**TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO**

# GLOBALIZATION OF THE JIHAD: THE ABU SAYYAF GROUP

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## *Abstract*

The Southeast Asian terrorist group founded in the early 1990s, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) emerged as a group that strove to create an independent Islamic state in the Philippines using violence in the name of religion. It was more extreme and violent than other groups already settled in the Philippines, such as the MNLF or the MILF. Their leader, Abdurajak Janjalani, established ties with Al-Qaeda and led the ASG into bombing infidels, particularly Christians; until the Philippine army killed him in 1995 so they changed their tactics and began kidnaping for ramson instead of the afore-high-profile operations. Other terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah provided monetary and operational support. However, the ASG split into factions, their members began decreasing whilst the Moro political discontent was increasing. Nevertheless, the group's violent actions have made up for its size more than enough.

## Resumen

A principios de la década de los 90, Abu Sayyaf (ASG) surgió como un grupo terrorista del sudeste asiático que trató de crear un Estado islámico independiente en Filipinas, mediante el uso de la violencia en nombre de la religión. En comparación con otros grupos ya establecidos en Filipinas, como el MNLF o el MILF, surgió como un grupo más extremo y violento. El liderazgo recayó en Abdurajak Janjalani, quién estableció relaciones con Al-Qaeda. El ASG comenzó a bombardear infieles, sobre todo cristianos, con el liderazgo de Janjalani, hasta que en 1995 el ejercito filipino acaba con él. Las tácticas de ASG cambiaron y se centraron en llevar a cabo secuestros para obtener rescates. Otros grupos terroristas, como Jemaah Islamiyah, les dieron apoyo monetario y operacional. Sin embargo, el ASG se dividió en facciones, sus componentes comenzaron a disminuir mientras el descontento político de los musulmanes aumentaba. A pesar de todo, las acciones violentas del grupo han compensado con creces su tamaño.

## Palabras clave

Abu Sayyaf Group, ASG, Filipinas, AQ, ISIS, terrorismo

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## *List of Acronyms*

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| AFP | Armed Forces of the Philippines |
| AQ | Al-Qaeda |
| ARMM | Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| ASG | Abu Sayyaf Group |
| IEDs | Improvised explosive devices |
| IIRO | International Islamic Relief Organization |
| IR | International Relations |
| IS | Islamic State |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| JI | Jemaah Islamiyah |
| MILF | Moro Islamic Liberation Front |
| MNLF | Moro National Liberation Front |
| NPA | New People's Army |
| PNP | Philippine National Police |
| SALW | Small Arms and Light Weapons |
| U.S. | United States |
| UN | United Nations |

# INDEX

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorist activity involves criminal behaviour which, at first glance, may reach a wrong conclusion when considering that terrorism and criminal activity are one and the same. The Muslim insurgency movement located in the southern Philippines was included in the now defunct Global War on Terror by the United States (U.S.), so it was seen as terrorism mainly.

This war in the southern Philippines, in particular in the Sulu Archipelago region of Mindanao, has the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and its members as a key actor.

The ASG is considered to have had, in its "true form", its heyday in the last years of the 20th century and the first years of the following 21st century, maybe a little more of presence at the end of this timeframe. Within this period of time, the strength of the ASG is said to have peaked at around 1200 paramilitary operatives. However, when taking into account sympathisers, they surely were considerably more. The ASG had a real potential to become the Philippines beast, because if unstopped, it could become the Asian enclave of the nowadays ISIL[1].

There is no doubt the ASG throughout its existence has committed acts that may described as "criminal" and as "terror". Nevertheless, today there is a definition of "international terrorism", and, in its true sense, it does not apply to describe the ASG as a whole, as it does not fit completely within the context. On the one hand, most of their kidnap victims shall be categorized as international, in terms of race or ethnicity. On the other hand, the ASG has evolved as a whole, especially their modus operandi, so there is no way of describing a complex organization such as the ASG as only "international terrorism".

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[1] "The English word closest in meaning to "al-Sham" is the dated name for a slightly overlapping geographic area: the Levant, which spans the countries of Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey. Therefore, the acronym ISIL is the more-accurate name, as it recognizes these areas that the group affects and targets, while ISIS refers exclusively to Iraq and Syria." (Hogeback, J., n.d.)

## 1.1.    RESEARCH QUESTION

This work main aim is to collect information about the Abu Sayyaf Group, and subsequently analyse it so as to answer the following question: is the ASG a successful result of the "Globalization of the Jihad" movement?

The scope of this investigation extends to cover the ASG biggest impact in the Philippines, which is considered to be the last decade of the 20th century and first two decades of the 21st century, a time frame around the shift originated after September 11, 2001 in the southeast Asia Region, due to the need to analyse and study a current issue in a world where the fight against terrorism is more alive than ever.

## 1.2.    RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Before enumerating the objectives, the questions that shall guide this research are the followings: the strength of the ASG in the Philippines is due to a non-anticipation or failure of the Philippine government and security agencies? How a group such as the ASG is able to evolve from terrorism to organized crime? There is resentment, but are they really ideologically driven?

The following compilation of information and data aims to provide an answer to the aforementioned questions. To that purpose, the specific objectives, whether of a methodological, procedural or applied nature, are presented below:

i.    Analyse the Abu Sayyaf Group and its role on the "Globalization of the Jihad" movement
ii.    Study the foundation of the ASG taking into account the socio-cultural and historical context
iii.    Consider the origin and evolution of Islam in the Philippines
iv.    Evaluate the process the ASG followed in order to end up linked to ISIS
v.    Explore the ASG structure, logistics and modus operandi

## 1.3.    METHODOLOGIES

The project is a bibliographical analytical research based on primary and secondary sources that shall be found cited throughout the paper, as well as in the bibliography.

The paper will pursue the following structure. First, an introduction in which the research question and the objectives shall be established. Second, a theoretical and conceptual framework that shall include international relations theories which are key for the subsequently analysis, in this case, realism and neorealism highlighting the dynamics of the balance of power and the Clash of Civilizations with the paradigm in which cultural identities are the main drive and source of conflict, because that is how the frontier conflict between Christian and Muslim population shall be clarified.

Furthermore, within the introduction this project shall include the meaning of concepts that shall be used in the main analysis, such as terrorism and, specifically, jihadist terrorism concepts along with what is known as "globalization of the jihad", the definition of a network structure, as well as logistics, including funding, human resources, propaganda, weapons and modus operandi. Within this block a historical context within the Philippines until the end of the Soviet-Afghan war in 1989 will also be incorporated, highlighting the Muslim population located in the area, as well as the historical causes of resentment and minoritisation.

Hence, this block constitutes an introduction of the following, which is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), an analysis divided in: firstly, an overview of the relationship between Al-Qaeda and the ASG; and secondly, the ASG's ideology in which it will be linked with the IS and the globalization of the jihad, ASG's structure, logistics, provisioning, propaganda, and modus operandi, along with some of its most well-known attacks. Finally, the conclusions will close the analysis. In addition, tables and graphics shall be found in the Annex, whilst figures shall be found throughout the analysis.

# 2. THEORETICAL-CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1. IR THEORIES

The theoretical-conceptual framework aims to provide part of the analytical structure with which the main case of the ASG shall be subsequently analysed. The block will discuss in the first place the reasons of electing this particular framework and the international theories that can relate to the analysis, because an analysis could be executed through an extensive variety of approaches in international politics when it comes to the way a state behaves. Hence, realism and neorealism, considered to be among the main schools of thought within international relations, will be elaborated along with their repercussions for this case analysis. Finally, so as to compliment the more general approach aforementioned, there is another theory that shall be explained: the clash of civilizations by Samuel P. Huntington, due to the existent frontier conflict between Christian and Muslim population in the Philippines.

### 2.1.1. Realism and neorealism: the dynamics of the balance of power

The most notorious IR theory of peace and war, one of the most pressing issues in politics at international level, is realism. Realism, according to Walt (1998, 31) is a theory that provides "simple but powerful explanations for war, alliances, imperialism, obstacles for cooperation". Hence, realism was especially during the Cold War the most influential school of thought in international politics (Vink, 2015), as well as the basis of other IR theories or schools of thought. In order to proceed with the analysis, there is a need of understanding its main assumptions, because it is true, on the one hand, that there are sub-theories that have come into existence –like neorealism–; on the other hand, however, for realist theories in general there are several general key elements that shall be understood.

### 2.1.1.1. Realist Assumptions

Realists' main unit of analysis are groups, as we always have lived in groups, therefore the realist school of thought predicts international politics in an anarchic world system (Vink, 2015). Group member relations can be strong, although this can become a conflict with other groups. Thus, group actors are identified by realists as sovereign nation states in international politics, becoming the core of analysis. However, according to the state behaviour, we shall differ between international and domestic realm. According to Vink (2015), the state regulates internal affairs as it has been legitimized by their people, so the state in return will provide opportunities and security; therefore, the difference between the domestic and the international realm lies in the last one's anarchic nature, as there is no central authority that controls and regulates interstate relations. As a result, the non-control and non-regulation provokes insecurity in the international system, which in turn leads in a competition between states for power and influence (Walt, 1998, 31-38). However, this may seem that realists associate a "central authority" with "peace and order" –domestic–, therefore the absence of it, is associated with "violence and insecurity" –international– (Vink, 2015).

Furthermore, under the Realist perspective, states shall behave in accordance with their own interests, in this case, survival in the struggle for power. In order to ensure survival and obtain security, a state needs power because powerful states will have more chances to survive, and it shall be achieved by relying only on their own capacities (Vink, 2015). We may also distinguish between power as influence of politics –social power– and power as resources –material power–, although realists state the most relevant indication of a state power is its military capabilities, because the military strength can subject other states (Walt, 1998, 38).

### 2.1.1.2. Neorealism

Realist tradition in IR has diversified and many sub-schools of thought has emerged, such as neorealism, which shall be used as a way of identifying factors influencing the state foreign policies. Waltz (1979) is the father of Neorealism, a theory developed as a reaction to the original Realism. The difference between both theories lies in that

Neorealism consider power as means to a greater objective to achieve, survival, instead of an end in itself like Realism (Vink, 2015).

However, there are two Neorealist sub-theories that differ regarding the behaviour of the stated generated because of anarchy: Offensive realism assumes the states will have an offensive behaviour to acquire more power, whereas Defensive realism determines the restraint the states acquire in order not to have too much power. In other words, Waltz (1979, 40) as a defensive realist establishes as main goal of a state the security maximization, therefore a state shall only look for an "appropriate" power, so other states won't engage in conflict because of balancing behaviour. Mearsheimer, among other offensive realists, determines the continuous strive for power by states, because more power means more security, which also means states will have more aggressive behaviour so as to get more power (Vink, 2015).

### 2.1.2. Clash of civilizations by Samuel P. Huntington

According to Huntington (2000, 24-25), "a civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans form other species", and the differences between civilizations are not only real but also basic, as their disparities lie in language, culture, history, tradition and religion; and that is how the people in each civilization have diverse perspectives regarding the relations between the individual and the group, man and God, citizen and state, responsibilities and rights, authority and liberty, hierarchy and equality Huntington (2000, 25) also states these differences have emerged after centuries of evolution, and they are considered to be more fundamental than political regimes or political ideologies differences.

Although differences do not need to mean conflict and conflict do not need to mean violence, throughout history the differences within civilizations have indeed constituted the origin of the longest and most violent conflicts. Nevertheless, the global politics in the post-Cold War world entered a new phase in which people's religion and cultural identities are the main source of conflict instead of the afore capitalism versus communism motivation.

