ISIS-EA Remains an Active Threat Despite COVID-19

- An April ambush on AFP troops killed 12 and wounded 13 in the deadliest ISIS-EA attack in 15 months.
- Philippine authorities disrupted an ISIS-EA cell near Manila, one of the first identified cells outside the country's southern provinces.
- Several terrorist attacks took place during late May, while Muslims were celebrating the end of Ramadan.

COVID-19 Quarantines Generate Tensions and Stretch Security Resources

- AFP and police resources were deployed for quarantine enforcement, especially around Manila.
- ISIS-EA social media posts called for attacks in response to COVID-19 restrictions and threatened violence if mosques were not allowed to reopen.
- In May, ISIS-EA attacked a COVID-19 quarantine checkpoint, killing 2 AFP soldiers.
- The Philippine government’s COVID-19 ceasefire with communist rebels broke down, with both sides returning to active fighting.

COVID-19 Impacts U.S. Advise and Assist Efforts

- U.S. forces interacted remotely with AFP partners in advise and assist efforts and in providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).
- The AFP increasingly relied on its own ISR to supplement U.S. support.
- U.S. civil affairs efforts focused on delivering medical supplies and equipment to Philippine healthcare workers.

Philippines Suspends Termination of Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)

- In February, the Philippine government announced it would terminate the VFA, which grants access to U.S. military personnel and vessels.
- The June decision to suspend termination extended the VFA for at least 6 months.
- The COVID-19 pandemic, worsening economic trends, and aggressive Chinese behavior in the South China Sea factored into the suspension.

Philippine Government Enacts New Counterterrorism Law

- The Anti-Terrorism Act enhances law enforcement powers to arrest individuals for planning and providing material support for terrorist acts.
- U.S. advisors said they hope the law will help the Philippines transition from a military to a law enforcement approach to terrorism.
- The law has drawn local and international criticism from those who fear it may lead to abuses of power and silencing of political dissent.

USAID Approves $22 Million for the COVID-19 Response

- Much of this assistance had yet to be implemented, with only 3 percent of the funding disbursed this quarter.
- Weak health systems and limited testing hindered the COVID-19 response in the southern Philippines.
- USAID implementers adopted remote monitoring of programs and faced travel restrictions in some areas.

Oversight

- Lead IG and partner agencies completed 6 oversight reports this quarter, including audits of DoD mobile medical team training and of the DoS anti-terrorism program.