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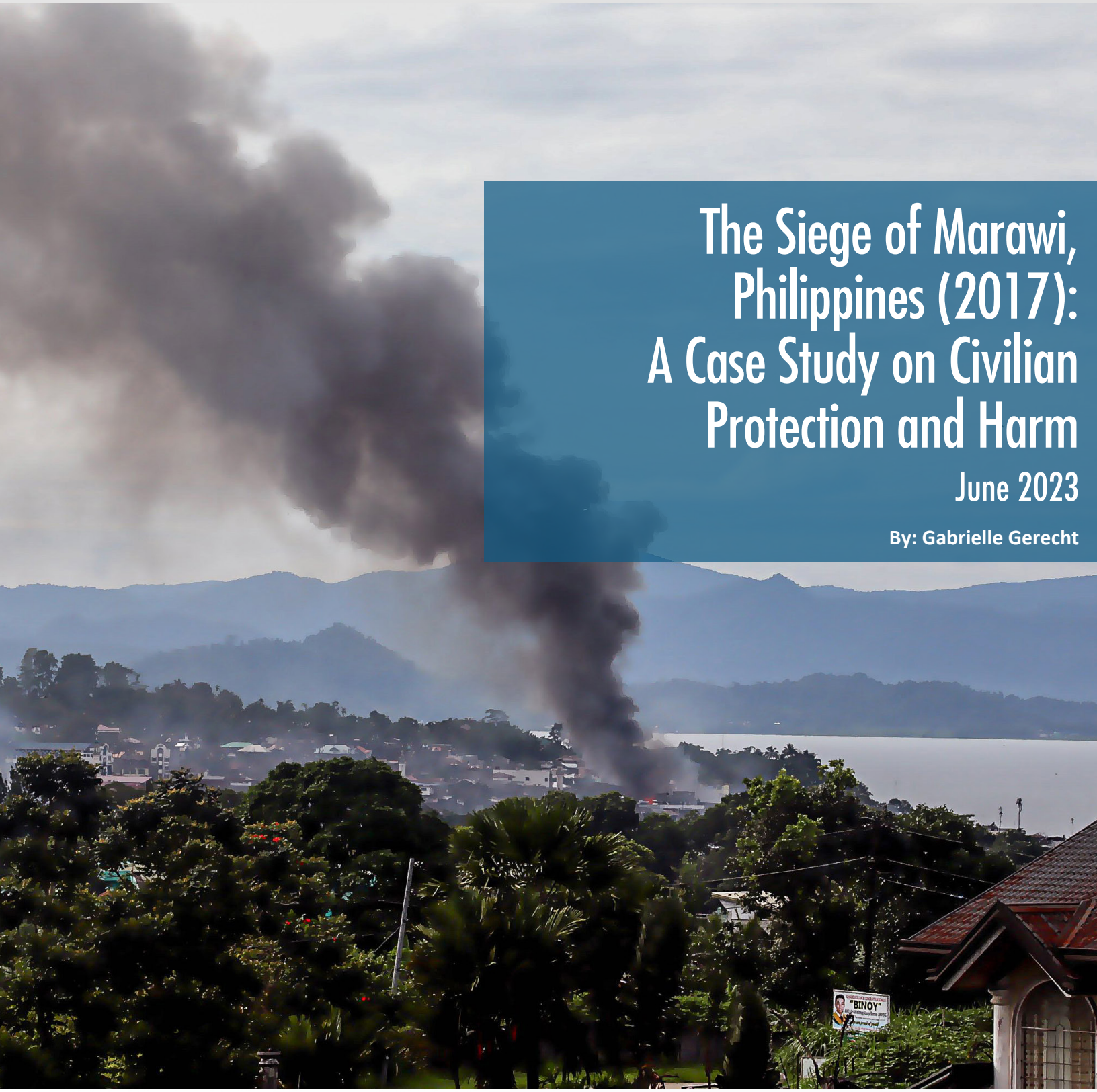

The Siege of Marawi, Philippines (2017): A Case Study on Civilian Protection and Harm

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Cover Image: A Philippine Air Force (PAF) chopper carries out airstrikes against the Maute group at Barangay Banggulo near Lanao Lake in Marawi City on Tuesday (July 4, 2017). (PNA photos by Oliver Marquez) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Marawi#/media/File:Marawi_chopper_airstrike.jpg

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Abbreviations

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
ARMM-HEART	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao - Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
BDA	Bangsamoro Development Agency
BFP	Bureau of Fire Protection
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BMCRRP	Bangon Marawi Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery
CA	Conflict Area
CMOCC	Civil-Military Operations Coordinating
CSP-PCVE	Community Support Program–Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
CTIWFP	Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program
DIILS	Defense Institute of International Legal Studies
DoD	United States Department of Defense
DOH	Department of Health
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EcoWeb	Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IMET	International Military Education & Training
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPAC	Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict
IRR	Implementing Rules and Regulations
IS	Islamic State
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JCMAC	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Assistance Center
JDCC	Joint Defence Cooperation Committee
JETG	Joint Engineer Task Group
JTF	Joint Task Force
MAA	Most Affected Area
MARADECA	Maranao People Development Centre

MBA	Main Battle Area
MCB	Marawi Compensation Board
MDT	The Mutual Defense Treaty
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MLSA	Mutual Logistics Support Agreement
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MNNA	Major non-NATO ally status
MSU	Mindanao State University
MSU-IIT	Mindanao State University-Ilagan Institute of Technology
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NDRRMC	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHA	National Housing Authority
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
PDRRMC	Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council
PNP	Philippines National Police
POC	Protection of Civilians
PPO	Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RPG	Rocket-Propelled Grenades
SAG	Special Action Group
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operation Forces
SOVFA	Status of Visiting Forces Agreement
TFBM	Task Force Bangon Marawi
TPBM Movement	Teach Peace Build Peace Movement
U.S.	United States
UC	Unified Command
UN	United Nation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VFA	Visiting Forces Agreement
YPEERPilipinas	Youth Peer Education Network

1. Executive Summary

From May to October 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) fought local militia groups pledged to the Islamic State (IS) in the Islamic Capital of the Philippines, Marawi. As IS was weakening in the Middle East, IS fighters began to search for a new home. The emir of IS in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, sought to take control of Marawi as a new IS base in Asia.

IS militants skillfully prepared for the takeover, capitalizing on Marawi's dense infrastructure, outperforming the AFP for several months. IS militants used fear and violence as part of their strategy to take control of the city. As a result, civilians trapped in Marawi or taken hostage by IS militants witnessed horrifying atrocities. Despite AFP's attempts to remove as many civilians from the battleground as possible, actions taken by AFP resulted in civilian casualties and destruction of civilian structures and infrastructure. A high pace and volume of airstrikes and the actions of individual soldiers left civilians and parts of the city in ruins. Six years on, Marawi is still a shell of what it once was. The reconstruction process has taken several years longer than expected and many Maranaos remain displaced or do not have access to basic necessities or livelihoods.

> ***"Any future war against a peer or near-peer enemy will contain some measure of urban combat. A broad base of historical, demographic, sociopolitical, and military analysis makes that fact abundantly clear."[1]***

The urbanization of many parts of the world means that many future conflicts, localized terrorism, or great power conflict will occur in areas similar Marawi. The siege of Marawi in the Philippines is an important case study in understanding how militaries can better prepare and anticipate civilian harm and protection in the context of urban armed conflict. The key findings of this report are listed below.

2. Key Findings From The Siege Of Marawi

1. **AFP considered the Marawi operation a success, however the entire main battle area was destroyed and the conflict will affect generations of Maranaos**
   a. The scale of civilian harm suggests that the protection of civilians was not sufficiently factored into AFP operations planning. The impact of this conflict on civilians will affect generations of Maranaos.

2. **AFP acknowledged civilian harm from past operations. Yet, those lessons were not applied to Marawi.**
   a. AFP openly acknowledged some harm the military has caused to the Moro people in past operations, including the Moro conflict of 1972 and the 2000 "all-out war." AFP's open acceptance of their past and eagerness to change the narrative led to a general change in sentiment in Mindanao towards the military. However, AFP has not yet acknowledged the full breadth of harm they caused during the siege of Marawi. When harm is acknowledged, the military can better anticipate and mitigated civilian harm ahead of and after the conflict as well as further support to recovery of the Moro people.

3. **Greater investments in urban warfare capabilities could have helped to avoid the destruction in Marawi**
   a. Urbanization of the globe means that conflict will occur in urban areas. Greater investments in urban warfare tactics and weapons systems, including smaller tanks and drones, could have helped to minimize infrastructure damage in Marawi.

4. **Further investments in intelligence and an analysis of the civilian environment is still required prior, during, and after operations:**
   a. limited detection of on-going stockpiling of munitions in private residences and religious sites;
   b. the concept of "pintakasi" whereby Maranaos collectively fight against an outsider;
   c. lack of familiarity of the vast network of tunnels utilized by militants led to inability to isolate militant fighters.

3. Recommendations

This report presents two key sets of recommendations for the Department of Defense (DoD) aimed at enhancing AFP's protection of civilian obligations. Firstly, it is imperative for DoD to actively encourage and facilitate the Armed Forces of the Philippines to conduct a comprehensive review of the Marawi siege from a Protection of Civilians (PoC) perspective. Although AFP has authored several books and articles, such as "Marawi and Beyond: The Joint Task Force Marawi Story" by AFP's Operations Research Center, the existing literature primarily focuses on heroic accounts from the battlefield and innovative information operations utilized by AFP. Limited attention has been devoted to exploring how AFP can leverage the lessons learned from the siege to assess tactical, procedural, and capability adjustments needed to anticipate and minimize civilian harm in future operations. An assessment from a protection of civilians perspective would significantly contribute to improving civilian protection efforts in future conflicts

1. **Encourage and facilitate AFP to undertake a thorough review of the siege of Marawi** to extract specific lessons and areas for development of tactics, procedures, and appropriate capabilities to anticipate and minimize harm to civilians.
   a. An effective and thorough review would include:
      i. Documenting examples of effective adaption and innovation
      ii. Focusing attention on specific types of civilian harm which can be anticipated and avoided
      iii. Inviting the perspectives of:
         1. Displaced leaders (Bakwits) and other affected civilians
         2. Local civil society organizations
         3. Marawi Reconstruction Conflict Watch

2. **Encourage and support AFP to codify and operationalize key lessons** through strengthened legal protections, doctrine, training, and procedures. This should include incorporating examples of innovation in training

3. **Offer lessons from U.S. operations in urban settings** along with steps the U.S. is taking to apply learning to mitigate civilian harm in future operations

Secondly, the battle for Marawi also provides an opportunity for AFP to develop effective measures to anticipate and mitigate civilian harm in future opportunities by:

1. Investing in analysis of the civilian environment prior to battle to inform operational planning, including weapons selection.
2. Updating checkpoint procedures to comply with basic norms and legal obligations and ensuring rigorous training and oversight to reinforce compliance.
3. Establishing fair and accessible complaint mechanisms that the civilian population, civil society, and other actors can access and use to report problematic conduct and abuses.
4. Establishing a means to assess and track civilian harm resulting from their operations and to inform

necessary adaptations to better anticipate and avoid civilian harm.

