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

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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.

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;

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reasons, such as those

with the beheading of

be murky in practice,

ASG or financial

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  There are many reasons why the SuperFerry man Abuza (see note 15 above), 11. These come from Khaddar Jangalan's own written words. Quoted in Banlaoi (see note 6 above), 11.

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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 Malyasian resort in Dos Palmas on 27 May 2001.

Ibid.

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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.

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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).

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

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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.

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Additional information

Notes on contributors

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