In the case of the Philippines, there is indeed a frontier conflict between Christian and Muslim people, taking into account that conflicts between Christian and Islamic civilizations have been on for around 1,300 years, therefore the interaction between both of them is seen as a clash of civilizations (Huntington, 2000, 31-32). By the time the Philippine government asked for help in their fight against terrorism, the U.S. supported them. It is the perfect example of two states belonging to one civilization – Philippines and U.S.–, one of them becomes involved in war –Philippines– with people from a different civilization –Muslim people in southern Philippines–, so they naturally ask for help to other states of their own civilization –U.S. –.

## 2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.2.1. Terrorism and Jihadist terrorism

There is no recognized international definition for terrorism, not even in the UN. Whilst the ordinary linguistic meaning of this concept is quite simple: extreme fear, the leading global thinker on the study of terrorism, Martha Crenshaw (1992), states the concept of "terrorism" comes from "terror", which means fear, shaken, commotion –associated to a physiological response to something–and "ism", which means that it implies a system or a structure, also implying redundancy, something repeated over time. This concept of terrorism shall first be coined after the French revolution, a time when psychological impact of that political period was used as controlling for invasion, therefore conceiving terrorism as a political codification during the French Revolution.

The most accurate existing definitions of the concept nowadays are the ones of the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism, the one by Waciorski and the idea by the aforementioned Crenshaw, which shall guide and will be used as a basis for this project. The League of Nations in 1937 drafted the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism[2]. During this Convention, the League of Nations will focus on the definition of "anarchy". The Convention defines the act of

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[2] Available online in: https://dl.wdl.org/11579/service/11579.pdf. Last access 18th May 2021.

terrorism as one of the aims or purposes is to provoke terror to control population, when spreading terror in the society, it's easier to control, a driving force for the society. It was created because of the risk of terrorism impacting the geopolitical positions of countries at that time. Waciorski (1939, 98) focuses on the tactics, on the modus operandi: "Terrorism is a method of action by which an agent –terrorist group or individual– tends to produce terror for domination". This definition will focus on what kind of attack will be used to provoke this situation of terror. Crenshaw (1992) introduces the idea of revolutionary terrorism as the result of abstractions and observations to create the bases of a theoretical framework of terrorism.

### 2.2.2. Network Structure

Terrorist organizations as a non-state actor are a threat, but when we refer to the organization *per se*, their networks evolve just like other organizational entities when it comes to social network relationships throughout a geographical space. According to Richard Medina and George Hepner (2008): "a network is visualized as a collection of vertices or nodes and the connections between them termed edges or links", taking into account in this context that nodes shall be actors such as an individual terrorist or a terrorist cluster or cell, and links are the ties between those nodes.

Consisting of a newer type of organizational structure, the networked one is viewed as less hierarchical, more decentralized and more flexible; there is no clear leader in the network structure, much bigger organization; there is more of a coordinator than a leader; it is more durable in the sense that the organization will still be working even when cutting from a point. However, the main disadvantage is the structure has problems with the budget and the logistic matters –human resources, funding, weapons–, because they are only supported by the ideology but not economically. For instance, AQ with Ayman Al-Zawahiri as the leader, move from a hierarchical structure to a networked structure after 9/11 because Bin Laden went into hiding, he did not order the attacks, but he did provide the moral leaderships.
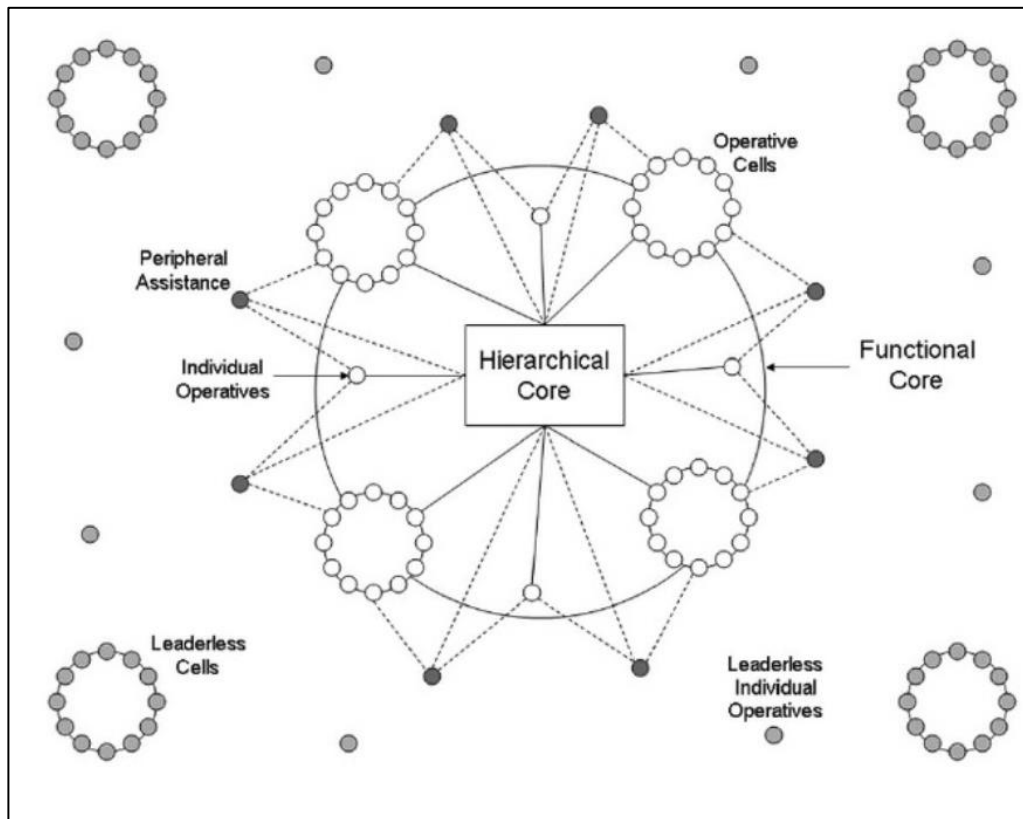
*Figure 1:* Terrorist network structure

Source: Medina & Hepner, 2008

Cells like AQ are monetarily self-sufficient, so as to ensure that after being caught, members will not expose any information about organizational funding (Medina & Hepner, 2008). This process of network decentralization appeared with the use of advanced information technologies, as electronic financial systems in addition to an easier communication access produces a rise of decentralization, mainly because of three reasons: less communication costs, less of transmitting time and more complex transmittable information (Medina & Hepner, 2008).

### 2.2.3. "Globalization of the jihad"

Al-Qaeda and the IS, in spite of the fact that they share being a violent transnational Sunni jihadist organization, they diverge when it comes to doctrines, strategies or even modus operandi. Regarding doctrines, AQ first idea comes up against Abdallah Azzam's –Palestinian and Jordanian Shaykh– and Al-Zawahiri conception of Sunni

global jihadism. AQ shares a part of Azzam's Muslim Brotherhood, regarding a non-sect Church, non-exclusivity but openness, a Sunni unity, solidarity, brotherhood with a sense of community in which tolerance of differences constitutes a force, regarding allies in the Arab Muslim world (Kamolnick, 2017). However, AQ differs with the ideologists mainly in two key points. First, Osama bin Laden, as he wanted to achieve the creation of an autonomous army, but Azzam believed bin Laden had a more complementing and assisting role, subordinating Arabic people to fight in the Afghanistan war against the communist regime; and second, AQ believed Palestine was an "Arab- led transnational military expeditionary force" which served as a force supporter, whereas Azzam, Palestine was in a "privileged theatre of future near-term operations" (Kamolnick, 2017).

Hence, AQ deployed high quality operations with advanced trained forces in AQ's believes alongside the willing to fight within the Islamic land so as to establish once again an Islamic Caliphate so then they could attack the original infidels in the name of the jihad –Dar al-Harb–, just like Al-Zawahiri proposed (Kamolnick, 2017). Azzam's proposal was to enter into a direct fight with their biggest enemy, the U.S., because he believed jihadism prevents *fitna* or fire of discord within the Islamic land if the fight starts inn Dar al-Harb (Hegghammer, 2020, 392).

The different prognosis is therefore served, according to Hegghammer (2010) the doctrine of Azzam "advocated conventional military tactics in confined theatres of war" whereas the declaration of bin Laden in 1998 "sanctioned all means in all places". Now the question that arises is why Azzam's doctrine did not mobilize as many people as he expected. Hegghammer (2010) proposes the following reasons: first, there were other strong ideologies at that time, and national, regional and local concerns were more relevant to ordinary people; second, the issue of whether participation on foreign countries or not was an individual duty for everyone, was faced by Azzam, as there was already set a very influential theological view on it. In fact, there is no doubt there was a strong notion of collective duty, in which the participation in other Muslim wars of national liberation represented one in which participation had to be authorised by parents and the prospective recruit's government; therefore, showing how collective duty provides difficulties to participation for the ones that are highly motivated and also excuses for the ones that are not so much.  (Hegghammer, 2010).

In the end, in AQ, bin-Laden combined both, as he set a core of AQ structure, as well as structures in the countries where the mujahedeen fought in Afghanistan and came back to their countries of origin, constituting the beginning of the process of globalization of the jihad.

### 2.2.4. Logistics

Gary M. Bald, Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), before de United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Washington DC on 5th May 2004 stated that terrorist groups require both initial and continuing support in order to further their ideological objectives through violence. To this effect, material support is included with items that are related to terrorist attacks, like weapons and ammunition, as well as the more distant support, involving funding, recruitment and communication resources (FBI, 2004). Therefore, logistics are the material resources of a terrorist organisation. There are three main elements: funding, human resources and weapons.

### *2.2.4.1. Funding*

When it comes to funding, it was mainly an unattended topic within the international community until 9/11 happened, which is when intelligence agencies began to investigate money and where it comes from. Apparently, at least 10 % of the funding was for the attacks and the other 90 %, to the organisations. In other words, this 90 % is for acquiring food, shelter, care of martyrs' families, weapons, clothes, vehicles… Such a low percentage for the attacks is due to the low cost of an individual terrorist operation. For example, World Trade Center attack in 1993 is estimated to have cost around US$19,000, Bali bombings in 2002 around US$20,000, and Madrid attacks in 2004 between US$10,000 and US$50,000 (Freeman, 2016). If we compare it to the 9/11 attacks, it was indeed more expensive, as it required between US$350,000 and US$500,000 because of expensive flight simulation training in addition to 19 hijackers that were operating abroad (Freeman, 2016).

Funding may be divided as well in three interrelated elements, combining legal and illegal activities: earning, moving and storing. Firstly, earning can be done through legal activities with investment and companies in which money laundering appear to be the order of the day, and illegal activities such as States' sponsorship, individual donations, mafias, mobs or misuse of NGOs; secondly, storing and moving aim to gain funds legally with gold, jewels, antiquities or art proceeding from shops and gold sales, so these elements are stored legally in bank accounts and, after some time, the elements are resold as the prices have increased (Abuza, 2003). Zakat, for instance, is mandatory for every Muslim and it is proportional for the annual income; it has charitable purposes as it is regulated and channelled in Muslim countries by the Ministry of Finances or Ministry of Religious Affairs; in western countries, however, there's no Ministry of Religious Affairs, so Zakat is sometimes paid to illegal mosques and it cannot be controlled (Abuza, 2003). There is also Hawala, an alternative or parallel remittance system based on family ties, in which there is minimal use of a negotiable instrument (Jost & Sandhu, 2000). In other words, transfers take place based on communications between members of hawaladars, also named hawala dealers, so transfers avoid international control, therefore they cannot be monitored (Jost & Sandhu, 2000). Ransoms and extorsions can also be highlighted as they constitute a very important source of financing terrorist movements through kidnappings and hijackings mainly.