5. Strengthening and systematizing investigations into deliberate mistreatment of civilians and appropriate disciplinary action.
6. Investing further in civil-military dialogue tailored to help anticipate and avoid civilian harm during armed conflict and to facilitate timely and accountable post-conflict compensation and reconstruction.
7. Prioritize young AFP soldiers in DoD training programs under the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) including the International Military Education & Training (IMET), the Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS) and the Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare Fellowship Program (CTIWFP).
8. Work with the United Kingdom to assess challenges and gaps in their trauma risk management training for AFP soldiers to see how the DoD can prioritize the well-being of AFP soldiers while safeguarding civilians from any potential adverse effects. Furthermore, particular attention should be given to preventing instances of abusive behavior directed towards civilians by soldiers grappling with their own traumatic experiences.
9. Encourage the establishment of a framework that addresses how AFP manages internal displacement resulting from terrorism-related conflicts, separate from frameworks currently utilized for managing displacement caused by natural disasters.

4. Introduction

The city of Marawi was once the most populous city in the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).[2] Officially known as the Islamic Capital of the Philippines, Marawi endured a devastating siege by Islamic State (IS) - affiliated militants from May to October of 2017. The siege was the longest and bloodiest Philippine military operation since World War II.[3] Seeking new territory as IS weakened in the Middle East, IS fighters, led by Isnilon Hapilon, aimed to establish a stronghold in Southeast Asia. As a majority Muslim city with deep-seated resentment against the government, Marawi was an ideal location for new IS territory. The city's dense infrastructure would also allow IS militants to easily defend their position from outsiders.

The battle lasted five months and caused significant harm to the people from Marawi, commonly referred to as the Maranao. Civilians trapped in the city or held hostage by militants experienced and witnessed horrifying atrocities. Unlike with militants, harm caused by AFP was not deliberately planned by senior leadership. Nevertheless, constant airstrikes and actions taken by individual soldiers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) left civilians and parts of the city in ruins.

This research report will look at types of civilian harm perpetrated by both parties to the conflict, IS militants and AFP. It aims to shed light on how AFP can improve their strategies and mechanisms used to protect civilians in urban conflict, especially when faced with an armed militia deliberately disregarding their legal obligations towards civilians.

The report will begin by presenting key pre-siege factors that explain why Marawi was ripe for a potential IS takeover and then delve into the forms of civilian harm committed by both militants and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In examining the siege's impact on civilians, the report will also explore measures taken by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and others to mitigate civilian harm during the siege. Finally, the report will address the current context for civilians from Marawi and the challenges civilians continue to face.

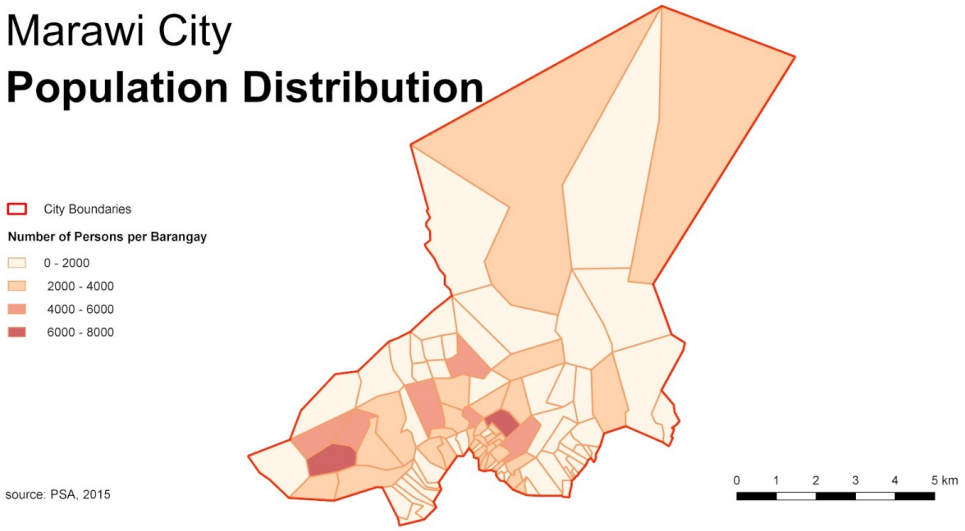
This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What forms of harm did civilians encounter during the siege of Marawi?
2. What forms of harm did civilians encounter after the siege of Marawi?
3. Were civilians also protected by the parties to the conflict and other stakeholders?
4. Was the amount of damage to civilian infrastructure necessary to counter IS-militants?
5. What civil-military coordination mechanisms existed and were they successful in protecting civilians?

5. Background

Prior to the siege, Marawi was a city of around 200,000 people, a majority of which were Muslim. Figure 1 shows the relative population densities of Marawi City's central districts. The city's central location in the region turned it into a hub for commerce, governance, and education. Marawi boasted key government offices, regional private and public service facilities (including the Amai Pakpak Medical Center), and key secular and Islamic educational centers such as the Mindanao State University (MSU) and the King Faisal Center for Islamic, Arabic, and Asian Studies.[4] Although Marawi was a main hub in Mindanao for trade and education, six out of ten persons lived below the poverty line or on less than US$500 a year.[5]

Marawi's unique social, and religious dynamics in the country highlight why IS militants chose Marawi for takeover. Dating back to the Spanish occupation of the Philippines, the indigenous, Muslim Moro people in and around Marawi have dealt with significant oppression, brutality, and forced displacement by their ruling government. In a war between 1972 and 1976, between Muslim separatist rebels in Mindanao, now known as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and the AFP, an estimated 120,000 people died in the fighting. One million people became internally displaced and more than 100,000 Philippine Muslims to fled to Malaysia. A similar conflict occurred again in the early 2000's



which resulted in 425 civilian casualties and between 755,000 and 1 million civilians displaced.

Figure 1: Map of Marawi Population Distribution[6]

Historical grievances and the marginalization of Muslim communities in Marawi and greater Mindanao contributed to growing sympathy for separatist causes. IS-affiliates took advantage of civilian distrust and fear of the government to facilitate cooperation across clans, broaden extremist recruitment pools and create new channels for funding and foreign soldiers.

Marawi's geography also played a critical role in why IS militants chose Marawi and why it became so difficult for AFP to retake control of the city.

5.a. Geography

Figure 2: Maps of Marawi City and the Main Battle Area[7]

Marawi has a total land area of 8,755 hectares (21,630 acres). Located on the northern shore of Lake Lanao, Marawi was the original converging point of all roads in Mindanao. The Agus River system, upon which the area's main hydroelectric power plant is built, runs through the middle of the city.[8] Marawi's cool climate and constant rainfall made the agricultural areas of the city suitable for high-value crops and gave the city the nickname, "the summer capital of the south." Figure 2 shows the geographic layout of Marawi and the main battle area.

Within the city sits the old historical quarter and port, Dansalan, where people from across the country came to engage in trade, commerce and governance. The historical quarter along with nearby markets and critical infrastructure including the main hydroelectric power plant and water treatment plant and an estimated 38 mosques were in the main battle area (MBA), which after the siege became known as the most affected areas (MAA) of the siege.[9] In order to cross the Agus river in the middle of Marawi, the city built three bridges: the Masiu Bridge (commonly referred to as the Raya Madaya Bridge/New Bridge), the Banggolo Bridge (commonly referred to as the Bayabao bridge), and the Mapandi Bridge (commonly referred to as the Baloi bridge). During the siege, these bridges separated the main battle area from the military-controlled "safe-zone."[10] Some of the worst fighting during the siege happened on the bridges. The Marine company who took control of the Mapandi Bridge on 20 July suffered 53 casualties. Troops regained control of the Masiu and Banggolo bridges in September, four months after fighting began.

The geography of Marawi made it the perfect location for the IS-militants. The city is protected from the east and south by Lake Lanao, reducing the number of locations where militants needed to be strategically positioned. Compounding this advantage was the absence of a significant armed forces presence in Marawi at that time, as most of the troops were engaged in operations elsewhere. As a result, the militants could concentrate their efforts on ambushing the bridges, effectively isolating the military

from the main battle area.[11]

Marawi's terrain allowed weaker forces to resist effectively and force the government and military to face a difficult dilemma: appear impotent or be responsible for significant military and civilian casualties.[12] This is common in urban battles where the advantage is always on the side of the defense.[13]

5.b. Timeline of Key Events

On 23 May 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines launched an operation in Marawi to apprehend Isnilon Hapilon, the leader of a local IS-affiliated militant group, Abu Sayyaf (Bearers of the Sword), and the IS-anointed emir for Southeast Asia. IS-affiliates were planning to take control of Marawi three days later, on the eve of Ramadan, however, the attack on Isnilon Hapilon led militants to attack the city prematurely. During the attack on Hapilon's safe house, around 100 militants unexpectedly emerged from buildings, killing several of the troops.[14] When soldiers tried to escape from the area, neighbors began to snipe at troops in what is known locally as pintakasi (collective effort in fighting an outsider).[15] Hapilon and the Maute brothers were able to escape through a hole in the wall of the safe house.[16]

After the failed arrest, militants swarmed in on several government buildings in the city, taking in hundreds of hostages, mostly Christians. Simultaneously, militants set fire to several Christian-affiliated locations including Saint Mary's Cathedral, Ninoy Aquino School and Dansalan College. Militants also burned the city's police station and released 68 prisoners from the city jail.[17] Figure 3 illustrates areas of Marawi where militants set fire to buildings. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Maute fighters began to set up

blockades on bridges to prevent AFP from entering the city and civilians from escaping.

