

Experts See Gains Against Asian Terror Networks

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Azhari Husin, one of the most feared bomb makers in Asia, was killed by Indonesia's elite antiterrorism unit in 2005, but his second in command, Noordin Top, is still at large, American intelligence officials said.

"Overall, the threat is far less in Indonesia than it was two or three years ago," said Sidney Jones, a senior adviser to the International Crisis Group in Jakarta and an expert on terrorism in Southeast Asia.

Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, director of the [Defense Intelligence Agency](#), voiced cautious optimism to Congress in February about the situation in Indonesia. He noted, though, that the fact that Indonesian authorities were seizing caches of weapons showed that insurgents were still trying to mount attacks.

In the Philippines, the government and the Pentagon say that the threat of the Abu Sayyaf has substantially diminished over the past few years, noting that several of the group's top officers, including its leader, Khaddfy Janjanlani, have been killed and its ranks have dwindled to about 200 from more than 1,000 in 2001, according to terrorism experts.

But there are clear indications the group can still do damage. In the attack on the Philippine air base on May 29, a cellphone-detonated bomb was apparently concealed in a bag belonging to a civilian commuter waiting to hitch a ride on a C-130 cargo plane outside Edwin Andrews Air Base in Zamboanga, police officials said.

The Philippine government blamed Abu Sayyaf as well as elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, a separatist group that has been fighting for an Islamic state in Mindanao for decades and that has been involved in peace talks with Manila.

It was not the first time that the Front had been accused of colluding with Abu Sayyaf. In the past, accusations that it had helped the group, as well as Jemaah Islamiyah, had threatened the peace negotiations, with the Front remaining adamant that it had nothing to do with these terrorists. It had said it would withdraw from the negotiations if the government continued its accusations.

An American-supported "civil action" campaign in the Philippines, involving building infrastructure for social services in communities and financing medical missions, has gained some praise. But in general, the government's campaign against Abu Sayyaf has been dominated by a heavy military approach that is often seen as broadly categorizing all Muslims together as a threat, which terror experts and analysts fear could backfire.

"My real concern is that Philippine government has never had a comprehensive policy with Muslims in Mindanao," said Zachary Abuza, an expert on terrorism in Southeast Asia who teaches at Simmons College in Boston.

Lumping the Islamic Front with Abu Sayyaf will inflame those Filipino Muslims who are seeking self-determination through a peace effort, and make it harder for the Front to cooperate in fighting terrorism, said Abhoud Syed Lingga, the executive director of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, a research organization on Islamic issues in Cotabato City, in Mindanao.

"U.S. forces are strengthening the Philippine military and using civic action to drive a wedge between rebels and the Muslim populace," said a recent report by the International Crisis Group that referred to the Abu Sayyaf Group. "But if their goal is to defeat the A.S.G. and its foreign, mainly Indonesian, jihadi allies, they are casting the net too widely and creating unnecessary enemies."

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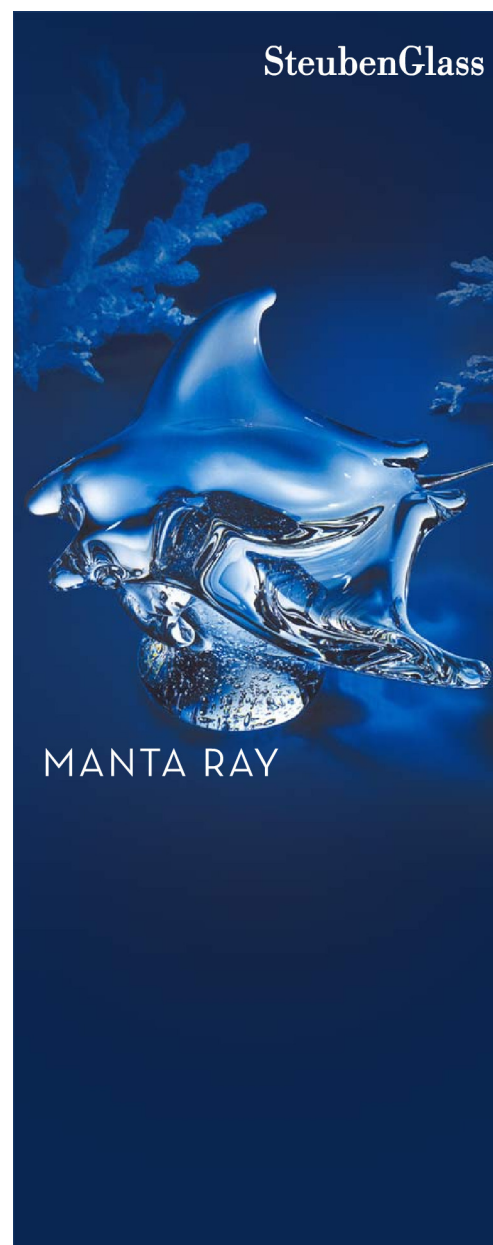
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