According to Gary M. Bald (FBI, 2004), for terrorists, a lack of finances can thwart or hinder short-term goals whilst dismantle long-term agendas, because without funds terrorist groups suffer defection, disarray and demise. The issue that arises is that all of these funding mechanisms have not been shut down successfully since the war on terror started, it may be because of the impossibility of shutting it down, of "bureaucratic inertia" and a lack of political will (Abuza, 2003). In fact, AQ saw the Southeast Asia region so appealing due to the network already set of Islamic charities, with economies full of money laundering due to the spread of poorly regulated Islamic banks (Abuza, 2003).

*2.2.4.2.    Human Resources*

Human resources are mechanisms of promoting the joining or indoctrination of individuals and training those members so as to carry out a terrorist attack. Faria & Arce (2005) established the typology of membership in any terrorist organization: first, those individuals convinced by terrorists in supporting their political cause as terrorists so they join in; and second, the volunteers that already have the will to join in the organization without the need of being convinced or recruited by the organization members.

However, it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation and recruitment, because despite their similarities, they differ in the fact that radicalization refers to a change of the attitude, therefore leading towards the involvement in the use of violence for a political aim; whereas recruitment refers to the practical steps towards joining a terrorist group, in other words, it constitutes the bridge between the pursuit of violence and radicalisation (Neumann & Rogers, 2007).

Before 9/11 attacks, the recruitment consisted of brainwashing 2nd generation immigrants in western countries, mostly in France and the United Kingdom. However, after the attacks, recruitment was located in every western country. There are three main individual aspects to consider: first, age; second, the link between lower status and lower level of education, in which relative deprivation or the perception of lack of opportunities is also examined, even though it is considered by studies to be more a perception than a real factor; and finally, psychological profile, as terrorist organisations tend to avoid profiles with mental disorders due to hardness and difficulties attached to dealing with these individuals, as they seek for personal satisfaction instead of committing themselves to the cause (Neumann & Rogers, 2007).

Once kinship and religion are consolidated through these structures of spotting or detecting commitment, we'll find the phenomenon of acceptance, which is the moment of integration in this subculture, when the individual becomes part of the jihadist community and is sent to be trained (Neumann & Rogers, 2007). The process of radicalization is dual, as the recruiters spotted the individual while the individual wants to join the organization (Doosje et al., 2016). After contacting comes indoctrination in

order to know if an individual its operative, kind of operative, or only if the individual is valid. After 9/11, there are new tools involved for communicating, expanding and distributing propaganda: internet. The small percentage of individuals that were not rejected are consequently trained and deployed (Doosje et al., 2016). Again, after 9/11, training is provided by other modern means, so there is no need of the individual to travel. Among other objectives, terrorists seek publicity to make their cause known in order to increase its popular support, therefore the role of propaganda is very important when it comes to terrorism[3]. Throughout history, there has been an increase of propaganda because of many factors, such as the impact of 9/11 as well as other attacks, the role of propaganda in terms of the mobilization strategy, the proliferation of a more decentralized terrorist groups, and the use of Internet by terrorist groups (Torres et al., 2006).

### 2.2.4.3.  Weapons

Weapons are a logistic element with three different origins, either from the black market, from sponsor states providing support to certain terrorist groups or either from looting, stealing from the enemy or handmade weapons. In addition, they can be categorized in conventional or non-conventional weapons. Conventional weapons are the most commonly used tools that get less attention whilst inflicting dramatic damage. Non-conventional weapons or weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are barely used nor developed by non-State actors because of a lack of capabilities, although dirty bombs with radiological material entails a high threat.  Weapons have become more sophisticated, common place, easier to acquire and able of inflicting horrific damage (Schmid, 2004). The classification of weapons shall be divided in manual weapons, such as bladed weapons which are deadly at a close range; improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the most common terrorist tool and its power may vary depending on the amount and type of explosive, the disposition of the explosive device and the proximity to the target; and small arms and light weapons (SALW), including pistols or handguns, submachine guns, assault and sniper rifles (Lawrance, n.d.).

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[3] See *Table 1* in Annex.

Among the problems that may arise because of the availability of SALW, we shall name the following: criminal or terrorist acts will be executed with military weapons; violent solutions to any conflict will be promoted; increase of armed citizens as well as a development of private security groups; the proliferation of illegitimate centres of violence; democracy and democratic political development will be threatened, as well as the economic development; har to civilians will be increased (Lawrance, n.d.).

### 2.2.5. Modus Operandi definition

There are diverse manifestations of warfare, categorized by theatre or place where the fight is located –naval warfare, air warfare, land warfare–, by periods of time –ancient warfare, modern warfare–, by types of weapons –chemical warfare, nuclear warfare–, by the peoples involved in the conflict –Arab warfare, Chinese warfare–, or by tactics used –asymmetric warfare, siege warfare, guerrilla warfare (Lele, 2014).

The 21st century, especially after 9/11, appears to have become ruled by asymmetric warfare, an act of a non-state actor against a state. According to Khan (2005) there are three types: tactical asymmetric, strategic asymmetric and war by proxy. Tactical asymmetric consist of tactics, training and technology that can allow a small force to overcome a larger one; in strategic asymmetric, parties to the conflict deploy same kind of forces and the quantity and quality of the opposing forces will determine the outcome; and in war by proxy, a side of the conflict is a non-governmental actor that has an interest of a particular nation. Within this typology of asymmetry, terrorism is part of the potential asymmetrical threats

#### 2.2.5.1. Main Jihadist MO

The planning cycle of a jihadist terrorist group, whether the attack is more or less sophisticated, are the seven steps designed accordingly depending on the target selection and the psychological impact when developing a terrorist attack. According to Rabasa et al. (2006) and the Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team (JCAT, n.d.):

First, there is broad target selection, in which there is a collection of information of potential targets gathered from different sources –members or operatives, sympathizers, passive supporters, non-active sympathizers that provide info without knowing–, so this target selection is based on the "motives/opportunity/means principle", taking into account that jihadism has an ideology of killing infidels, that is the motivation; opportunity shall be seen when there is a meaningful and successful attack in terms of benefits or success, which is more important than the level of intimidation; and means refers to access to weapons or level of security in the target, among others. Rabasa et al. (2006) also differentiate two kinds of targets: hard targets, related to people, structures, facilities or locations of high-level security awareness, a high level of perception of threat, they feel the danger, so they have a high level of physical security structure; and soft targets, which are people, structures, facilities or locations with low perception of threat, low security awareness, and no security measures, as they disrupt the activities that normally take place.

Second, broad intelligence gathering and surveillance such as transportation routes, kinds of transport, activities and schedules of the target, gap of response, kind of security. These elements able a terrorist group to move from 10 potential targets to only one. Third, is related to second, as the specific target selection is making a choice and selecting one target among all of them, which shall be the one that will be more beneficial than costful, that has as many victims as possible, and the one that attracts media the most. Four, pre-attack surveillance and planning, which shall depend on the capabilities of the terrorist group, as it would take more or less time to design everything. For planning the attack, if is a terrorist on his own or a lone wolf, the level of sophistication will be decreased, or time will be increased. In addition, the vulnerabilities of the target will be analysed, the operatives will be recruited, and trained, and other elements shall be planned such as deployment of the attack, weapons or escape routes in case there are. Five, testing and rehearsing the attacks, which is the previous step to action. Six is the attack per se, played with surprise, using time and conditions and trying to maximize casualties within the ideological framework. Seven and finally, mediatic exploitation and escape, how to maximize the impact at the social level. The strategy varies from one terrorist group to another, although jihadist groups tend to claim responsibility of everything.

## 2.3.  The Philippines: Historical context

The Philippines archipelagic territory has more than 7,500 islands, conforming an area of around 300,000 square kilometres, although only the eleven largest islands comprise most of the land area. In the current section, the focus will be made in the Sulu Archipelago area, in Western Mindanao, Southern Philippines.
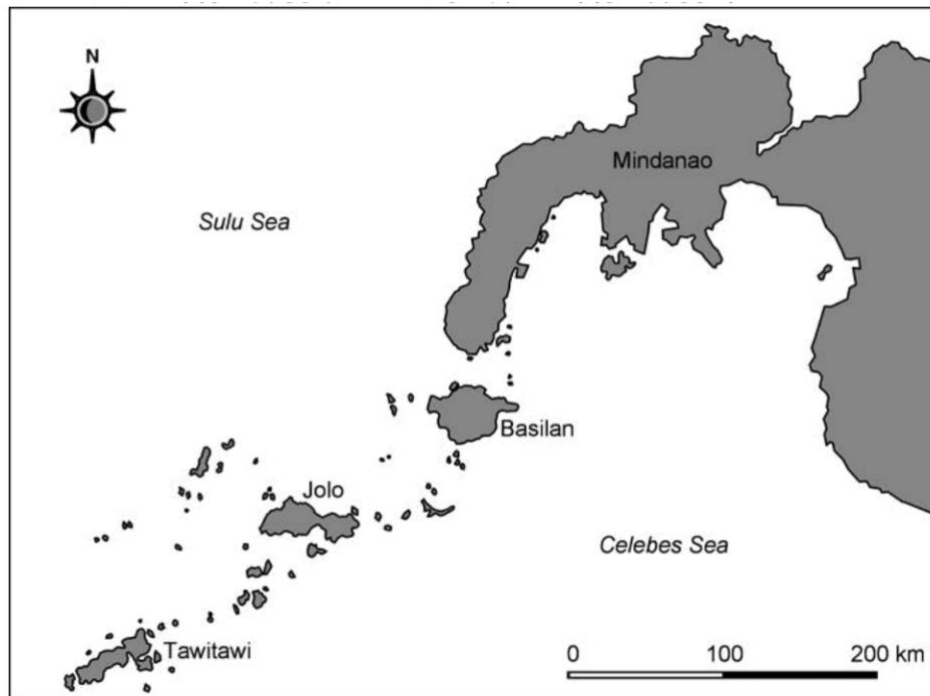


*Figure 2*: Map of the Sulu Archipelago Area, Southern Philippines.
Source: East, 2020.

Muslims in the Philippines are the largest ethnic minority, being around 5,6 % of the total Philippine population of 110,870,000 as of May 2021 (WPR, 2021). The history of Muslims in the Philippines is the most entrenched among other people's history within the country. During the Spanish era, from 1565 until 1898, the U.S. era, from 1900 until 1946, and after their independence inn 1946, Muslim people had a main role in shaping the nation along its history. In fact, *makdumin* –Islamic missionaries– in Mindanao and Sulu already introduced the creation of the Philippine state by around 100 years before it happened (Magdalena, 2017).

Since the Spanish colonisation of the southern region Mindanao in the Philippines, around late 16th century, the resentment has been present from local Muslims and even from the native indigenous people, also known as heathens –in Western writings designated as pagans– (Magdalena, 2017). Tausug Muslims dominated the whole Sulu Archipelago, most of Mindanao region was controlled by the Maranao and Maguindanao Muslims, non-Muslim tribes or *Lumad* –tribal groups with trading relations with Muslim people– were the inhabitants of the eastern and central area of the island, and some of them adopted the Islam as their faith whilst others adopted Christianism as it was introduced by Spain in their 300 years of colonization (Magdalena, 2017). Therefore, the Muslims or Moros inhabiting the greater Mindanao region resisted fiercely the attempt at conversion. As a matter of fact, Moro comes from the Spanish word *moro* from the older Spanish word *moor*, the Reconquista-period term used to refer to Arabs or Muslims, which come from the Mauros of Greece, meaning black (Tenorio, 2019). There were permanent military confrontations between Muslims and Spanish colonial forces from the late 16th century until late 18th century, also known as the Moro Wars, in which Muslim people fought and succeeded; Spain tried for a couple of decades to establish a colony in Mindanao, yet with no success, which led to a repelling of the Spanish attacks by the Muslim people throughout the 17th century in Mindanao, including the Sulu Archipelago (East, 2020). In 1762, the Moro Wars ended with the British occupation of Manila in the middle of the Seven Year's War. The British reach to occupy certain islands in the Sulu Archipelago, although in less than 10 years, in 1773, they were all evicted by the Muslim people.