Figure 3: Map of Marawi City and Buildings Burned by IS Militants[18]

That day, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Proclamation No. 216, which implemented martial law and the suspension of writ of habeas corpus in the whole of Mindanao, encompassing Marawi and an additional 26 million civilians in the region.[19] Martial law split Marawi into two sections during the

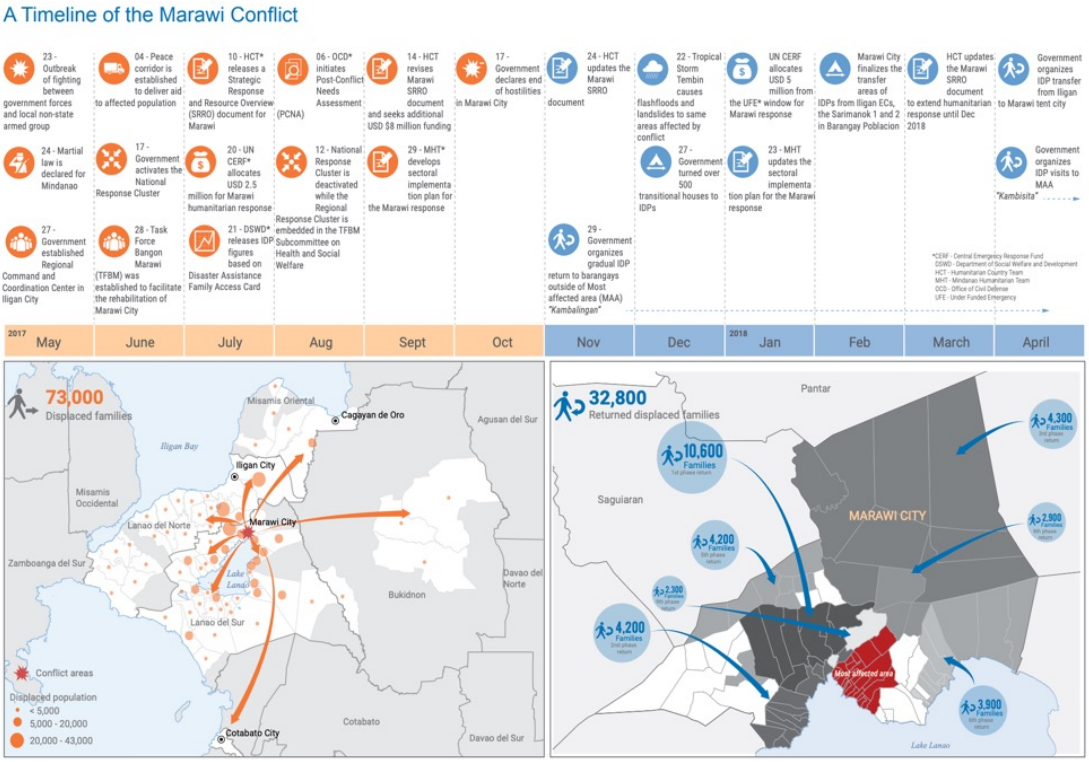
fighting: the MBA, which at the start was a 2,500 square meter (26,909 square feet)[20] combat zone, and the Controlled Area (CA) where there was no actual fighting but restricted entry.

Civilians began to leave their homes soon after martial law was announced. On 25 May, soldiers knocked on doors to order people to evacuate. Residents were fearful and left much of their belongings at home, expecting to return soon.[21] Eighty percent of civilians left within the first week, causing major traffic jams on the highways. The main evacuation route led to Ilagan city, a usual hour and a half drive from Marawi, which turned into eight hours the first week of the siege. Civilians who did not own cars had to negotiate fees with motorcyclists and taxis.[22]

The military, fearful that Ilagan would be ASG's next target, set up checkpoints on the highway. Civilians in private cars were required to open their windows and trucks. Passengers on public buses had to line up for individual inspection and were required to present identification cards. Others remained trapped in the city and remained in hiding or were taking hostage by militants. The exact number of civilians who were trapped in the city remains unknown but on 29 May 2017, the UN reported 2,300 people were still inside the city.[23] On 4 June, a peace corridor, to be discussed further in section 7, was set up by the government and rescued at least 255 civilians.

Initially, the Western Mindanao military chief Corleto Vinluan Jr thought retaking militant-controlled areas would take three days.[24] However, the AFP were unprepared for urban fighting. Troops were accustomed to operating in sparsely populated jungles and mountains.[25] The fighting droned on for five months until 23 October 2017, when the Philippine army declared victory. Roughly ten days prior, an AFP sniper killed Isnilon Hapilon and Omar Maute of the Maute Group. Figure 4 offers an illustrated timeline of the Marawi conflict.

Many civilians remained in evacuation centers and transitional housing far after the end of the siege. Martial law as well remained in effect until the end of 2019, 953 days after declaration and two years after AFP cleared the final militant-held building in Marawi. In total, official Philippine government records



indicate that 1,200 government troops, militants, and civilians were killed. Of which, at least 47 were

civilian casualties.[26]

Figure 4: A Timeline of the Marawi Conflict[27]

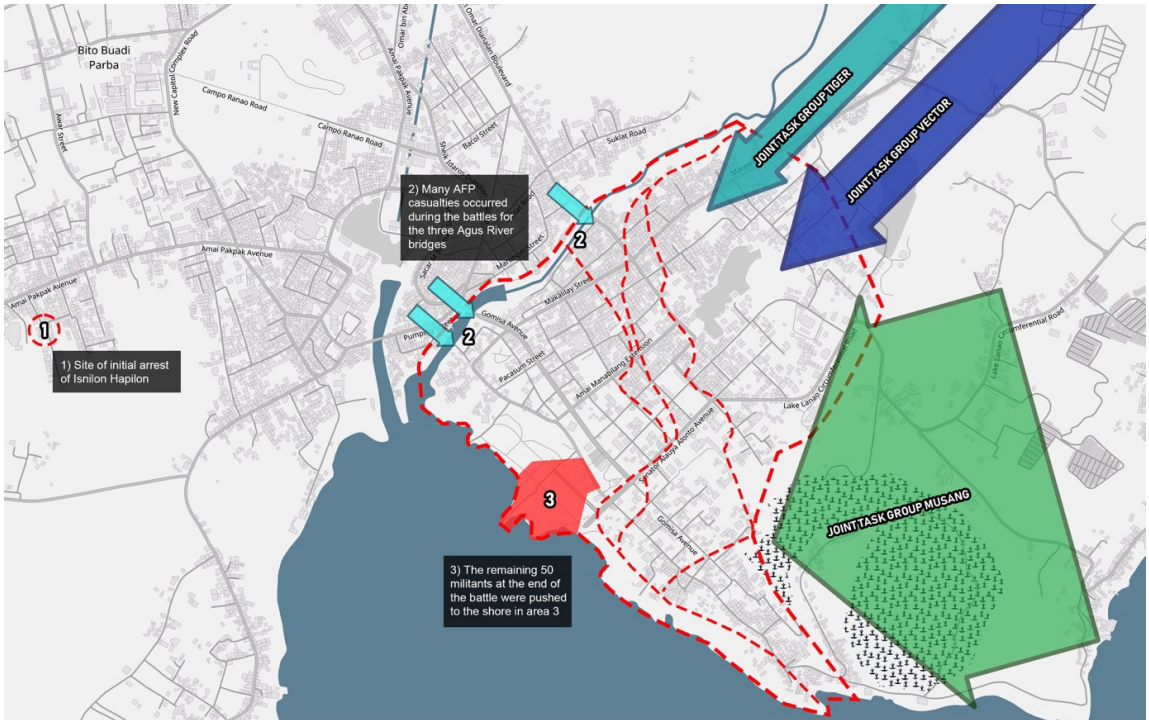
5.c. Key Stakeholders in the Siege of Marawi

There were several key players during the siege of Marawi. This report will focus on the main parties to the conflict, civilian-led branches of local and national government, former separatist groups who supported AFP, humanitarian actors and foreign military and government support to AFP.

5.c.i. Parties to the Conflict: Armed Forces of the Philippines

AFP is made up of three branches (Army, Navy, and Air Force). All three branches were involved in the siege under the Joint Task Force Marawi (JTF). JTF Marawi served as the nerve center for the battle for Marawi and was responsible for updating and facilitating the transfer of information to and from the combined operations on the ground to the AFP.[28]

The AFP described their approach to regain the city as 'SLICE-ing' (strategize, locate, isolate, constrict and eliminate).[29] The main battle area (MBA) was split into three parallel sectors from the lake. Figure 5 depicts AFP's approaches to the main battle area. Under Joint Task Group Musang, Major General Glen Paje led scout rangers and infantry forces on the eastern side adjacent to the hills. Brigadier General Melquiades Ordiales of the Philippines 1st Marine Brigade led Joint Task Group Tiger, made up of marines on the western side of the lake. Western Mindanao military chief Corleto Vinluan Jr. managed the Joint Task Group Vector, composed of special forces and the Philippines National Police (PNP) in the middle of the battle area. AFP's Special Operations Command's (SOCOM) provided special forces and army scout rangers involved in physical fighting and in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).[30] The special forces were mostly made up of the Light Reaction Regiment; a US-trained anti-terrorism unit created in response to 9/11.[31] The navy, maritime police, and the coast guard under Task Force Lawa sealed off the lake. This took a while to do since in the first few months of battle the lake was

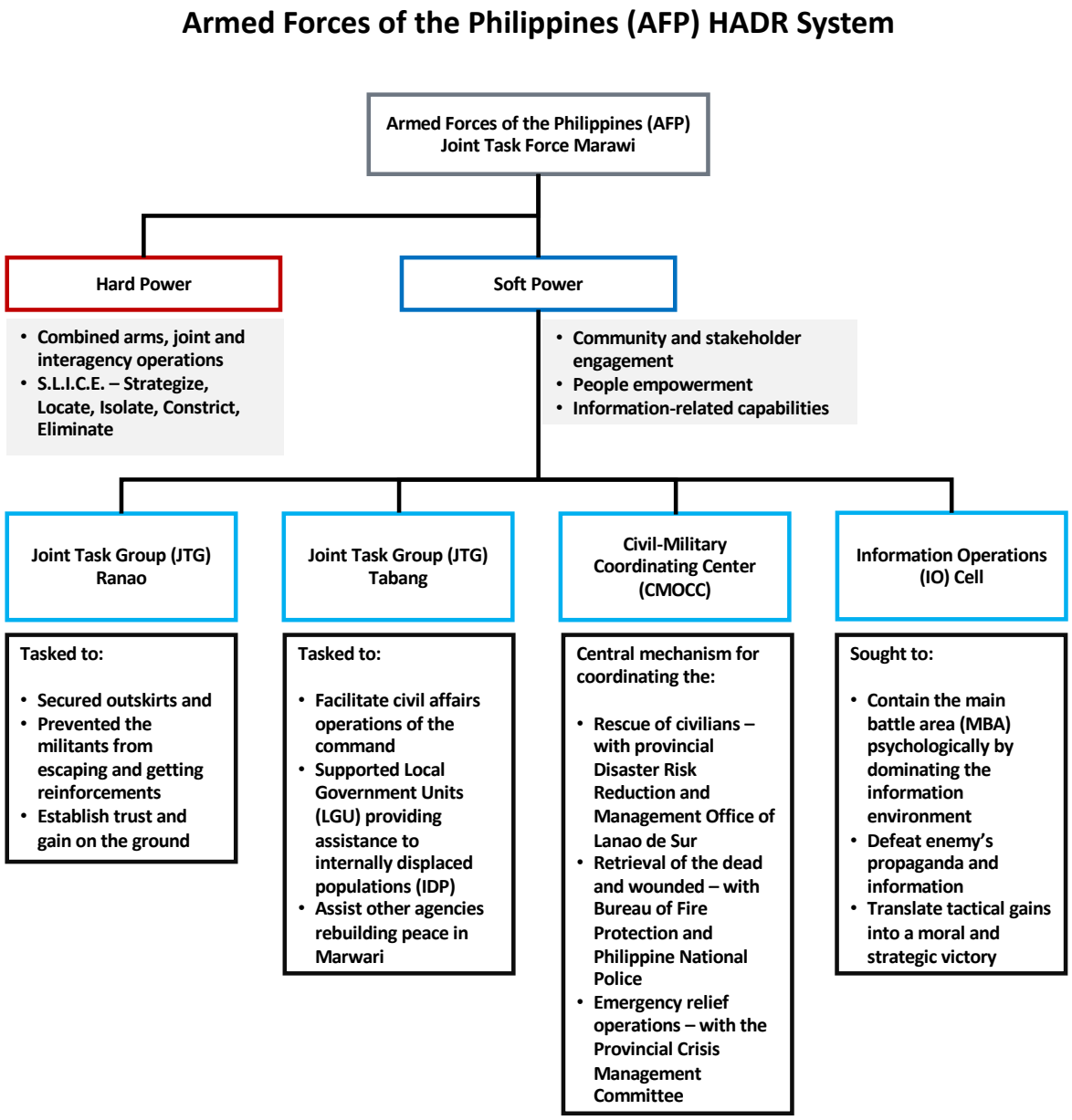


frequently used by militants to bring in reinforcements. The Air Force, using FA-50 jets controlled the skies and conducted ISR operations.[32]

