), 11. Khadaffy Janjalani is also quoted on kidnappings on page 67.

AKE Group, Quarterly Kidnap Report: Q4 2010, 7. This report holds that about one foreigner is kidnapped per month in the Philippines, while an estimated sixteen locals are kidnapped every month.

Ibid., 7. The average ransom settlement for a foreigner is listed as \$250,000 - \$3 million (and up to \$5 million), while the average ransom demand for a local is \$2,000 - \$50,000.

This term stems from Zachary Abuza's research. See, in particular, *Balik Terrorism: The Return of the Abu Sayyaf* (note 15 above) and “The Philippines Chips Away at the Abu Sayyaf Group's Strength,” CTC Sentinel 3, no. 4 (April 2010): 11.

This term stems from Zachary Abuza's research; see above note.

See both of Abuza's works as referenced in this article. Abuza notes that all kidnappings during 2004–2007 resulted in executions, rather than ransoms, but there does appear to be at least one incident, in October 2006, in which some ransom money was believed to have been paid.

Abuza (see note 15 above), 13.

“Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya, aka Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG),” *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2010), 368–369.

Ibid.

Gracia Burnham, *In the Presence of My Enemies* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). For those unfamiliar, Gracia was a hostage of the Abu Sayyaf for more than a year after her abduction at the Malaysian resort in Dos Palmas on 27 May 2001.

Ibid.

“Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya, aka Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)” (see note 38 above), 374–375.

Robin L. Bowman, “Moro Insurgents and the Peace Process in the Philippines,” *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century: International Perspectives, Volume 3: Lessons from the Fight Against Terrorism* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 485–507; 493.

Banlaoi (see note 25 above).

Ibid.

Ibid.

Aurea Calica, "Arrest of Abu Sabaya's Sister To Sustain Drive vs Abu Sayyaf," The Philippine Star, 5 September 2004, <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=263637>.

"Al-Harakatul Al-Islamiyya, aka Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)" (see note 38 above), 368.

Richard Lloyd Parry, "Abu Sayyaf at Heart of Islamic War After \$17 m Hostage Deal; Enriched by Libya's Multi-Million Dollar Pay-Off, the World's Most Ruthless Terrorists now pay \$1,000 a Head for new Recruits," London Independent, 29 August 2000, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/abu-sayyaf-at-heart-of-islamic-war-after-17m-hostage-deal-711564.html>.

Banlaoi (see note 25 above).

Rose Tamayo, Joy Cantos, and Lilia Tolentino, "'High-Powered' Firearms Flood Abu Sayyaf Camp," Pilipino Star Ngayon, 23 August 2000, FBIS Document ID SEP20000831000062. See also Glenn E. Curtis et al., Transnational Activities of Chinese Crime Organizations (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 2003), 44.

Jeannette Andrade, "Police: Abu Terror Cell Now in Metro," The Manila Times, 12 October 2001 (accessed via World News Connection).

Alex Ching, "Abu Sayyaf Now Also Relying on Drug Lords," Manila Remate, 26 March 2008 (accessed via World News Connection).

Ibid.

Zachary Abuza, "The Philippines Chips Away at the Abu Sayyaf Group's Strength," CTC Sentinel 3, no. 4 (2010): 11.

Ibid.

Jacob Zenn, "Makati City Bombing Brings Abu Sayyaf Terrorism to Manila," Terrorism Monitor 9, no. 6 (2011), <http://www.jamestown.org/single/?>

Zachary Abuza, “Umar Patek: Indonesia's Most Wanted,” *Terrorism Monitor* 1, no. 4 (2010),  
[http://www.apgml.org/frameworks/docs/7/Abuza%202010\\_April\\_Umar%20Patek\\_Indonesia%E2%80%99s%20Most%20Wanted%20.pdf](http://www.apgml.org/frameworks/docs/7/Abuza%202010_April_Umar%20Patek_Indonesia%E2%80%99s%20Most%20Wanted%20.pdf).

Ibid.

Audrey Kurth Cronin, “How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 7–48.

Ibid., 31.

Banlaoi (see note 25 above).

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## Additional information

### Notes on contributors

McKenzie O'Brien  
McKenzie O'Brien is affiliated with the Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies, part of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh.

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