Therefore, Spain was a very difficult to defeat occupier with its strong army and navy, as not only they conquered central and northern Philippines, but they succeeded as well in religiously converting the local population, with the only exception of Mindanao, the region where Muslims retained their faith because of being undefeated (East, 2020). Same situation happened with the coming of the U.S., as a result of the Spanish-U.S. war in 1998, as their defiance and unrest until nowadays is evidenced by clashes between them. The Mindanao area in the Philippines, especially the Sulu Archipelago, has witnessed Spanish, British and U.S. colonization, Japanese occupation and invasion, fights between the Moros and the AFP and the minoritisation of the Muslim population (East, 2020)

### 2.3.1. Muslim population and historical causes of resentment

Dr. Saleeby (1905) described the Moros as a law-abiding people, as they felt the government that was ruling them was their own. On the one hand and regarding the acceptance of the government by the Muslims, it is obvious that most of the Muslim population of Basilan and surrounding provinces do not feel their interests are represented in the central government of Manila; on the other hand, Muslim people indeed have representatives in the Congress and Senate, although mostly ineffective in terms of legislation due to numerical factors (East, 2020).

Therefore, the following analysis will provide an overview of the events so as to enlighten about something that was and still is nowadays an issue full of complexities in the southern Philippines greater Muslim region, especially the Sulu Archipelago area, as in the majority of Muslim provinces law and order is very unstable, considering "law" as the deemed acceptable for stability by society and "order" as the set of elements needed for a society to peacefully coexist. Despite of the non-existence of a solely key incident that caused in the 20th century the drop of the predominance of Muslims in the Filipino provinces, there was a series of combined events: unintentional, intentional, predicable, avoidable, unavoidable and as a result of historically being under threat when it comes to religious practices (East, 2020). Among the factors that shall shaped and influenced the history and its evolution in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago region, we shall mention the growing discontent towards the Christian population, for many reasons, one of them being the fact that the authorities in charge of security and peace –AFP and PNP– are non-Muslim. Hence, the minoritisation issue shall be exposed hereafter.

#### 2.3.1.1. Minoritisation

As a minority, the Moro needed to protect both identities, as Moros and as Muslims. The 9/11 swift arose the fear of it happening to them. Minorities shall be able to defend their rights to coexist with the rest of the people through democratic processes and institution, although minorities in the Philippines were denied their right to vote in the past (Tenorio, 2019).

Therefore, minoritisation of a clan or race shall be either intentional or unintentional, according to Bob East (2020), but no matter which one is chosen, in the end the direct consequence is a loss of influence. By intentional we shall consider a purpose to outnumber the population, whereas unintentional refers to uncontrollable events, such as less fertility. The southern Muslim areas during the 20th century, when it comes to legislations of "minoritisation", were not affected intentionally or directly; the impact on the Moro population in Mindanao, however, is another story that requires attention, because minority shall be fully comprehended once we establish a broader perspective of the issue.

According to Bob East (2020), Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi were not directly affected by minoritisation, due to the fact that in the Sulu Archipelago the Muslim population remained –and is still remaining– quite the same when it comes to percentages. Hence, East (2020) raises the following concern: "If Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi had been affected by minoritisation, then the number of Christians and non-Christians would be closer in number, thus breeding resentment by the Moros against those who were perceived as interlopers", which is factually accurate in various provinces of Mindanao.

The ASG, at that time considered to be these islands provinces main bandit group, was not perceived as dissidents, but rather a group of insurgents that acquired a degree of popular support and legitimacy because of fighting a national government; therefore, while the MNLF and the MILF were created as a consequence of minoritisation, it is not the case of the ASG, as the group's presence appeared once the major minoritisation issues in Mindanao were over (East, 2020).

We may speculate that the Muslim people would be fairly and equitable represented in public institutions if their people had not been reduced, thus crime would have not been applied as an excuse for advocating "justice to the oppressed" (Tenorio, 2019). Understanding the fact that minoritisation is a very complex issue comes along with how the Muslim people in the Philippines changed from being the ethnic majority to the minority throughout the 20th century, as well as the need to expand the context and include all ethno-linguistic tribes in Mindanao area: Bajao, Iranun, Jamamapun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Maranao, Molbog, Palawani, Sama, Sangil, Tausug and Yakan (Tenorio, 2019).

Bob East (2020) suggests that when the major group benefits of having majority-law-enforcement agencies with their respective officers –also coming from the same group–, the ethnic group capability to self-guide or self-supervise, decreases causing an escalation of resentment in the minority group. The situation in Mindanao is the perfect example of this situation, in particular since the mid 20th century. Tenorio (2019) even points out the fact that the government forces –AFP and PNP– present in Basilan, although being a region mostly Muslim, are northern Philippines Christians.

The Philippines' government then wanted to provoke the migration of Christians from northern provinces –especially from Visayas and Luzon– into the Mindanao region, although there had to be a motivation for them to migrate, which was the appealing opportunity of owning new agricultural and rural land holdings (Lat, 2018). It all began through Act No. 718 of 4th April 1903, a provision in which all conveyances "by Moro sultans or Chiefs of the non-Christian tribes were to be considered illegal, void and of no effect", causing the dispossession of the ancestral landholdings of the Moros (Lat, 2018). Then, the enactment of Act No. 926 of 7th October 1903, in which the "long term occupancy of ostensibly public lands would no longer best any right in the occupants" (Lat, 2018). The consequent mass migration to Mindanao area of Christian settlers mainly, in addition to the following displacement of Muslim communities, is among the major grievances behind the ongoing violent conflict between the government forces and the Muslim community (Lat, 2018).

This period when the Muslim people were left out from their homeland was called "resettlement", therefore showing that minoritisation constitutes the euphemism of this concept (East, 2020). During the Marcos Administration, around the 1970s, the southern Philippines Muslims began to be military organised because of the flow of Christians from Visayas and Luzon to the Mindanao area since 1903, resulting in one of the main reasons of the Marcos Administration to justify the implementation of "marshal law-domestic insurgency", causing even more unrest between the Moros, hence, also more domestic insurgency (East, 2020). Speculation of what may or may not have occurred shall remain as theories or assumptions, but the minoritisation and its consequences are facts, as the exclusion and marginalization occurred in a period of time of some decades.

### 2.3.2. Phase zero

Demographic and socioeconomical tensions in the Philippines have been on for decades due to secessionist movements led by all the aforementioned Muslim minority insurgent movements, so as to go against the Catholic majority (Robinson, 2016). An insurgency to highlight in the 70 is the one led by the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF because they demanded an independent Muslim State. Later on, the MNLF confronted the AFP in a guerrilla war that lasted 5 years, from 1973 to 1978, and it ended with negotiations between the Philippine government and the MNLF in 1989 that led to the establishment of the ARMM or the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Hammerberg et al., 2017). The movement then was divided. A faction demanding independence for Muslim regions formed a group named the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a group that in the 90s gained strength due to their collaboration with JI, an Al-Qaeda terrorist group located across the Southeast Asian region (Hammerberg et al., 2017). The other faction was the Islamic Movement or Harakat al Islamiyya which shall later be renamed as ASG, formed between 1990 and 1991 (Hammerberg et al., 2017).

# 3. ABU SAYYAF GROUP

This part will introduce the Abu Sayyaf Group, hereafter just called the Abu Sayyaf, and its origin. It will also include the first decade and a half of the 21st century of the group, the aforementioned troubled provinces of the Philippines, in the context of not exhaustive-kidnaps-for-ransom, armed clashes, structure, logistics and modus operandi.

Before examining this escalation of violence in Basilan, Sulu, and its immediate neighbours-and other associated matters-it is important to firstly differentiate between the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan and the Abu Sayyaf in its neighbouring province, Sulu. In the latter part of the 20th century the Abu Sayyaf in Basilan came under the leadership/s or direction-for the most part-of Abdurajak Janjalani, his younger brother

Khadaffy Janjalani, Abu Solaiman, and Abu Sabaya. Itis fair to say at that time, in the main, the struggle for the most part was ideologically driven by a sense of attempting to gain self-determination for their fellow Moros. Negotiations for a peaceful transition to a self-determination had been on since the 1996 Peace Agreement between the Ramos Administration and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). However, frustration at the process led to many Moro people leaving both the MNLF and the MILF to join forces with the more aggressive Abu Sayyaf.

## 3.1.  Foundation and direct connection to Al-Qaeda

Abdurajak Janjalani was native from Basilan, he founded and named Abu Sayyaf, "Father of Swordsmen" (CEP, n.d.). Janjalani fought in the Afghan war against the Soviets in the 1980s, which is when he met Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, participating in the foundational leadership circle of the core of AQ (Hutchinson, 2009). According to Abuza (2005), the ASG was founded, allegedly at the behest of Osama Bin Laden, with the intention to disrupt peace talks between the Philippines government and the MNLF. In the beginning, the official headquarters of the group were established by Janjalani on Isabela, Basilan naming the Camp Al-Madinah Mujahideen in 1992, but the Philippine Marines captured the camp in 1993, therefore the ASG was forced to relocate and establish a new base in Patikul, Sulu (Hutchinson, 2009).

During the foundational phase, ties to AQ were very direct, as well as strong, due to Janjalani's personal relationship with Osama Bin Laden and his brother-in-law: Mohammed Jamal Khalifa (Hammerberg, 2017). Ties resulted with funding and training of the ASG by AQ core, in particular, using Khalifa's charity which operated in the southern Philippines (Banlaoi, 2006). Plus, the ASG received bomb making training and other funds from the AQ bomb maker Ramzi Yousef when he travelled to the Philippines in 1994, so as to establish Manila as the base for the Bojinka plot[4].

On the one hand, AQ and ASG direct connection began to diminish after the plot failed, Ramzi Yousef was arrested in Pakistan, Khalifa was banned to enter in the Philippines

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[4] Bojinka plot had similar elements as the 9/11 attacks, but it was a failed plot as police discovered it when, in a Manila apartment building, an accidental fire broke out. Evidence showed the intention to assassinate also Pope John Paul II (Smith, 2015).

and the 9/11 attacks (Fellman, 2011). On the other hand, the ASG ties with other jihadist groups were increasing. In fact, MILF was used by JI for training and operational planning, which tied JI directly with the ASG and MILF in the late 1990s (Niksch, 2007).

During these years, it is true the ASG had limited operation capabilities, but they were able to carry out terrorist attacks such as ambushes, bombings, executions and also kidnappings[5] whilst focusing on recruiting from other insurgent groups like the MNLF (Hammerberg, 2017). Hence, this extreme fundamentalist Islamic paramilitary group uses kidnapping and extreme violence, including beheadings, in an endeavour to pursue its goal for an independent Muslim state in the southern Philippines. Like the Taleban in Afghanistan, the ASG, if successful, would adopt a primitive medieval form of Islamic moral code in government (East, 2009).