Figure 5: AFP placement during the Siege of Marawi[33]

When the siege happened on 23 May, infantry brigades based in Mindanao were in the jungles trying to capture guerrilla leaders. On 25 May, they began a two-day trek through the jungle to get to Marawi. By the time troops arrived, some could barely walk from the blisters they'd acquired during the journey.[34]

The Armed Forces of the Philippines also used their humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HA/DR) branch to support their mission in Marawi. Figure 6 details AFP's HA/DR organization structure and tasks during the siege. The Civil-Military Operations Coordinating Center (CMOCC) was originally responsible for the rescue of trapped civilians, corpse retrieval, treatment of wounded civilians, organization of relief operations for for Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and accepting donations for the troops and IDPs. The CMOCC was divided into three key divisions: the Stakeholder's Desk, Rescue, Retrieval, and Relief Operations for IDPs.[35] The CMOCC in Marawi was staffed by liaison officers



from all AFP operational units and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council

(NDRRMC)-designated liaisons. When joint task group Ranao and joint task group Tabang were created, they took over the security clearances and the management of of IDPs.[36]

Figure 6: The Armed Forces of the Philippines HA/DR System

The Philippines National Police, under martial law, falls under the operational command of the military.[37] The PNP was principally responsible for conducting security and intelligence operations with AFP, evacuation and humanitarian assistance, and recovery efforts during and after the siege. During combat, police were deployed to Marawi from all over the country. Special action group (SAG) troops from Zamboanga City (475 kilometers; 295 miles from Marawi) and further were tapped to reinforce police efforts in the city.[38]

5.c.ii. Parties to the Conflict: IS-Affiliated Groups

There were several IS-affiliated and local terrorist groups involved in the siege of Marawi including the ASG, the Maute Group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Ansar Khalifa Philippines. This report uses the term "IS-affiliated militants" or "militants" to refer to any individual or member of these militant groups. However, this section of the report will focus on the key IS-affiliated militias, ASG and Maute Group. Both groups grew in popularity during the rise of Al-Qaeda. Disenfranchised members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who held more extreme views began to engage with radical Islamic movements in the Middle East and many fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. In their time fighting overseas, they learned key IS fighting tactics, including a "seize-defy-discredit" approach: seize dense urban terrain to hold it and its population hostage, defy the government to regain control and discredit the government by forcing it to either capitulate or destroy the city.[39] These were the tactics ASG, and the Maute Group used during the siege.

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). In the early 1990s, several MNLF members broke off to form ASG. ASG is known for using violent tactics including bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations.[40] In 2004, ASG claimed responsibility for the worst terrorist attack in Filipino history: the bombing of Superferry 14, which killed 116 people.[41]

In 2016, ASG pledged allegiance to IS online and IS endorsed ASG's leader, Isnilon Hapilon.[42] Hapilon was killed by an AFP sniper in October 2017, resulting in the end of the Marawi conflict. The group is now splintered but has committed several suicide and car bombings since the end of the siege.[43]

Maute Group. The Maute Group was started by two siblings from the wealthy Maute clan native to Lanao del Sur. Omar and Abdullah (commonly known as Abu Hasan) Maute grew up in Marawi and came from a large family with networks across the country and region. Using their clan base, the brothers mobilized their mother, cousins and other relatives, including some of their neighbors to join them. These networks gave the brothers access to top separatist leaders who provided them with resources and training on urban warfare and terrorism financing.[44] The Maute Group used their resources in Manila and overseas to purchase weapons and bribe civilians for support. IS Middle East provided US$1.5 million through Indonesia via Western Union to arm the Maute Group and others in Marawi.[45] Prior to the siege, the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) listed the Maute Group as potentially "the most dangerous of the groups operating in the Philippines."[46]

The Maute Group pledged allegiance to IS in 2015 and as IS retreated in the Middle East, many

Indonesian and Malaysian fighters came to the Philippines and joined the Maute Group.[47] Omar and Abdullah were killed by AFP during the siege. The group has since had several leaders and it is unclear where the group stands today.

5.c.iii. Civilian-Led National Response

Task Force Bangon Marawi. On 3 July 2017, President Duterte announced the new Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) to manage the recovery and rehabilitation of Marawi City. The task force was an ad hoc response to the Marawi conflict, originally composed of security forces from the Philippine Army's 103rd Infantry (Haribon) Brigade and the PNP and supported by the local government.[48]

In order to rebuild the Marawi City, TFBM were tasked with conducting a post-conflict needs assessment of Marawi city to inform a Bangon Marawi Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Recovery Program (BMCRRP). The post-conflict needs assessment estimated that a total of US$969 million was required to finance the full recovery of Marawi. The break-up of cost is as follows: productive sector (36%); infrastructure sector (33%); social sector (19%), and cross-sectoral (12%).[49]

The BMCRRP then selected the following as their focus:

1. Restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure to revitalize the local economy and restore social services;
2. Rebuilding of resettlements in accordance with the spatial framework and urban design that showcases the Maranao culture;
3. Restoration and improvement of livelihood, business, and other sources of income;
4. Strengthening local governance as means to achieve peace and progress; and
5. Increasing resilience and capacities of communities in coping with future hazards.

National/Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) is a working group of various government, non-government, civil sector and private sector organizations. The working group is responsible for ensuring the protection and welfare of civilians during disasters or emergencies.

During the siege, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) under the NDRRMC and led by Saripada "Tong" Pacasum Jr., tried to protect civilians as they knew the military and the police were primarily focused on the battle at hand. Pacasum Jr. collaborated with ruling clans to safeguard civilians and carried out numerous rescue missions, with the support of the government's Humanitarian Emergency Action Response Team (ARMM-HEART).[50]

PDRRMC members involved in rescue missions were eventually dubbed the "Suicide Squad" by the media. After the Siege of Marawi, the NDRRMC worked with TFBM on IDP rehabilitation and coordinating recovery efforts.

5.c.iv. Militant Movements Integrated into Local Government

Two separatist groups originally emerged in Mindanao, the Moro National Liberation Front and its offshoot, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The main separatist group involved in the siege was the MILF.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). MILF was created when a member of MNLF, Hashim Salamat, started his own offshoot. MILF continued to grow as a separatist movement until 1996 when it became the main Moro separatist group. In 2001, then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo changed government policy towards separatist movements to "all-out-peace" and began peace negotiations with MILF. In 2010, MILF officially dropped its demand for full independence and in 2014, they signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro with the government.

On 4 June, MILF joined forces with the AFP to negotiate the humanitarian corridors, known locally as the 'peace corridor,' between the AFP and militant groups.[51] MILF senior leadership was determined to contribute to the fight against militants. However, AFP was concerned about the potential for MILF and AFP soldiers to accidentally shoot each other; potentially causing a public relations crisis and jeopardizing the ongoing peace process. Instead, MILF worked outside the battle area setting up checkpoints and securing routes for AFP's entry into the city, while preventing militant reinforcements from entering.[52]

Since the siege, MILF has played a major role in the creation of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and the ratification of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in 2019.

5.c.v. Foreign Military and Government Support

AFP received support from several foreign allies during the Siege of Marawi. Major allies included the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Singapore, and China. Other countries provided varying levels of support including Israel and Japan. Below is a table of AFP's key foreign allies during the siege.

Countries	Known Security Agreements	Technical Assistance during the Siege	Foreign Military Sales (FMS)	HA/DR for Marawi
United States	The Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), Major non-NATO ally status (MNNA)	Special Operations Force (SOF) arrive first week, ISR drones, P-3 Orion surveillance planes[53], Operation Pacific Eagle, $5 million bounty for Hapilon[54] Philippines declined US offer of air strikes[55]	2017: $1.4 billion in defense articles and service exports[56], C-130T transport aircraft[57], M4 carbines, Glock 21 pistols, four M134D Gatling-style machine guns, M203 grenade launchers[58]	USAID: US$63.6 million to support Marawi rehabilitation[59] US Embassy in Manila: P22 million (US$401,943) for educational and informational programs for students and women leaders.[60]
Australia*	Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC), Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperative Defence Activities, Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA), Comprehensive Partnership[61]	AP-3C Orion surveillance planes[62], training in urban counterterrorism, ISR, strengthened bilateral maritime patrols.[63]	At a minimum: US$838,000[64]	Marawi Recovery Project: US$20 million in assistance: Building Sustainable Institutions and Communities in Bangsamoro[65]

United Kingdom	Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation	In response to siege but in 2019: Trauma Risk Management Training for AFP[66]	2017: 256 arms export licenses provided to the Philippines, £12,878,254 GBP (US$16 mil) value[67]	Unknown
China	Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Industry Cooperation[68], Belt and Road Initiative MoU (part of Duterte's "Build, Build, Build" initiative)	Duterte heaped praise on Premier Li Keqiang for China's role in Marawi. Unclear what this support included.[69]	At a minimum: high-power assault and sniper rifles.[70] US$10 million weapons sale agreement[71]	$89,000 donation to families of slain soldiers,[72] US$19 million for rehabilitation grants,[73] built two drug rehabilitation centers
Singapore	Philippines-Singapore Action Plan[74]	C-130 transport planes, & ISR[75]	None	Transport of supplies for the rehabilitation of Marawi, Use of Singapore HA/DR Center to gather foreign contributions for reconstruction[76]

*** The siege was the biggest cooperation between Australia and the Philippines since they signed the SFVA in 2012**

5.c.vi. Humanitarian Actors

According to UNOCHA, a total of 128 organizations provided food, cash, health, water, sanitation, and other services during the conflict. Aid was provided alongside combat activities and under strict martial law.[77] International, national, and local humanitarian organizations played different roles during and after the conflict.

International. Several international humanitarian actors were involved in supporting civilians and the military during the siege. Martial law made it difficult for international organizations to collect information and monitor the situation. Instead, international organizations, like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), carried out relief efforts in partnership with the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao provincial government, through ARMM-HEART. During and after the siege, international organizations created information sharing tools between the government and humanitarian actors, supported evacuation centers, and provided rehabilitation, employment, and psychosocial programs after the conclusion of the siege. Amnesty International surveyed survivors of the siege to better understand the severity and variety of civilian harm perpetuated by militants and the AFP.[78]

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) partnered with the Maranao People Development Centre (MARADECA), Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits (EcoWEB) and Mindanao State University-Ilagan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT), to implement the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), IOM's system which was used to track and monitor the needs, gaps, and concerns of more than 87,000 IDPs.[79]

National. National humanitarian actors are usually Metro-Manila-based and receive their funding from, and coordinate with, international organizations such as the UN, ICRC, and World Bank. There were a few national-level organizations involved during the siege including the Philippines Red Cross and

Teach Peace Build Peace Movement (TPBM Movement), which, within 10 days of the siege, launched donation campaigns and psychosocial peacebuilding sessions.[80] TPBM also partnered with AFP and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) to conduct several youth leadership summits.[81]

Other national humanitarian actors supporting civilians after the siege are Singtala Center for Women and Children in Conflict, Youth Peer Education Network (Y-PEER Pilipinas), and Conflict Alert.

Local. Due to frequent fighting and natural disasters in Mindanao, Marawi had a flourishing local, non-governmental organization (NGO) community. After the "all-out" war* between the government and MILF in 2000, many local non-governmental humanitarian and rights-advocacy organizations were set up to support civilians in crisis. Although there were tight security protocols that did limit NGO movement during the siege, local organizations negotiated with AFP to allow them to find and rescue trapped civilians inside the city, while others set up evacuation centers and collected local donations for victims. Balay Mindanaw activated their Balay Mindanaw Group Operations Center to track civilian locations and coordinate with other local partners and organizations to provide available resources to evacuees.[82]

Some key local organizations that supported civilians during the siege include: Ranao Rescue Team, MARADECA, Balay Mindanaw, Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits, and Bangsamoro Development Agency.

6. During the Siege

Approximately 300,000 civilians were able to escape Marawi before any major combat between AFP and the militant groups. Various factors likely contributed to the population's decision to leave instead of staying put including: the fear of militant brutality, the subsequent shock that arose from witnessing members of their own community engage in such atrocities, and memories of past violent battles with AFP. Civilians also assumed that the conflict would be resolved quickly.[83] Those that decided to stay or were forced to witnessed horrific acts of violence and the complete destruction and pillaging of their homes and community.

Despite the devastating toll the conflict had on the local population, there were several successes by AFP, civilian-led government branches, and humanitarian actors to prevent additional harm to civilians. These included frequent rescue missions, a humanitarian corridor, and information operations to ensure better communication between trapped civilians, hostages, and AFP.

This section details the types of harm against civilians perpetuated by parties to the conflict and attempts by key stakeholders to protect civilians during the siege.

* The administration of Philippine President Joseph Estrada advocated a hardline stance against the MILF, directing AFP to "go all out" against the MILF on March 21, 2000, after the secessionist group invaded a town in Lanao del Norte and took hundreds of residents' hostage.

6.a Civilian Harm During the Marawi Siege

Figure 7: The Humanitarian Consequences of the Siege of Marawi[84]

6.a.i. Civilian Harm Committed by IS-Affiliated Groups

International humanitarian law (IHL) requires non-state armed groups to treat civilians living under their control "humanely and without any adverse distinction."[85] IHL prohibits all acts of violence against life and person; it prohibits pillage; and it requires parties to conflict to respect the convictions and religious practices of civilians under their control and to take special care not to damage or destroy cultural property.[86] The following section details key instances in which militants violated IHL.

Targeting civilians. As jihadist groups, ASG and Maute Group aimed to create an Islamic caliphate in the Philippines; ridding the area of any kafir (infidel; non-Muslim). Militants went house-to-house and requested civilians recite the Shahada (Islamic profession of faith). Those that could not, or refused to, were shot, and killed.[87] Christians who were captured by militants while attempting to flee the city also faced brutal executions or were kidnapped and held hostage.[88]

According to Amnesty International, militants took more than 1,780 civilians hostage.[89] Some

Christian hostages were forcibly converted to Islam[90] and then forced to conduct tasks for militants including foraging, distribution of supplies, information collection and the digging of fox holes.[91] Militants in Marawi also used common IS tactics including using hostages as human shields. Militants did so knowing that AFP's rules of engagement (ROE) prevent AFP from targeting civilians and religious, cultural, and social service facilities (mosques, hospitals, schools, etc.). Militants would bring hostages, up to 300 at a time, with them into key civilian facilities, particularly mosques, to prevent AFP from attacking them.[92] The physical abuse perpetrated by militants was equally staggering. Hostages dealt with daily beatings, rape, and forced marriages. In some cases, hostages were forced to watch the beheadings of other hostages.[93]

Child soldiers. Decades of insurgencies and natural disasters in Marawi have left behind a vulnerable population of impoverished, orphaned, or homeless children. The Maute Group was excellent at exploiting the vulnerabilities of these children and invested heavily in training child soldiers.[94] One former child soldier told the Strait Times that part of his initiation into the Maute Group was to behead a target. Failure to complete the task could result in his own beheading.[95] During the siege, policemen reported seeing 10-year-old Maute soldiers armed with M-16 baby armalite rifles.[96]

Infrastructure Destruction. Militants strategically planted a vast number of improvised explosive devices (IED), including Molotov cocktails, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) within buildings and along possible routes into the city, aiming to obstruct AFP.[97] Although the precise quantity of IEDs employed by militants remains unknown, the Joint Engineer Task Group (JETG) reported recovering 2,853 unexploded ordnances and 415 IEDs within the MAA by December 2017.[98] The IEDs posed a major obstacle for reconstruction and citizens seeking to return home following the siege. When families did begin to return to Marawi, teachers were instructed to show students as young as five years old how to identify IEDs.[99]

In addition to the widespread use of IEDs, militants deliberately set fire to numerous buildings, including religious institutions and schools, that had formed the bedrock of the Marawi community.

6.a.ii. Civilian Harm caused by AFP Operations

The Armed Forces of the Philippines is also responsible for civilian harm that occurred during the siege. However, harmful actions by AFP, unlike militants, does not appear to have been a deliberate strategy by AFP senior leadership. AFP was adamant that they were in Marawi to support civilians and were eager to build trust between the Moro people and AFP.

This section will detail the types of civilian harm committed by AFP against civilians during the siege.

Destruction of the city. In Marawi, AFP lacked the equipment and technical know-how to combat highly trained urban militia in such a dense environment. Militants had the advantage and had reinforced buildings to create mini fortresses within the city connected by a maze of underground tunnels.[100] Office buildings and houses formed a multitude of stacked, tough concrete cells that hid and protected militants. Soldiers were being easily shot through small holes in interior walls, snipers on the top of buildings, or killed by unseen IEDs. When AFP tried to use 100-pound bombs to soften the ground for troops, soldiers overheard militants laughing on the radio. The bombs barely made a dent in

the concrete.

With the capabilities AFP had at the time, they turned to massive airstrikes and explosive firepower to clear buildings;[101] often resorting to 500-pound bombs, which could shatter windows up to two kilometers away.[102] Even AFP's preferred indirect fire weapon, the 105 mm howitzer, became irrelevant in Marawi's dense urban environment. AFP soldiers had to resort to using plastic Ramen noodle packaging and bags of rice to adapt the howitzers into direct-fire weapons.[103] "They became useless because we were fighting less than 100 meters away. We were fighting building to building," Retired Lt. Gen. Danilo G. Pamonag told Indo-Pacific Defense Forums.

Relentless airstrikes to soften the ground unfortunately resulted in significant challenges for hostages and trapped civilians. According to Amnesty International, a large building with more than 100 hostages was hit by an AFP airstrike, killing ten civilians.[104] Trapped civilians were left with two options: endure the fighting without basic necessities in the hopes of an imminent rescue, or embark on a treacherous escape without any assurance of safety. Former ARMM Vice Governor, Norodin Alonto Lucman, who provided refuge to several Christians in his basement during the siege, decided to try to escape when airstrikes hit too close to home. Lucman and 172 civilians (many others joined along the route) chanted "Alluh Akbar" while crossing the city in hopes that the chant would convince militants they were all Muslim. Fortunately, it worked for Lucman and his followers.[105] It did not for many others. A group of Christian rice millers who tried to escape for fear of being bombed were later found in a ravine bearing the word munafik (traitor in Arabic and the local Moro language) written across their chests.[106]

The devastation caused by air strikes became the primary grievance among Marawi residents towards the military.[107] One local politician told the military the "anticipation of death is worse than death itself."[108] Others saw the destruction of their city and historical sites as the final erasure of Moro history. When the provincial government and local organizations appealed to the military to end airstrikes,[109] military leaders did meet with local politicians and organizations to explain why their tactics were necessary. Many local leaders eventually backed down but international and local organizations are still concerned about whether the ground operations were consistent with the IHL principle of proportionality in attack, whereby the anticipated collateral loss of human life and damage to civilian structures should not be excessive in relation to the expected military advantage gained.[110][111] Of particular concern was the fact that a significant portion of the destruction occurred several weeks after the government had asserted that fewer than 40 militants remained in the city.[112]

AFP continues to justify the level of destruction airstrikes and ground troops caused due to the limited capabilities they had at the time.

Alleged mistreatment at checkpoints. Several local articles and a report by Amnesty International claim civilians were harassed and tortured by troops. The military had several checkpoints set up around Marawi on critical routes in and out of the city and towards the lake. During the siege, soldiers allegedly became mistrustful of civilians at checkpoints, presuming they were militants or at least sympathizers of militants. One survivor told Amnesty International:

> ***"When we got to the bridge, we didn't realize there was a military checkpoint. [When we got closer] the military cocked their guns and we all dropped down and then they searched us. … Then they gave us biscuits and we thought that we were safe. But then the master sergeant arrived. Then they told us that we were [IS]. … They beat us. … I was punched and kicked… My***

companion showed his ID, but the military said he was a sniper for [IS]… I was beaten with an Armalite [rifle]. … They tied our hands and feet with electrical wire. I was crying and they would not listen. … The military was very angry because 13 of their men were killed."
– Justin, a Christian construction worker[113]

Former Armed Forces spokesman, Major-General Restituto Padilla, was adamant that AFP does not tolerate and condone these abuses and would investigate all accusations of torture by AFP soldiers. The author was unable to verify whether subsequent investigations occurred and what their outcomes were.[114]

Looting. A deep-seated distrust of the government and its institutions led many Moro people to avoid banks and instead keep their money in cash, storing it in safes within their homes. When people fled from the area, they presumed the conflict would be resolved quickly and did not bring many possessions with them. Businesses were also preparing for Ramadan at the time had more stock than usual.