Nevertheless, we shall designate the differences between the ASG in Sulu and the ASG in Basilan. According to Bob East (2020), in Basilan, the original ASG was highly organised with Abdurajik Janjalani as its chairman, Abdul Asshmad as the intelligence chief and Ibrahim Yacob as the operations chief. The ASG in Sulu, however, shall be described as a group of local banditry taking advantage of being linked to the other ASG in Basilan, which gave credibility when it comes to their claim of fighting for a "broader Islamic agenda" (East, 2020). As Taylor (2006) enlightens, the ASG in Sulu is "a more complex phenomenon in the sense that it does not lend itself to the straightforward assessments made by government and military authorities regarding the group and its members".

Regarding the 9/11 attacks in 2001, an astonishing increase of the support by the U.S. government for the AFP counterterrorism operations was brought. In fact, the U.S. in 2002 deployed around 1,650 forces, of which 150 were Special Forces operators to the southern Philippines, in order to help eradicate the ASG as the U.S. was a part of the Operation Enduring Freedom (Fellman, 2011).

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[5] See *Graphic 1* in Annex.

## 3.2. ASG

Since 2000, the media rather like to name ASG affiliates "suspected ASG members" (East, 2020). During the following 15 years, criminality and violence attributed to them has increased to a point in which there are almost daily several reports of armed clashed between the "suspected ASG members" and the AFP, robberies and kidnappings in Basilan Province and its surroundings, such as Sulu Province (East, 2020).

Bob East (2020) highlights his concern when it comes to the assessments in the first fifteen years of the 21st century of the three Philippine Administrations –Aquino, Estrada and Macapagal. The assessments hold the ASG and its members accountable for being responsible for the lawlessness and violence in Basilan Province and in Sulu Province. If the blame lies indeed with the members of the ASG for the current rising of criminality and violence in Sulu and Basilan, the end of the first decade of the 21st century shall be considered a worrying increasing of what it seemed to be a decreasing ASG activity in the Mindanao region (East, 2020).

### 3.2.1. Ideology

De Castro (2010, 144) states that the ASG cannot be considered a homogenous organization, as it is more a highly factionalized group of radical Muslim terrorists. Hence, it will be further explained throughout this section the reasons how and why this happened.

ASG main aim consist of a purpose shaped by the historical narrative of the Bangsamoro struggle, as it is to establish an independent Salafist and Sunni Islamic state in Mindanao for the Moros (CISAC, 2018). Moreover, a second goal to achieve is expelling Christian settlers who came from other regions, like the Visayas or Luzon in the Philippines, who migrated to Mindanao in the 1910s under the encouragement of the government (Kamlian, 2003).

The ASG may have become an organised crime group with no ideology or strategic goals, instead, their main purpose is to create an environment of fear and insecurity in the region throughout their criminal activities (Gerdes et al., 2014). Nevertheless, ASG indeed has an ideology, and it is derived from its eponymous founder Janjalani. According to Banaloi (2006, 250), Janjalani issued "The Four Basic Truths", a public proclamation in the 1990s defining ASG's ideology and goals. The ASG shall serve as balance between MILF and MNLF, as they are also part of the struggle for Moro liberation, according to the "first truth" (Banlaoi, 2006, 250). The second truth emphasizes ASG's goal, which is to establish an Islamic government in Mindanao "whose nature, meaning, emblem and objective are synonymous with peace" (CEP, n.d.). The third one claims how necessary is the advocacy of war whilst the injustice, oppression and arbitrary claims imposed on Muslim people are still on a daily basis (Banlaoi, 2006, 250). Finally, the last truth aims to establish righteousness and justice for all under the Koran, the real objective of humanity that shall be achieved by war, disturbing peace only for the achievement of this goal (Banlaoi, 2006, 250).

Moreover, before Janjalani's death in 1998, he gave 8 *khumbahs* or radical ideological speeches in which Janjalani revealed how the Filipino Muslims were not practicing the allegedly "pure Islam" that was being practiced in Malaysia or Indonesia, blaming Muslim scholars in the Philippines and their lack of knowledge of the Quran, whilst introducing the Wahhabism brand of Sunni Islam in the ASG –learnt by Janjalani when he studied Arabic and theology in Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria (Banlaoi, 2006, 251). These *khumbahs* showed the resentment of Christian missionaries in Mindanao, and the interpretation was that Christian missionaries and their preaching were insulting Islam and provoking them to respond in a violent way (Banlaoi, 2006, 252).

After Janjalani's death followed a stunting of the ASG's doctrinal development due to a lack of another ideological leader. On the one hand, experts such as Samuel (2016) established it as the beginning of the ASG prioritizing profits over their stated objective: the creation in the southern Philippines of an independent Islamic State. The main reason to sustain this allegation is the lack of ideologically motivated recruitment efforts by the ASG (CEP, n.d.). On the other hand, experts such as Sidney Jones (2017) affirm there is a unification of disparate Islamist militants and groups in the Philippines due to a rise of ISIS, as it helped to merge them all under one ideological banner.

### 3.2.1.1. ISIS, ASG and the globalization of the jihad

ISIS has indeed helped and inspired ASG members to launch jihadist attacks, despite losing territories in the Middle East, such as in 2019: on 28th June in Jolo, 5 Philippine soldiers were killed by 2 suicide bomber, and local authorities blame the ASG faction loyal to ISIS, as ISIS claimed responsibility for it (Hart, 2019). However, it all started back in 2014, during summer, when Isnilon Hapilon –ASG's Basilan-based faction leader– pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi –ISIS leader–, ceasing kidnapping activities right after the pledge (CEP, n.d.).

Since 2016, the IS province in the southern Philippines, *Wilayah al-Filibin*, began to be popularized by ISIS, whilst ISIS news reports on the region established *Wilayah al-Filibin* as the core region of the IS operations in East Asia or *Sharq Asiya* (Singh et al., 2019). We shall highlight that ISIS made direct contact with Hapilon in December of 2016, as they instructed him to find a safe location so as to establish the caliphate in Mindanao (Fonbuena, 2017a). In fact, evidence of around 200 Filipinos fighting or having fought with ISIS was released in August 2014 after the Philippine government leaked the document (FlorCruz, 2014). Same year but a month later, in ASG's stronghold of Mindanao, some photos appeared from the city of Marawi that showed ISIS flags, and their presence was confirmed by local authorities that would not arrest them whilst they remain peaceful and acting within the law (CEP, n.d.). Hapilon was killed in Marawi after a military operation, and the following day it was announced by Duterte that Marawi was liberated from ISIS (CEP, n.d.). The aftermath was Furuji Indama leading the ASG faction based in Basilan, although in September 2020, a clash with the Philippine forces left Indama fatally wounded, so Western Mindanao Command chief Lieutenant General Corleto Vinluan is in charge of the operation on locating Indama's remains to confirm his death (Rappler, 2020).

Only a year before, in February 2019, a commander of the ASG based in Jolo, Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, began to lead ISIS in the Philippines. Sawadjaan is responsible for bombings, as well as high-profile executions and kidnappings, including the beheading in 2016 of 2 Canadians (AP, 2019). However, he allegedly died in July 2020 after being injured in a clash with Philippine army, but they are not able to confirm his death until retrieving his remains (Gomez, 2020).

### 3.2.2. Structure

#### 3.2.2.1. Leadership

There is a strong leadership with Abdurajak Janjalani, because he was able to involve Moro dissatisfaction in politics, therefore turning the political process into Islamist terrorism through the reinterpretation of their regional struggle under an Islamist perspective (Banlaoi, 2006, 251). In other words, the fight for Moro political independence was framed by Janjalani as a "*jihad* or "struggle" so as to obtain *kaadilan* or "justice" for the Moro people" (Banlaoi, 2006, 251).

According to De Borchgrave (2009), leadership is considered especially crucial in Moro communities due to the fundamental rules that governs Moro political alliances, which are based more on kinship and friendship rather than on a sense of overall Moro community. This feature is manifested in the way Moro fighting groups form, that is to say Moro fighting groups bind together with "maximal alliances" or friendship among leaders instead of a bigger common cause that shall unite every member of the group (Fellman, 2011). "Maximal alliances" develop from when "minimal alliances" or smaller groups of between 25 and 60 people tie to fight under a local headman[6] (Fellman, 2011). We may assure the parallel between this model and the ASG structure, because faction within the group relied on Janjalani to get in touch with local headmen so as to unify other small groups into a greater network able enough of coordinated acts of terrorism (Fellman, 2011).

When it comes to alliances, the ASG is a group that itself is divided into many factions, and most members have relatives either in the MNLF or in the MILF (Banlaoi, 2008, 41). Nevertheless, due to the fact that they all share the enemy, all groups shall help each other in the fight as they share cultural, religious and even tribal factors (Banlaoi, 2008, 40).

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[6] Maximal and minimal alliances concepts are taken from Thomas Kiefer's 1960s' research on ethnic Tausugs on the island of Jolo. Kiefer describes "minimal alliances" as kinship-based alliances that form the basis of a community headman's power. "Maximal alliances" are the "formation of dyadic friendship alliances between leaders of minimal alliances groups, and the pyramiding of these alliances into large fighting forces."

The construction of the ASG in a network-of-networks[7] explains as well the way the group began to disappear after the aforementioned "high-level alliances" were undone because of Janjalani's death (Fellman, 2011). Because of the same reason, the ASG as an organizational structure began to crumble. The leadership void seemed to end with Abu Solaiman as leader of the ASG in Sulu Province (East, 2009). They never expect that in January 2007 on Jolo Island, an armed encounter with members of the AFP would end with the death of Abu Solaiman (East, 2009).

The lack of an overall leader able to control and steer the ASG, according to Tommel (2009), increased the discontent among its original members as it finished with the split of the ASG, therefore becoming a network of various armed sub-groups within the globalization of the jihad, each of the sub-groups had their own *Amir* who led and controlled their own loyal followers (Rommel, 2009). The majority of the sub-groups, according to Banlaoi (2008, 36), were based in Basilan and Sulu Provinces, as well as in Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga City, so the ASG began to operate in semiautonomous sub-groups. Fellman (2011) describes two main factions ever since the split: first, the one of Abdurajak's brother Khadaffy based on Basilan; and second, then one led by Commander Robot or Galib Andang on Sulu.

Later on, it wasn't until the leader of Southeast Asia IS-pledged forces and of the ASG, Isnilon Hapilon, appeared and strengthened the group again in 2017 (Singh et al., 2019). Hapilon led one of the main ASG factions that was established in Basilan Province, but had to move the stronghold to Mindanao as an evasion strategy, so as to avoid operations by the AFP. He joined forces with the Maute brothers –Abdullah and Omarkhayam in particular– once the stronghold was changed and they were established in Mindanao; and the ASG succeeded when they were able to mobilize an international band of fighters from Southeast Asia and the Middle East as part of the jihadi takeover of Marawi (Singh et al., 2019).

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[7] The International Crisis Group defined ASG as "a network of networks, an alliance of smaller groups around individual charismatic leaders who compete and cooperate to maximize their reputation for violence This characterization will be used throughout the case study. See International Crisis Group, The Philippines: Counterinsurgency, 7.

Nevertheless, the faction based in Sulu has Radulan Sahiron as leader, one of the most-wanted terrorists according to the U.S. since 2005, although the faction members that support ISIS remain to consider Hapilon as their leader, due to the fact that Sahiron rejected ISIS and his main aim is the commitment to reach a local, regional caliphate (Fonbuena, 2017b). In April 2017, Sahiron showed the willingness of negotiating his surrender after military offenses in Sulu, according to the Philippine military forces (CEP, n.d.). The repercussions of counterterrorism operations in the Sulu region resulted in a lack of support from residents, hence, 10 militants surrendered to the military forces: on 6th March in Sulu some ASG members surrendered, and on 9th March, followers of a local leader of ISIS –Hatib Hajan– also surrendered to the army forces (Pareño, 2020).