"My father insisted not to bring too many clothes and other belongings because he expected that we will return in three days anyway. This was his experience during the Marawi uprising of 1972. This is also the very reason why most of the [Maranaos] had the plan to return soon."
– Raihan A. Yusoph, author and survivor of the siege [115]

Amidst the rush to escape Marawi, an abundance of cash and possessions was left vulnerable to looters. It is estimated that militants looted up to Ph 2 billion (US$36 million) worth of cash, gold, and jewelry during the siege from private residences, businesses and public institutions.[116] There are also reports of the soldiers looting as well.[117] It is unclear how much looting was done by AFP soldiers but unverified photos of alleged looting by soldiers went viral on WhatsApp during the siege.[118]

Initially, the military, and President Duterte, adamantly denied any looting. Instead, AFP pointed to their recovery and turn-over to the government of cash denominations looted by militants amounting to US$1.6 million.[119] Task Group Ranao deputy commander Colonel Romeo Brawner stated that AFP does not tolerate looting and would investigate all claims[120] and Defense Secretary Lorenzana said he would order AFP to apply the "full force of the law" to address the looting allegations.[121]

The military did end up charging at least one Army officer and five of his men after they were caught looting. The officer was relieved of his duty and made to return the items he stole.[122]

Red tagging. In several instances, suspicions and pre-held beliefs by AFP members allegedly prevented civilians and civilian organizations from gaining access to critical services and information. AFP's willingness to work with local NGOs was, at times, determined by pre-existing ideological and cultural stereotypes. Chief health officer of Lanao del Sur sought dialogue with military leadership because troops at checkpoints wouldn't allow health workers to enter Marawi and accused them of sympathizing with the Maute Group.[123] Local NGOs were also "red-tagged"† and labeled as "either left, yellow-linked (tied to the Liberal Party leaders) or friendlies." Red tagging an organization can put that organization and its employees at grave danger of unlawful targeting, arrest, or extrajudicial killing.[124]

† The act of blacklisting and labeling individuals or organizations as Communist who are critical or not fully supportive of the actions of the sitting government administration in the Philippines

6.b. Effective Mitigation of Civilian Harm by AFP

While numerous civilians became victims of violence during the siege and experienced the loss of their homes and possessions, it is important to acknowledge that AFP undertook various operations to safeguard civilians as well. AFP carried out rescue and corpse retrieval missions, actively supported the negotiation of humanitarian corridors, and employed several other tactics designed to minimize harm to civilians.

6.b.i. Rescue & Retrieval Missions

Rescue operations conducted by the military were in partnership with the local government of Lanao del Sur, ARMM-HEART, PDRRMC, and other volunteers.[125] In the first few months of battle, the militants had highly sophisticated artillery that could easily counter AFP attempts at rescuing hostages. AFP had to learn to innovate. Soldiers would attach a cell phone by string to a drone along with instructions on how to use the phone and a knife to cut the string. The cellphone had one number programmed into it. The military reported to have received thousands of distressed calls from trapped civilians and hostages. They recorded important information such as the civilian's cell number, date and time of the call, their location, and current state of health for those needing medical assistance. With the help of Maranao speaking officers, non-commissioned officers (NCO), and representatives from the provincial government, the military plotted distress calls on a map located at the CMOCC to mark their exact locations. In cases where their locations were near troops, the military coordinated with them to facilitate the rescue of the civilians. In one instance, hostages called the number within hours and by midnight, soldiers had rescued 17 hostages.[126] The military recorded a total of 1,777 individuals rescued as a result of AFP's rescue missions.[127]

AFP also collaborated with the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) of Lanao del Sur, and the PNP Scene of the Crime Operations (SOCO) from the Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office (PPO) to conduct corpse retrieval operations. A total of 232 bodies were recovered, processed for identification, and given a proper burial.[128]

AFP also attempted to negotiate several ceasefires to get over 1,000 trapped civilians out of the city. Instead, militants used it as an opportunity to recalibrate their positions and attack an unsuspecting AFP.[129]

6.b.ii. Peace Corridor

In late May, MILF chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim and Presidential Peace Adviser Jesus Dureza met with President Duterte to discuss the concept of a peace corridor, a safe route civilians trapped in the conflict could take to exit the city.[130] The OPAPP facilitated the cooperation between the government, through the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Assistance Center (JCMAC), and MILF. MILF then

reached out to members of the Maute family that were once part of MILF and to religious leaders who volunteered to lead residents out of the city.[131] Militants agreed to a humanitarian corridor along a three-kilometer stretch of the Banggulo Bridge.[132] Figure 8 illustrates the Peace Corridor route.

Figure 8: Peace Corridor Route out of Marawi City[133]

The first corridor opened on 4 June 2017, rescued at least 255 civilians and allowing international and local organizations to enter critical areas in Marawi.[134] Local and international NGOs entered by requesting safe conduct passes through the CMOCC. Civilians were then driven south out of Marawi City until the southern city of Malabang.[135] Relief efforts through the second peace corridor were in partnership with international organizations including ICRC, CSFI, and the local Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA). The ARMM Regional Command Center worked with ICRC to facilitate the deployment of doctors and supplies into Marawi.[136]

The establishment of peace corridors presented a significant opportunity for both MILF and the government to shape the narrative of the conflict. MILF were fearful that the government and the media would blame them for the siege since many of the IS-affiliated militants were originally MILF members. Such attribution could have jeopardized MILF's progress in the ongoing peace process with the government. The peace corridors offered MILF the opportunity to emphasize what side they were on. Stories of MILF members eagerly helping along the peace corridor even while fasting for Ramadan

appeared across Filipino media.[137] The government hoped this would discourage any retaliation against Muslims in the Philippines and avoid collective blame for the actions of a radicalized few.[138]

6.b.iii. Information Operations

President Duterte and senior AFP leadership acknowledge on numerous occasions that the battle in Marawi was an opportunity to correct previous injustices made against the Moro people.[139] The military was intent on changing the narrative in Marawi to prevent future resurgences of` violence.[140] From the beginning of the siege, the military emphasized the conflict was not a war between Muslims and Christians, but against extremism of any kind.[141] On the ground, the purpose of these operations

was to avoid civilian casualties, urge citizens to evacuate, and halt further recruitment by militants. In a broader context, information operations (IOs) tried to "translate tactical gains into a moral and strategic victory."[142] Figure 8 shows "pro-AFP" graffiti on the wall of a destroyed building.

Figure 9: Photograph of a Destroyed Building in Marawi that Reads, "Soldiers are friends of the Muslims"[143]

> ***"The militants expected, that if most of the population of 200,000 remained, they would either represent a human shield, or their slaughter in the inevitable fight would both cause an international outcry and motivate others to join a wider insurgency—exactly the effect that US operations in the Iraqi city of Fallujah had in 2004. Not only did almost all of the population escape, the militants' attempts to foment rebellion amongst a suffering and displaced population also failed—something that the AFP attributed to the success of their 'soft power' influence operations."***
> – Dr. Charles Knight, Australian Army Research Center [144]

The Joint Task Force in Marawi created an 'information operations' division in the CMOCC under Lieutenant Colonel Jo-Ar Herrera to produce videos and documentaries that undermined IS narratives.[145] AFP worked with large media corporations in the Philippines to push out emotional combat footage, documentation of civilian rescue operations, and solidarity stories. One major story was the escape of a hostage, Fr. Teresito "Chito" Suganob, the Catholic vicar general or Marawi. A militant known as "Abu Sera" saw a drone-dropped cell phone and number during an attempt by AFP to convince

militants to surrender. Abu Sera proceeded to call the number and worked with the military to help plan the vicar's escape.

Senior community leaders reported that AFP messaging significantly contributed to Marawi civilians and other Moros reimagining their former 'oppressors' as rescuers.[146]

The military also emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity as part of a narrative change. During the evacuation process through the humanitarian corridor, AFP developed what are now known as "hijabi warriors" or "hijabi troopers." The division was originally composed of 60 female military soldiers and 40 female PNP personnel who wore modest Muslim attire to staff security check points all around Mindanao.[147] After the siege, hijabi troopers were tasked with supporting civilians in evacuation centers. They focused on peace education and assisted in psychosocial debriefing, especially among youth traumatized by the war. The hijabi troopers were well-liked by civilians and have since become an institutionalized division within the military to support counter-insurgency operations.[148]

7. After the Siege

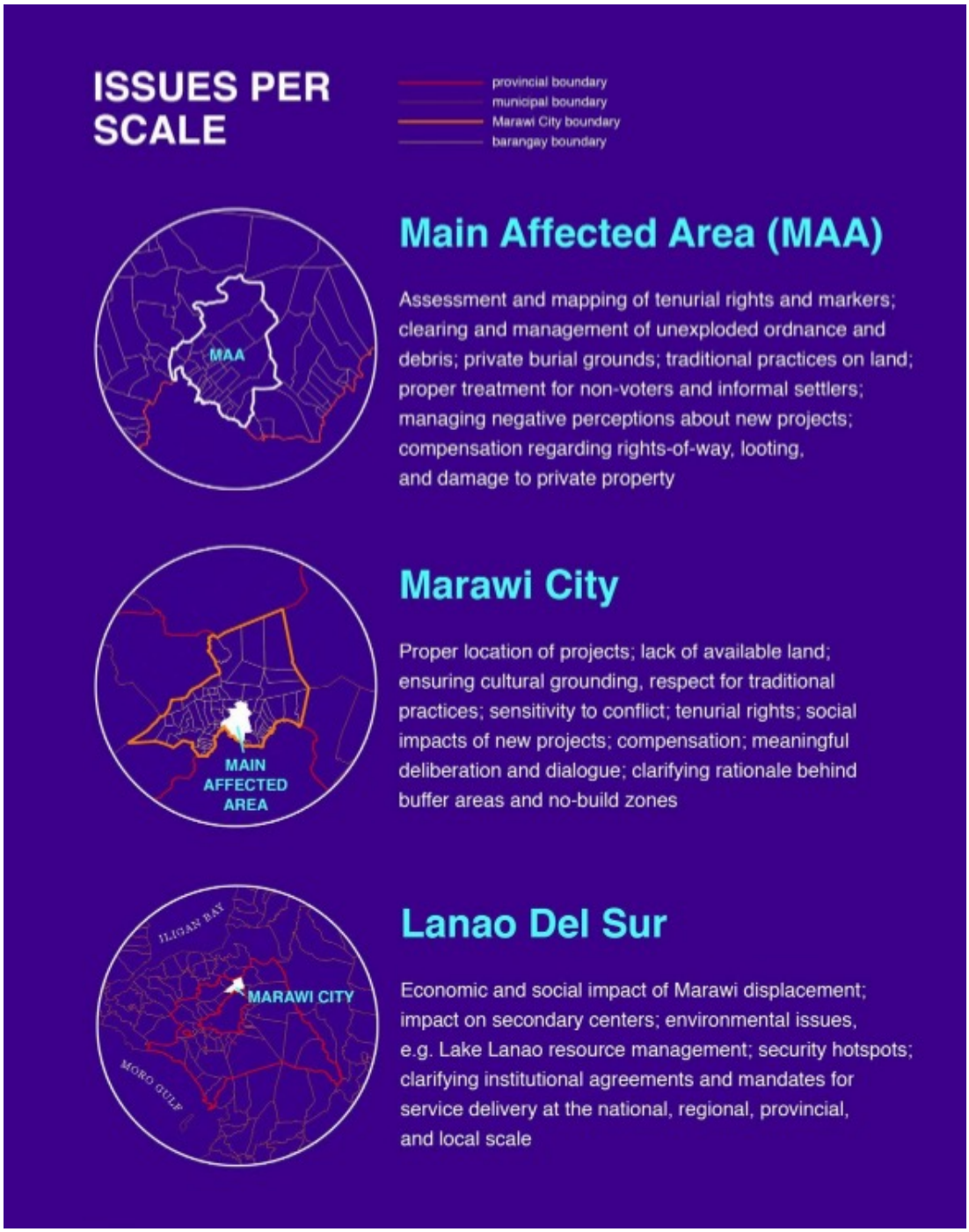
7.a. The Situation in Marawi as of August 2023

"We want to go home. That's all. We want to go home to Marawi."
- Aishah Riga, internally displaced person [149]

The reconstruction process in Marawi has taken significantly longer than expected. Despite billions of pesos in investments pouring into Marawi's recovery, a once bustling trade and fishing hub is eerily quiet.[150] Newly rebuilt mosques by foreign donors only permit a few visitors a day. Grand infrastructure projects such as a Peace Memorial Park, convention center, and sports stadium have been prioritized over residential areas. Family homes still standing are spray-painted with family surnames to deter squatters and mark their territory.[151] Families unable to return home have been moved from evacuation centers to transitional housing provided by international organizations or remain with family members outside of Marawi and as far as Manila. Families also continue to deal with the trauma from the siege. Many lost everything they owned.

7.a.i. Reconstruction

On 23 February 2023, the Task Force Bangon Marawi Field Office Manager Felix Castro Jr. announced in a Senate hearing that the rehabilitation work assigned to TFBM was 85% complete.[152] Those outside the MAA have mostly been able to go home. Inside the MAA, out of 17,793 households only 100 families had returned by February 2023.[153]



"It's going to be a huge challenge, as a lot of residents don't have titles to their properties, even though they have been living there for generations."
- Tong Pacasum, Marawi resident[154]

Figure 10: Key issues in and around Marawi after the siege[155]

There are a few reasons for why the construction process has been so slow. Marawi historically has had a lack of comprehensive land and property records. Years of dependence on informal land tenure mechanisms and poor planning has made it difficult for the government to determine rightful property owners and establish clear boundaries for reconstruction efforts. Multiple contesting datasets have only

added to the challenge of defining Marawi's land distribution and size.[156] The government did create an adjudication board to address land disputes, however there were many issues the committee could not even resolve.[157] Discussions of land ownership were also marred by the politicization of returns. Certain residents who were well connected were allowed to visit their homes while others were not.[158] Additionally, certain residential sections destroyed during the conflict were replaced by government-designated facilities without the consent of landowners from that area. The government has promised to give permanent shelter to those who would lose their land in the process.[159] In 2019, a Marawi resident sued top officials in the TFBM for allegedly demolishing destroyed structures without permission from landowners.[160] The Philippine company, Finmat, was ordered to stop work clearing debris after it demolished at least 56 buildings without the consent of homeowners.[161] Some permanent housing offered by the National Housing Authority (NHA) remain completely empty. According to an interview with the Provincial Governor of Lanao del Sur, recipients refused the homes because of poor water quality and little-to-no water supply.[162]

Moreover, funding constraints and bureaucratic hurdles also slowed down the reconstruction process. After the siege, it was estimated that the total reconstruction cost for the Philippines government would be US$1.1 billion.[163] Securing the necessary financial resources and navigating through complex administrative procedures took more time than initially anticipated. Marawi's MAA projects had no allocations in either the 2018 or the 2019 national budgets.[164] Instead, foreign funding was prioritized. The reconstructed Grand Mosque, or Jameo Mindanao Al-Islamic Islamic Center were given new color schemes and patterns based on requests made by overseas donors even though locals expressed a desire to preserve the original designs of mosques.[165] TFBM has stated that the rehabilitation of Marawi is being done in consultation with local representatives. However, there is criticism over the lack of consultation with community members in terms of identifying the priorities for rehabilitation and designing infrastructure projects.[166]

Lastly, the presence of unexploded ordnance and potential security threats made it challenging for construction crews to work effectively and safely, causing further delays.

7.a.ii. Temporary Housing Challenges: Evacuation Camps and Home Stays

Government reports indicate that Maranaos who chose not to stay with family or friends were scattered across at least 87 evacuation centers.[167] The evacuation centers, mostly built by AFP engineer units, did provide critical necessities to IPDs.[168] AFP initially conducted a total of 21 relief operations for IDPs in different evacuation centers and coordinated with partners and stakeholders such as IOM for continued relief operations. To provide IDPs with a hot meal, an AFP joint task group partnered with local government units to initiate mobile kitchens.[169] The local governments in and around Marawi became instrumental in providing necessary care and services to IDPs, as, over time, AFP presence in the evacuation centers began to diminish.[170]

However, evacuation centers also became another battle ground for civilians to manage. When families initially moved into the evacuation centers, there were concerns about limited space, medicine, and food. As of December 2017, the Department of Health (DOH) reported that 86 people had died in evacuation centers.[171]

> ***"For a moment, I thought I was going to die. But we survived. Although, the fight for survival doesn't stop there. Here, in this evacuation center, surviving is also a daily struggle."***

- Hassana, internally displaced person [172]

The evacuation centers were small and required women and men to share the same spaces, an act considered taboo in Maranao culture. Women and girls interviewed by Frontiers for Human Dynamics were concerned for their safety. One young woman reported experiencing sexual violence at the evacuation center.[173] Children also refused to attend school or leave their parents side, traumatized by the war. Joint Task Group Tabang, the AFP branch responsible for supporting IDPs, did engage with children in evacuation centers to soften the trauma of war.[174]

"We needed land for the internally displaced quickly. It was not easy to buy land,"
- Marawi City Mayor Majul Gandamra[175]

The government and partners began moving IDPs into transitional homes on December 5, 2019.[176] Those still in temporary housing in 2022, however, had to deal with the potential of being evicted. The government had hurriedly signed lease agreements during the siege for temporary housing. However, no one expected the reconstruction process to take so long, and the leases were only agreed to for five years. Based on available research, no evictions occurred. Had evictions taken place, some 4,000 families would have been forced to leave their home.[177]

The evacuation centers were only used by a small portion of Maranaos who had left Marawi. More than 90% of IDPs chose to move in with family and friends in areas around Maranao.[178] Maratabat (Maranao code of honor) obliges families to take in displaced relatives. However, many moved into family homes barely larger than their own in Marawi and were expected to contribute financially.[179] One woman recounted living in one room with 15 other relatives. Since she was able to find employment after the siege, she was expected to take care of many of the basic needs of her extended family and cover the bulk of living expenses.[180] These types of financial contributions may have prevented Maranaos from being able to save up to rebuild their own homes in Marawi.

7.a.iii. The Impact of Trauma on Siege Survivors

"My wife and I survived. My two daughters too. Although my daughters are alive, they are really not living."
– Sam, internally displaced person [181]

Maranaos are also still dealing with the traumatic impact of the conflict. Many have lost access to their livelihoods, lost family and friends and their possessions. Civilians were experiencing, nightmares and flashbacks. Some were still living in hospitals two years later trying to heal from the trauma they had experienced.[182] Humanitarian actors provided trauma support. For example, when the ICRC began to assess the psychological needs of survivors of the siege, former hostages were the most impacted by the violence they experienced. The ICRC engaged with the communities of former hostages through "sensitization briefings" so communities knew how to best support victims.

7.a.iv. Continued Violence in the Region

After the siege, there were grave concerns about the potential escalation of violence in the region, as

land conflict had been a leading driver of violence in Mindanao before the siege. The Maranao people's resentment against the government could resurface if the reconstruction process was not efficiently managed and carried out with their consent.[183] Additionally, while AFP succeeded in eliminating Hapilon and the Maute brothers, insurgencies are hardly defeated on the battlefield. Other active players within ASG and other extremist groups could pose a persistent threat.

Fortunately, no explosion of violence has transpired by either the Maranao or extremist groups since the end of the battle. Although ASG members have continued to target military bases and civilian infrastructure around the southern Philippines, the number and intensity of attacks is nowhere near the level or consistency at which they conducted attacks prior to the siege. As of March 2023, AFP reported that a few remaining ASG members were hiding in the jungle and AFP is managing a program to help caught ASG members reintegrate into society.[184]

7.b. Initiatives in the Post-Siege Period

Since the end of the siege, the military, the government, and foreign allies have taken several steps to prevent another Marawi from happening. Although not all these steps are directly aimed at protecting civilians, the successful implications of these changes will enable civilians to live in a more physically and financially secure and stable environment.