### 3.2.3. Logistics

#### 3.2.3.1.  Funding

The ASG encountered new challenges during the post-Janjalani and post-9/11 era, according to Thompson (2018). The ASG was under intense pressures because of the global war on terror, as the U.S. was providing military forces and assistance to the AFP so as to end with the ASG as well as to stop the flow of money from al-Qaeda (Thompson, 2018). The ASG was then forced to look for funding and recover from different sources, like smuggling, extortion or taxation (Croissant & Barlow, 2007).

The ASG is illegally financed, but there are two main sources where the ASG receives these funds. On the one hand, the multimillion ransom payments from –mainly– kidnapping, extorsion of enterprises, villages raids, extortion, bank robberies or taxes imposed to the people –businesses and locals– living in the area under the control of ASG (CEP, n.d.). In fact, as a way of earning more money and attract the world's attention, they used to require watches, jewellery and even clothes and shoes from photographers and journalists. In return, the ASG may offer protection to local money-makers endeavours, including marijuana farms in Sulu (Dominguez, 2014). On the other hand, the ASG has received funding from other sources derived outside the Philippines, in which we may include contributions coming from Pakistani and Saudi

Islamic groups (Manalo, 2004). As a matter of fact, according to Manalo (2004), six million dollars were sent in 1991 to the ASG, money coming mainly from Al-Qaeda and Libya. But AQ is not the only group, we shall also mention funding from Hezbollah, Jamaat-e-Islami, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin in Afghanistan, al Gama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, Hizbul-Mujahideen in Pakistan, International Harakatu'l al-Islamia in Libya and the Islamic Liberation Front in Algeria (Banlaoi, 2006, 249). Nevertheless. Still today there is almost no evidence whether the ASG receives funds from companies, non-governmental organisations or individuals.

Funding from AQ came mainly from Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, Osama bin Laden's brother-in-law and main ASG financier after establishing a Philippine branch of the Saudi-based IIRO, an illicit charity organization created in the late 1980s (USDT, 2006). Mahmud Abd al-Jalil Afif ran de IIRO in the 1990s, and he was a major supporter of the ASG (USDT, 2006). In 2010s, Kahir Mundos –one of U.S. most wanted terrorist– was arrested and confessed to transfer money from al-Qaeda to Khadaffy Janjalani for bombings or other material in Mindanao (Stout, 2014).

Funding from ISIS was revealed by Philippines military forces after Marawi in 2017, as they transferred "a couple of million US dollars" to the faction led by Hapilon, from which US$1.5 million were sent in order to finance the siege in the city of Marawi (CEP, n.d.).Criminal activities might be considered opportunistic and, above all, non-justifiable, although there is indeed a justification according to the Islamic concept *fa'i* or "the robbing of non-believers as a way of raising funds for jihad" (Croissant et al., 2007). It shall justify not only robbing, but also kidnapping is considered morally correct.

### 3.2.4. Provisioning

#### *3.2.4.1. Weapon supplies[8]*

The police and military forces in the southern Philippines have been key suppliers of ammunition and weapons to non-state groups and even to politicians (Ugarte et al., 2011). The protection enjoyed by the ASG added to the weapons bought and provided by the military forces, shall be seen with the accounts of Palawan, Sipadan and Tumahubong abductions between 2000 and 2002 (Ugarte 2010: 400–5).

As a matter of fact, in order for the ASG to be taken seriously in their fight for Moro independence, they needed to step up and be more aggressive so as to attain the goal-armed clash. According to Bob East (2020), and armed clash showed the need to secure weapons, such as the Mi6, a self-loading rifle firing a 5.56 x 45 mm NATO round. Problem is that the Mi6 is a very expensive weapon, approximately US$400 each, around 65,000 Philippine pesos, that is to say the increasing urge for funding and the need for criminal activity such as kidnapping for ransom (East, 2020).

On a radio interview in October 2001, Abu Sabaya –the ASG commander– revealed the origin of some of the equipment –supplied by the US–, and how his men obtained it, therefore requesting the US to provide more (Ugarte et al., 2011). Capie (2002) also adds that illegal weapons circulate in the border between the Philippines and East Malaysia, being carried by fishermen as they need to be armed as well because of pirates and they have no time for formalities related to immigration when crossing the Philippines-Malaysia border.

According to Ugarte et al. (2001), in the last reported interview to Janjalani, he admitted the acquisition and buying of weapons from gun smugglers, from Recom –the Philippine National Police Regional Command–, or from soldiers in a need of cash in the early 1990s who were part of Southcom –Armed Forces of the Philippines Southern Command –.

We shall admit the ASG has equipped itself well. According to Banlaoi (2006, 255) the purchase of weapons and technical capabilities was obvious, especially after government seizures of thermal imagers, cellular and satellite phones, night-vision

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[8] See *Graphic 2* in Annex.

devices, commercial radios, sniper scopes and high-speed boats. In fact, it was members of the ASG trained in Libya the ones who facilitated the introduction of Pakistani-made HK33s, RPG-7s and MP5s into the southern Philippines (Capie, 2002). Another route of entry was through China, North Korea and Vietnam, because according to Filipino intelligence reports, there was allegedly a negotiation in May 2000 in which they were going to purchase anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons with US$3 million the ASG received from AQ (Capie, 2002).

Furthermore, the bomb-making abilities shall be mentioned, as it constitutes the main consequence of joint training with other Islamist groups (Banlaoi, 2006, 255). The capability of the ASG to use car bombs so as to hit major targets in major Philippine cities and have as many casualties and victims as they can has been possible because of these joint training operations (Banlaoi, 2006, 255). Moreover, the ASG is also considered to be a group of pirates, as they have indeed maritime and underwater training, facilitating them the capability of expanding attacks on targets such as commercial vessels and ports (Banlaoi, 2006, 255). The violent cycle is then served, as it is estimated that around 1.1 million unlicensed firearms are owned by civilians, criminal groups and insurgents; and around 15,000 of those firearms are mostly high-powered rifles owned by the ASG among other insurgent groups, according to the Philippine National Police (IRIN, 2009).

### 3.2.5. Propaganda

For the Islamic State core, the Marawi siege constituted a very useful propaganda narrative. During the siege, ASG member literally documented their victories as well as confrontations with the Philippine forces on ISIS social media accounts (Gutierrez, 2017). ASG fighters who posted Telegram channels supporting ISIS created for the Marawi jihad an "international constituency", according to a report from the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (2017) in Indonesia. This use of social media achieved to keep with the narrative in which the Philippine government had the blame for the oppression of Moro people in Mindanao as well as for Marawi's destruction (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017).

In fact, there was a change in alliances for two years since 2014. This paper explained before that the ASG was pro-AQ until 2016, when the Islamic State in June published a video in which several militant groups based in Mindanao, the ASG among them, pledge alliance to ISIS and ISIS recognized the pledges as well as Isnilon Hapilon as the *Amir* of ISIS Philippines (Singh et al*.,* 2019). In terms of ideology, there was a "major paradigm shift" that took place, as a result of the influence of both, the ASG and its allies, in the Philippines. At first, ISIS stated that the conquer of territories or *qital tamkin* was not between their modus operandi of terrorism in the Philippines (Singh et al., 2019). However, in the early 2017, ISIS began to lose territories that were key in Iraq and Syria, so many changes began to take place: Mindanao was being promoted as a very important area in the global caliphate or *Khilafah*, and because of this critical and unpleasant situation in the Middle East for ISIS, if a foreign jihadist militant was not able or willing to travel to Iraq or Syria, whether they are from Chechnya, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Turkey or Yemen, ISIS encouraged them to travel and join the ASG in their fight in the Philippines (Singh et al., 2019).

Later on, in June 2017, one of ISIS massive dissemination means, the Rumiyah magazine, published an especial issue called The Jihad in East Asia, in which ASG and other Philippine insurgent groups were referred as part of the "Khilafah in East Asia", with Mindanao being portrayed as the "Land of Hijrah and Jihad" (Franco, 2017):

> *On the 30th of Sha'ban, the soldiers of the Khilafah burned an armored vehicle belonging to the Crusader Filipino army during the course of clashes in the city of Marawi.*

Thenceforth, and after the success of *Rumiyah*, ISIS decided to keep informing through propaganda videos inside this *Khilafah*, in which ISIS militants from ASG and other insurgent movements were fighting the AFP, and in which there was a call for foreign ISIS-pledged militants to go to Marawi and fight (Franco, 2017). Basically, it was shown a defensive campaign, blaming the AFP and its supporters for the destruction of the city of Marawi.

### 3.2.5.1. Recruitment

This work already showed the divergence within the ASG, as it is a group that draws members from other groups, coming from family groups and clans. As of 2013, the Australian government stated that most of the ASG new recruits were young Muslims whose origin is the southern of the Philippines, essentially Mindanao and Sulu regions (Australian National Security, n.d.). Also, the ASG has even included foreign members whose origin was Indonesia or Malaysia (Abuza, 2008).

The ASG intention was to preserve a base with a minimum of 400 members, according to Australian intelligence, although ASG recruitment is said to fluctuate –it has escalated in terms of succeeds of their terrorist operations but also decreased due to pressure from the Philippines forces (CEP, n.d.). According to Banlaoi (2010), the ASG illicit operations is the reason why they enhanced their reputation and resources, therefore facilitating recruitment.

New recruits to ASG seems to be promised of having a status and wealth, turning it into the main motivation instead of ideological fulfilment, hence, poor Muslim people end up volunteering their sons so they join the ASG, and in return, they shall receive food supplies and financial support, that amounts to a few hundred dollars, monthly received (Banlaoi, 2010).

Banlaoi (2010) also add as motivations for the recruitment: ASG's marijuana production, clan conflicts that in Mindanao abound or revenge for family assassinated by the Philippine forces. Furthermore, The Republic Act no. 9054 was unilaterally implemented and although there was a disappointing outcome of it, it actually benefited the ASG's recruitment, because every individual that stood up for a moderate frame found the radical frame more attractive (Thompson, 2018).

### 3.2.5.2.  Training

ASG members have been trained by AQ and JI in guerrilla warfare, bomb-making and military operations in general (CEP, n.d.). Before 9/11, ASG members were physically trained in Afghanistan with AQ, but after the 9/11 shift, AQ relations with the ASG turned limited, although the U.S. National Consortium for the START (2015) –Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism– states the ASG still received guidance from AQ either from AQ affiliates that could travel to the Philippines or through other means.

The AQ perpetrator of the World Trade Center bombing, Ramzi Yousef, trained a small part of the ASG in making bombs, as the ASG is well known for receiving this kind of training and also the use of weapons from foreign terrorists (Fellman, 2011). Furthermore, Umar Patek and Dulmatin, members of the JI in Indonesia, travelled to the Philippines to train the ASG fighters on the use and manufacture of IEDs (Banlaoi, 2010).

Finally, the ASG has been able to target ferries and diverse sea boats carrying tourists after the group turned adept at maritime terror attacks due to their maritime knowledge because of descending from Philippine Moro tradition of fishing and seafaring (Banlaoi, 2010). In fact, the ASG uses this knowledge to train other members for overtaking and attacking ships, boats and barges in order to further their kidnapping-for-ramson agenda (Banlaoi, 2010).

### 3.2.6. Modus Operandi

ASG had to main master frames or factions with different active operations in Sulu and Basilan, so ASG was unique among the rest of terrorist groups. They both shared the struggle for recognition and opportunism (Thompson, 2018). Each faction chose a radical frame from which violence was justified. During the time frame when Khadaffy Janjalani was the leader of the ASG, there was a tactical shift, moving from "too drawn-out, risky and labour-intensive" kidnapping for ransom operations to a developed ASG determined by a comeback to "classic terrorism of bombings" (Thompson, 2018). They ended up becoming so, right after the U.S. involved itself within the confrontation with counterterrorism resources and forces (Santos et al., 2010).

### 3.2.6.1.  Tactics

Guerrilla tactics and kidnapping for ransom are ASG's major activities throughout its history. Besides, according to Banlaoi (2010), this group uses other tactics, including armed attacks, assassinations, bombings, beheadings, robbery, murder or even monetary extortion of businesses and individuals.

Forging alliances with other groups so as to be successful in the operations as well as in criminal activities is a clear example of the Modus Operandi pursued by groups in the Philippines in general, and the ASG in particular (Banlaoi, 2008, 38). Hence, the ASG is characterised for being able to operate either independently or as part of a bigger group, not representing a tactical concern for them, as they are able to have a high impact, whether they are a big or a small unit (Banlaoi, 2008, 42). Therefore, according to Niksch (2007), the ASG tend to employ these aforementioned tactics after predesignating a killing area in which troops shall be ambushed by a small unit. Moreover, Banlaoi (2008, 43) highlights the remarkable capability of the ASG to request local support despite its small number of fighters, which is one of their biggest strengths. Banlaoi (2008, 43) also remarks the fact that the purpose of the high number of kidnapping and other criminal activities of the ASG is not only to obtain money for them, rather is to "build up its manpower and help the local communities". It consists of an exchange, in other words, the ASG help locals whilst locals provide them protection, thus becoming a "safe heaven" for the insurgents as they also provide key logistical support with ammunitions, firearms and explosives (Banlaoi, 2008, 44). The question that arises here is whether the ASG intention is really to help local communities or if their modus operandi materialised in both, a manipulative and a lucrative strategy (Thompson, 2018). The last alternative is the most accurate option, taking into account that, on the one hand, it is true the Philippines and the U.S. adopted the policy of "no negotiation, no ransom" when dealing with hostage takers (Stratfor, 2003); on the other hand, however, there were indeed other countries that wanted to release captives, hence they would pay any sum at any time, such as Norway (AFP, 2016).

### 3.2.6.2.  Targets[9]

Cronin (2002) makes a difference between victims and targets of terrorism: "the targets of a terrorist episode are not the victims killed or maimed in the attack, but rather the governments, publics, or constituents among whom the terrorists hope to engender a reaction".

In order to success and create an independent Islamic state, the ASG main targets are Christians, Philippine military forces and foreigners mainly, but also a wider selection of individuals, such as businesspeople, politicians or even local Filipinos (Banlaoi, 2010).

Many experts in the ASG agree on the way the group shall have a personal purpose on committing some acts. For instance, when the ASG abducts Christians, is mainly because they use them as slave labourers, so they keep them for weeks –even for months–, and something similar happens to women: the ASG abducts them so they marry jihadi fighters against their will (Bonnet, 2015). Nevertheless, these intentions differ, as some attacks of the ASG, when it comes to bombing or beheading plantation workers, has a very different purpose, as it is not only inflicting harm, but also instilling fear.

### 3.2.6.3.  Cases

Although the ASG is been described by the government and media as a "mere bandit group" (Banlaoi, 2006), the first recorded activity of the ASG which was not considered "banditry" anymore was in 1991. On 4th April, they carried out a grenade attack, in which 2 Christians from the U.S. were killed; and, in August, they bombed M/V Doulos, a Christian missionary ship, 2 people were killed and 40 wounded (CISAC, 2018)[10]. Both attacks took place in the City of Zamboanga. Ever since, the ASG has been considered a dangerous terrorist movement because of their many acts of violence.

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[9] See *Graphic 3* and *Graphic 4* in Annex.
[10] See *Table 2* in Annex.

Until the 2000s, the ASG was believed to have around 700 members, considered to be highly motivated; although, after the 2000s, the figure was reduced, and they could not reach even 400 people (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, 2002).

Simultaneously, there were other insurgent groups in the Philippines, such as the NPA, with around 8,000 members, or such as the MILF, with more than 10,000, showed how small was the ASG in comparison (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, 2002). However, the ASG proved the number of people is not all, as the achievements and impact of their activities are considered to be far beyond its size due to the number of casualties and fatalities, as it can show the fact that the ASG has engaged in more than 370 terrorist activities since 1991 until 2000 (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, 2002).

- Main terminal of the Davao International Airport (4th March 2003)

A member of the ASG blew himself up, killing also other 20 people and wounding more than 150 in a lounge outside the main terminal of the Davao International Airport in Davao, Philippines (GTD, 2021). There was an American missionary from Iowa who was among those 20 killed, as well as another American missionary with her two children were injured. The responsibility for the attack was claimed by one of the leaders of the ASG, the Philippines government, however, rejected the claim (GTD, 2021). Nevertheless, the MILF was alleged to be also responsible for the most intense terrorist attack of those years. According to the GTD (2021), "members may have used the services of a known JI operative in preparing and detonating the bomb". A further clue can be given because of the timing of the attack, as it took place "before a planned deployment of United States anti-terrorism troops to the region" (GTD, 2021).

The main aim of targeting foreigners at a location such as an international airport, intended to command global attention, therefore giving credence to the aforementioned interpretation. It is speculated that the cause of this incident is the Philippines government's interest in the military solution to the *Mindanao problem* as it was.

According to Santos (2001, cited in Thompson 2018), scholars distinguish between two interconnected issues: the *Muslim problem* is related to "the sociocultural and economic life of the people" in the Philippines on the one side, and on the other side, the *Mindanao problem*, linked with "the socioeconomic and political struggles of Muslim leaders among themselves and against intruders into their homeland".

Nevertheless, viability of the peace process, or the perception of it, was already modified. In fact, the Davao International Airport bombing is believed to have been inspired by the radical frame, specifically due to frustration with the overall peace process (Thompson, 2018).

- Superferry 14 in Manila Bay (27th February 2004)

The Philippines archipelagic setting is both, lucrative for businesses and a need for the civilians to travel to big cities – where most of the work is– or to produce and travel goods as well (Dimailig et al., 2011). The inefficiency in the Philippines' domestic shipping industry is the result of policies undertaken by the country's government, such as inadequate waterways, undeveloped ports, non-maintenance of vessels… and the most relevant of them: all parties attitudes on the observation of security and safety regulation and policies application, for instance, passenger vessels sail with not enough "life preserving aids" (Dimailig et al., 2011).

A bomb made of 8 pounds or 4 kilograms of TNT was placed on the lower section of the ship and detonated whilst hiding in a TV set. The explosion was so powerful that the blast wave created a fire that destroyed the Superferry 14 in Manila Bay, whilst it carried 899 people –crew and passengers–, killing 116 (GTD, 2021). The sinking of this vessel proved the need for severe security and safety measures, revealed a vulnerability to terror attacks of maritime transport and showed that maritime terrorism is one of the main capabilities of the ASG (Dimailig et al., 2011).

- Valentine's Day Bombings (14th February 2005)

The "Valentine's day Bombings" by the ASG consisted of 2 simultaneous bombs detonating in Mindanao –Davao City and General Santos City– that were followed by another bus bombing in Makati City. The blast, overall, wounded more than 140 people and killed 8. Originally, they were suicide missions, as the ASG has been prepared and trained on this strategy by Dulmatin and Umar Patek –JI members– (Fabe, 2013). The simultaneous bombings revealed that the ASG is an expert in urban terrorism as well (Atkinson, 2012).

The ASG stated the Valentine's Day attacks was a message for President Arroyo, as a revenge for the military crackdown order in the southern Philippines against all Islamist separatists (Lynch, 2007).

- Marawi (2017)

During the so called "Ramadan Jihad", the militant action by the IS affiliates considered to be the most serious was the siege of Marawi, capital city of Lanao del Sur, province in the Southern Philippine island of Mindanao. There were seven coordinated assaults on the 23rd of May 2017, in which nine people were executed, and Marawi became the first city to fall for the IS out of the Middle East and North Africa (Gunaratna, 2017).

The Marawi siege sought to replicate an establishment of the IS in the Philippines (Franco, 2017). It was five months of urban combat, May to October 2017. After the Valentine's Day bombings, it was shown the expertise of the ASG in urban combat, but in Marawi siege, the insurgent group step up to the next level, as they even set up a checkpoint and stopped a truck carrying Christian civilians and government forces in Marawi (GTD, 2021).

It all began when the Amir or leader of ASG and of IS-pledged forces in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, was sighting in the city of Marawi, and Philippine security forces on 23rd May 2017 raided a safe house in Marawi after they received a report in which the city was being overrun (Franco, 2017). After observing closely, the city of Marawi, they created and prepared a list with the targets, so the IS fighters infiltrated the city under the cover of the Tablighi Jamaat convention attendance (Gunaratna, 2017).

The conflict had two main sides. On one side, joined forces of Isnilon Hapilon and the Maute Brothers. On the other side, the NPA, the MNLF with external assistance of China, the U.S. and some countries from the ASEAN (Singh *et al.,* 2019). Originally, the main aim of this operation was to disrupt the plan of Hapilon and his allies to launch attacks during the period of Ramadan; it ended up, however, in widespread clashes. First issue was the underestimation by the AFP of Hapilon and his forces, as they thought they were only a few dozen militants whilst in reality there were hundreds of terrorist militants fighting all together (Franco, 2017). It was actually estimated that they were around 300 fighters when the attack in Marawi began, 150 out of them were Maranaos IS fighters; 40 foreign fighters from Malaysia, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia; 50 Tausog and Yakans from the ASG; 30 Balik Islams –people converted to Islam– and 30 Maguindanaon fighters (Gunaratna, 2017).

Furthermore, it is necessary to explain the built environment in the city of Marawi, because, if it is compared to other provinces, it is distinctive that every commercial establishment and home is made of reinforced concrete, as a matter of response to clan conflicts in the region (Franco, 2017). Hence, once the battles, skirmishes and clashes began, Marawi was turned into a defensive fortress, and those commercial establishments and homes became fighting positions (Gunaratna, 2017). ASG fighters followed by foreign fighters led the fight, whilst Hapilon –with a full battle gear– flanked by the Maute brothers commanded and coordinated the attacks; however, they had to retreat from the battlefield when the Philippines government forces started to target leaders, although they kept coordinating operations from fortified buildings or mosques (Gunaratna, 2017). The battle got intense, so the IS forces received more support from Basilan, Lanao and Maguindanao provinces, until the waterways and land routes to Marawi were sealed by the government forces (Gunaratna, 2017).

The Marawi siege marked a turning point for several reasons: the extent of violence, the use of new technologies and, finally, propaganda. In terms of violence, before this siege, there was the Zamboanga City siege in 2013 which was considered the largest combat scenario in the Philippines until Marawi's because there was a military assault that lasted 19 days with around 500 insurgents occupying a residential area (Franco, 2017). So, the scale of violence is seen in Marawi and after these five months, on

16th October, it was announced the end of the siege as Hapilon and Omarkhayam were killed along with 847 terrorists, 163 government security forces and 47 civilians (Franco, 2017). The use of new technologies throughout the conflict constituted a widespread use by both parties of "commercial off-the-shelf systems", like for instance the use of drones (Franco, 2017). On the one hand, in order to detect AFP movements, the ASG and the Maute brothers used as surveillance assets consumer-grade drones, more specifically, hobbyist quadcopters; whilst on the other hand, these quadcopters unmanned aerial vehicles were also used by the AFP so as to increase their capabilities in reconnaissance and surveillance (Franco, 2017). Furthermore, technologies were used as propaganda, such as when IS explained and justified the control of Marawi by saying the aim was to make it "truly Islamic", in a dissemination across pro IS Telegram groups by Semion Almujaheed – IS fighter in the Philippines– on 28th May (Gunaratna, 2017).