7.b.i. Post-Marawi Security Initiatives

The military has taken several steps to prevent further attacks by armed militant groups and to better prepare for future urban combat. Soon after the siege, AFP began working with Malaysia and Singapore to restrict entrance of foreign fighters into the Philippines by improving maritime security and increasing patrol units.[185] Since then, the Navy, Coast Guard, and PNP have been strengthening their capabilities to provide maritime security and investigative cases.[186]

In December 2018, the Joint Task Force Sulu, a new division dedicated to fighting IS-affiliated groups in the region, was expanded to become the 11th infantry "Alakdan" Division. This division, along with support from MNLF and MILF, would be dedicated to countering the remnants of the Abu Sayyaf Group. The division was formed in response to lessons learned from Marawi. The Alakdan division consists of Brigade Combat Teams of two infantry battalions, one mechanized company, field artillery, and special operations forces. In comparison, a regular infantry brigade during the siege only had three infantry battalions, one company of artillery, and one signal company.[187]

The AFP has also focused on better understanding the roots of radicalization, as well as countering extremist views on the ground. AFP regularly conducts a 4-day Community Support Program–Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CSP-PCVE) Operations Course in the Unified Commands (UC) with the following objectives:

1. To educate participants on Islam, radicalism, and violent extremism;
2. To instill cultural sensitivity and diversity awareness to the participants;
3. To educate the participants on CSP-PCVE.[188]

AFP now works with the BARMM government to continue CSP-PCVE efforts in the Mindanao area.[189]

7.b.ii. Post-Marawi Government Initiatives

On 10 January 2019,, Republic Act 11188, the "Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act," was passed. The new law declares children as "zones of peace," aimed at protecting children in situations of armed conflict from all forms of abuse and violence and prosecute persons or groups violating the measure.[190] In 2017, the number of violations against children in situations of armed conflict significantly increased, primarily linked to the siege. These violations included 30 cases of recruitment and use of children by armed groups (many which were linked to the Maute group), the detention of 12 children for their alleged association with armed groups, 33 verified cases of killing and maiming, 3 cases of rape in the context of the Marawi siege, 60 attacks on schools and hospitals, and 5 incidents of abduction. The new law has been celebrated by international and local human rights organizations.[191]

On Tuesday, 23 May 2022, five years after the siege, the Implementing Rules, and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 11696, of the Marawi Siege Victims Compensation Act was signed. The Marawi Siege Victims Compensation Act requires the government to set aside P1 billion (US$18 million) to pay Marawi residents who lost property or family members during the siege. The signing of the IRR was a huge feat for Maranaos and was pushed through by the Marawi Reconstruction Conflict Watch, a Maranao multi stakeholder dialogue group supported by International Alert and the Australian government.[192] The IRR will allow Marawi residents to finally be repaid through the newly created Marawi Compensation Board.[193] Howeveer, Maisara Dandamun-Latiph, the chairperson of the Marawi Compensation Board (MCB), has stated that the funds set aside by the government are not sufficient to pay the roughly 100,000 claimants. Congress may approve another P7 billion (US$128 million) in 2024.[194] The compensation board also requires Marawi citizens to be physically in Marawi during the compensation process. According to several bakwits interviewed for this report, the compensation process can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. Many Maranao currently live outside of Marawi, some as far as Manila, and are unable to take enough leave from their jobs, fly to Marawi and

remain in hotels or with family for the length of the compensation process, making it difficult for families to start rebuilding.[195]

8. Conclusion

Ultimately, the Marawi conflict highlights the multifaceted nature of protecting civilians during urban combat. One side tells a story of success. Militants have not made a comeback and there were only around 47 civilian casualties, a rarity in intense urban combat where usually 10% of the population stays behind. Marawi was also a turning point in the Moro-AFP narrative. Although there were several allegations of abuse and looting by AFP soldiers during the siege, overall, the relationship between AFP and the Moro people was significantly stronger than before the siege.

"My home was destroyed, but I don't blame the military. They had a job to do."
– Norida Manna, Marawi resident [196]

AFP's information operations and involvement in the peace corridors, rescue missions and at evacuation centers ensured civilians from Marawi and across the country saw AFP soldiers risk their lives to protect civilians.

However, the other side details a city totally leveled with little to show six years on. Many Maranaos are still forced to live outside the city, some even as far as Manila. They are stuck without compensation, sustainable livelihoods, or access to their ancestral lands. Actions committed by the parties to the conflict had enduring consequences for civilians, many of which, with the right capabilities and training are predictable and avoidable. There is little to win for in battle if civilians cannot prosper afterwards.

Future research considerations: The author recommends the Center for Excellence, or other branches of the U.S. government working on local governance to conduct further research on the reconstruction efforts in Marawi to better assess how the U.S. can support Marawi local government structures and improve the compensation process for Maranaos.

Annexes

Annex 1: Pre-Siege Factors Contributing to the Conflict

1.a. The Moro People: Oppression and Autonomy

Marawi, known as the "Islamic City of the Philippines," is predominantly inhabited by the Moro or Bangsamoro people, a Muslim-majority ethnic group primarily found in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. They constitute the largest non-Christian population in the country, estimated to be around 11 percent of the Filipino population or approximately 10 million out of 98 million people.[197]

During the Spanish occupation between the 16th and 19th centuries, the Moro people faced continuous attempts at conversion and conquest, marked by particularly brutal episodes during the inquisition. Despite their hopes for self-governance following the Philippines' liberation from Spanish rule, they faced continued oppression under American occupation.[198] When the country gained independence in 1946, the Philippine Constitution guaranteed the Moro people an autonomous region. However, subsequent government leaders failed to honor this commitment. Much of the Moro ancestral lands were distributed to settlers and corporations through land-tenure laws,[199] further fueling Moro anger towards the government and the emergence of militant separatist groups in the Moro regions. Although the Moro people had gained greater autonomy by 2017, sentiments of resentment and distrust towards the government, military, and police forces still persisted.

IS-affiliates have been able to exploit Moro grievances and build community support for their cause. If families gave their children to militant groups, they would receive a small joining fee. Their children were promised a religious education and the financial security to support their families.[200] Years of antagonistic sentiment towards the government meant that no one reported the infiltration of several hundred-armed militants, including foreigners into the city before the siege.[201]

1.b. Clan Ties

The foundation of Moro communities on clan structures dates to the mid-15th century when Muslim leaders from the Middle East established sultanates in the Philippines. These clans can vary in size from a few dozen members to thousands, and the strong blood ties in Mindanao foster a sense of loyalty that can lead to violence.[202] Land disputes and political rivalries often spark long-lasting family feuds, known as rido, resulting in generations of armed conflict and even death in defense of clan honor.[203] Clan leaders exploit a weak state to consolidate their power and that of their kin, utilizing state resources for personal gain and maintaining private armies. The prevalence of private militias in Muslim Mindanao, with 72 out of 77 existing in the region, exemplifies this issue.[204] In Marawi, clan feuding was so common that during the siege, civilians mistook gunfire for rido attacks rather than the presence of ISIS militants.

"Clans were there to help during the siege. When problems come, the clan is there…"[205]

Despite the significant amount of violence clan conflicts can create, clans do provide critical support and relief in times of crisis. During the Siege of Marawi, the clan families across the country provided immediate relief to their own kin.

However, their practices also continued to perpetuate elite rule after the siege. Many families who were able to return, or visit their land, were only able to do so through their clan networks.

1.c. IS-Affiliated Terrorism Financing

As IS began to weaken in the Middle East, the organization searched for new territory and global access points. Mindanao became an ideal location for IS. Funds from the IS affiliates in the Middle East and Asia flowed into the region through remittances, cash couriers, crypto currencies,[206] and anonymous mobile payments.[207] Philippine military chief General Eduardo Ano once stated that Islamist militants who attacked Marawi had received some US$1.5 million from Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in January.[208] Additionally, the Maute group's family network around Mindanao and Manila allowed cash and technology to flow easily into Marawi.

ASG also worked with IS-affiliated groups in Indonesia and Malaysia to conduct kidnap-for-ransom operations. By mid-2016, ASG had collected US$7.3 million in ransom. Countries around the world were willing to pay several million dollars to bring back their citizens, however this only further emboldened ASG. In April 2016, ASG kidnapped two Canadians, a Norwegian, and a Philippine woman from a resort on Samal Island in Davao del Norte, Philippines. Ransom was set at US $60 million. There are also reports of ASG conducting piracy and armed robbery of commercial ships around the Philippine islands of Sulu and Basilan province up to the coast of Malaysia.[209] The ransom ASG and Maute were able to collect from kidnappings significantly contributed to their ability to stockpile weapons and food in Marawi and pay Marawi civilians' monthly stipends in exchange for weapons and food storage spaces and children.[210]

Annex 2: Full list of original members of the Task Force Bangon Marawi

- Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines
- Department of Education Secretary
- Department of Health Secretary
- Department of Energy Secretary
- Department of Budget and Management Secretary
- Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary
- Department of the Interior and Local Government Secretary
- Department of Information and Communications Technology Secretary
- Department of Science and Technology Secretary
- Department of Trade and Industry Secretary
- Department of Transportation Secretary
- Chairperson of the Local Water Utilities Administration
- Chairperson of the Mindanao Development Authority
- Chairperson of the National Electrification Administration
- General Manager of the National Housing Authority
- Cabinet Secretary
- Director-General of the National Economic and Development Authority
- Director-General of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority
- Administrator of the Office of Civil Defense
- Chief of the Philippine National Police
- Representative from the Office of the President

Annex 3: Philippines Laws on IDPs

The Philippines has no laws relating specifically to IDPs. Instead, legal guidelines for the State's response in cases of displacement are based on the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (PDRRMA) supported by the NDRRMC. This law reconfigures the traditional roles of national and local government agencies, giving them additional responsibility for disaster response.[211] The Siege of Marawi was the first time the NDRRMC supported a non-natural disaster in the Philippines. The NDRRMC has received criticism for taking a natural disaster approach during the Marawi armed conflict.[212]

Annex 4: Chinese Involvement in Marawi Reconstruction

Executive Order No. 49-2018 granted authorization to Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) member and former Ambassador and Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Albert del Rosario, along with the National Housing Authority (NHA), to select a private sector partner through a joint-venture agreement for the implementation of civil-works projects in Marawi's Most Affected Area (MAA). Following a procurement process, the Bagong Marawi Consortium (BMC) was chosen for the reconstruction endeavor. The consortium comprised companies with limited or no experience in public contracting within the Philippines and was headed by a Chinese entity with a troubling history, including being blacklisted by the World Bank, facing investigations, and being sued for collusive bidding, fraudulent activities, substandard projects, and tax evasion.[213]

Negotiations failed with BMC and the Power Construction Corporation of China Ltd. (PowerChina) took over the lead construction role in August 2018. PowerChina took charge through its newly registered domestic firm, PowerChina Corporation of the Philippines (PCPC). Power China has over 600 subsidiaries, making it unclear to TFBM which entity they were specifically dealing with. Additionally, instead of securing the certification of available funds for the project from a domestic bank, as is typically required for contracts, PCPC's certification came from a Bank of China branch in Beijing, raising concerns about transparency.[214]

Since 2018, limited information has been made available online regarding the identity of the construction company that ultimately completed the reconstruction. Several local activist groups and NGOs staged a protest the decision to have Chinese firms reconstruct Marawi City.[215] Drieza Lininding, chair of the Moro Consensus Group, a civic organization based in Marawi, blames the Chinese for delaying rebuilding and resettlement of residents by slowing negotiations with unreasonable terms. "Months after the liberation of Marawi, no groundbreaking happened because they [TFBM] were busy talking with the Chinese-led consortium to rehabilitate the city through a joint venture agreement," Lininding told Asia Times in March 2019.[216]

Many in Marawi also worry Chinese investments tied to the Belt and Road Initiative could lead to a debt trap, as it has in other countries.

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