# 4. CONCLUSIONS

Terrorism has evolved and become a global concern, in particular after 9/11. The Abu Sayyaf Group is still seen as one of the most lethal and violent Muslim insurgent groups in the Philippines, capable of inflicting terror through diverse strategies and tactics, such as hostage taking, kidnapping for ransom, bombings or armed assaults.

The ASG had its heyday in the last years of the 20th century and the first years of the following 21st century. Throughout the years, their members have decreased, but they still control the southern Philippines areas of Basilan and Sulu. According to Hammerberg et al. (2017), attacks dropped 56 % during the first 12 years of the 21st century whilst fighters were reduced from 1270 to 437, therefore reducing people's support and increasing approval of the Philippine forces.

It's also a group that has evolved in order to survive, therefore, once they pledge alliance to the IS –after being an AQ ally– and entered into "globalization of the jihad", they began focusing more on criminal activities for funds, above all, through kidnapping for ramson.

ASG's network structure and its flexibility when it comes to ideology, due to internal disagreement regarding their relationship with the IS, means it is a group subjected to instability –as it's hard to control and command as a whole– whilst resistant to eradication.

The project has analysed the Abu Sayyaf group and the environment in which they operate, on the assumption that the ASG success wasn't only because of being an AQ or IS affiliate, but because there was also an environment and a historical context of the Philippines key for their appearance. Therefore, we may conclude the conditions that led the ASG to become such a threat were three: history of jihadism and violence, demographic instabilities and internal conflict. Threads in its history show that the ASG is the pioneer for future terrorism groups and terrorist operations in the Philippines.

Still nowadays current policies of the Philippines do not effectively address Moro political dissatisfaction nor the roots that causes it. Instead, they tend to increase the Moro dissatisfaction. Therefore, the Philippines shall eradicate the Moro insurgencies, among them the ASG, so as to end jihadist terrorism in the country. The ASG, however, keeps carrying out attacks on foreigners, civilians and the Philippine forces, as the group regained strength. In fact, the ASG resurgence is the perfect example of a group that will still be a threat to the Philippines with the potential to extent their influence, therefore threatening security interests not only of Southeast Asia region, but also the whole international community.

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# 6. Annex

*Table 1: Dissemination medium: an analysis of a sample of 2,878 propaganda sample during the period between 1996-2005.*

|  | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Internet* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 19 | 234 | 2439 |
| *TV* | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 18 | 10 |
| *Written* | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 30 | 19 | 12 | 0 |
| *Unknown* | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 16 | 17 | 2 | 1 |
| *Total* | 3 | 1 | 12 | 3 | 1 | 19 | 63 | 60 | 266 | 2450 |

Source: Torres et al., 2006.

*Table 2: Top Terrorism Incidents in the Philippines: 31st March 2001 – 1st February 2019\*.*

| Rank | Group | City | Province | Date | Type | Target | Hostages | Injuries | Deaths |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | ASG | Lamitan | Basilan | 02/06/2001 | Hostage taking, barricade | Medical personnel, hospital patients | 200 | 41 | 16 |
| *2* | ASG | Zamboanga City | Zamboanga Sibugay | 28/10/2001 | Explosion, Bombing | Civilians in Zamboanga Cultural Centre | 0 | 48 | 11 |
| *3* | ASG | General Santos | South Cotabato | 21/04/2002 | Explosion, Bombing | Shopping Centre in General Santos City | 0 | 45 | 14 |
| *4* | ASG | Davao City | Davao | 04/03/2003 | Explosion, Bombing | Davao International Airport | 24 | 150 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | ASG | Manila | Metropolitan Manila | 27/02//2004 | Explosion, Bombing | Superferry 14 | 116 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | ASG | General Santos | South Cotabato | 12/12/2004 | Explosion, Bombing | Civilians shopping in General Santos | 15 | 58 | 0 |
| 7 | ASG | General Santos, Davao | South Cotabato, Davao | 14/02/2005 | Explosion, Bombing | Business civilians, bus | 14 | 6 | 8 |
| 8 | ASG | Quezon City | Metropolitan Manila | 13/11/2007 | Explosion, Bombing | Congressman | 3 | 12 | 0 |
| 9 | ASG | Lumapid | Sulu | 28/07/2014 | Armed assault | Vehicles | 0 | 12 | 23 |
| 10 | ASG | Zamboanga City | Zamboanga Sibugay | 23/01/2015 | Explosion, Bombing | Bar | 0 | 52 | 2 |
| 11 | ASG | Zamboanga City | Zamboanga Sibugay | 18/09/2015 | Armed assault | Bus | 0 | 32 | 1 |
| 12 | ASG | Isabela City | Basilan | 01/10/2015 | Assassination | Convoy of Vice-Mayor Abdulbak Ajibon | 0 | 11 | 4 |
| 13 | ASG | Ungkaya Pukan | Basilan | 03/01/2016 | Hostage taking, kidnapping | Jeepney | 26 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | ASG | Banguindan | Basilan | 09/04/2016 | Armed assault, Explosion, Bombing | Soldiers of AFP | 21 | 51 | 0 |
| 15 | ASG | MV Giang Hai | Vietnam | 19/02/2017 | Hijacking | MV Giang Hai Ship | 4 | 0 | 17 |
| 16 | ASG, Maute Group | Marawi | Lanao del Sur | 2017 | Armed assault, Facility Attack, Hostage Taking | Civilians in Marawi, government troops | 168 government forces, 114 civilians, 270 unidentified individuals | unknown | unknown |

| 17 | ASG | Lamitan | Basilan | 31/07/2018 | Explosion, Bombing | military and CAFGU joint checkpoint | 12 | 6 | 0 |
| 18 | ASG | Jolo | Sulu | 27/01/2019 | Explosion, Bombing | Lady of Mount Carmel Cathedral | 22 | 101 | 0 |

Source: GDT, 2021; Thompson, 2018.

*The ranking is based on personal weights assigned to hostages, injuries and deaths. Default ordering is by date of the attacks.
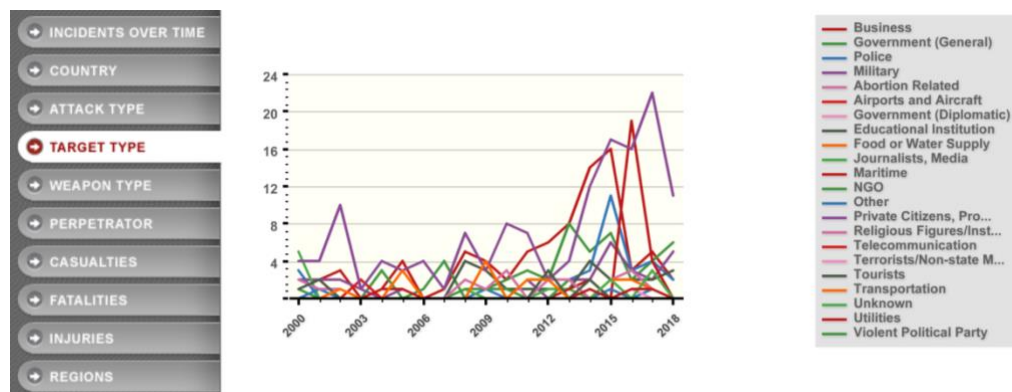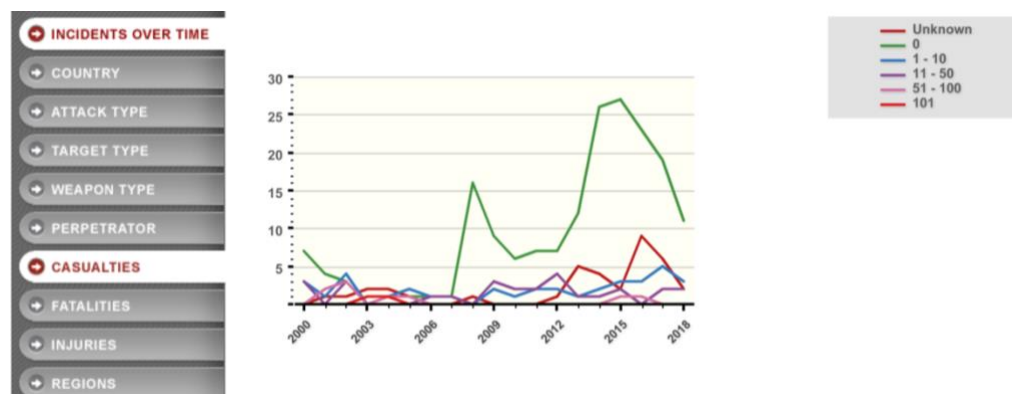
*Graphic 1: ASG: Attack Type.*
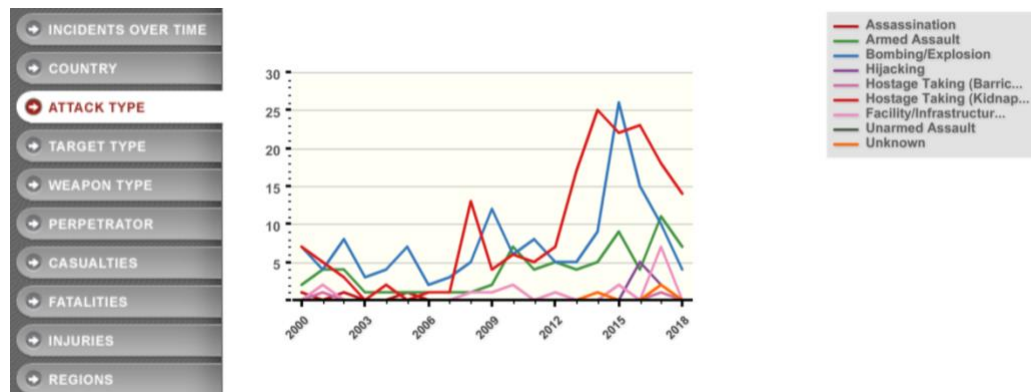


*Graphic 2: ASG: Weapon Type.*
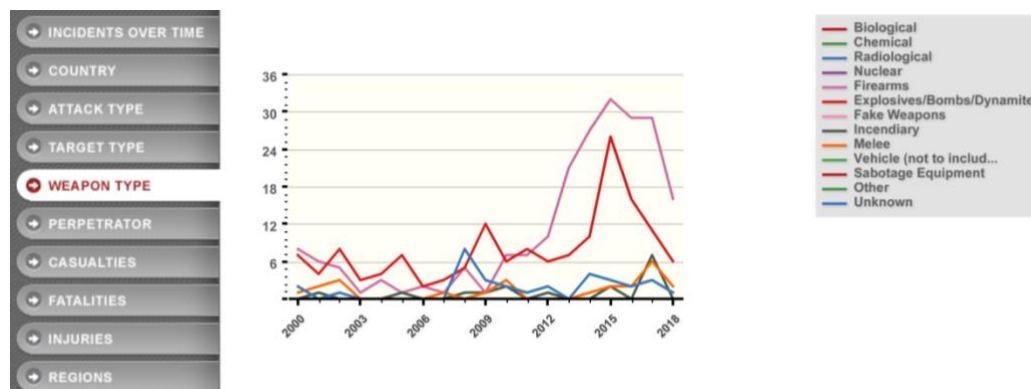
*Graphic 3: ASG: Target Type.*



*Graphic 4: ASG: Casualties & Incidents over time.*



Source Graphic 1, Graphic 2, Graphic 3, Graphic 4: GTD, 2021.