



Path to Hell: Daesh in the Philippines is a US Project

by

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on

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In a recent chain of events, the Philippines has been rushing towards chaos. The failure by the Philippine special forces to capture Isnilon Hapilon, considered to be the top brass of the infamous Abu Sayyaf organization in the country, coincided with a quick operation by a series of Daesh-affiliated terrorist groups to take the city of Mindanao. This is an escalation of internal and external pressure on the Duterte administration brought on by his foreign-policy shift.

The events of May 23 in Mindanao in the Philippines, the first city to fall into the hands of Daesh in Asia, shows disturbing parallels with the operational methods of Daesh in Syria, Iraq and Libya. The presence of 500 operatives, part of different dormant cells in Mindanao, allowed a coordinated assault on the police station and the city prison, enlarging the number of recruits and acquiring multiple firearms in the process. In a series of events difficult to verify, Daesh took control of the city and established several checkpoints. Employing an operational mix of tactics inspired by the beginning of the attacks on Syria in 2011 and in 2014, Daesh quickly expanded into Syria from Iraq.

The Philippines government and its armed forces have suffered numerous deaths and injuries, and although most of the city of Mindanao has now been brought under control, problems remain, with continued employment of fixed and rotary-wing aircraft as well as numerous ground troops

to confront the threat.

The drama continued in the Asian country, with a bombing in Manila sending the country into panic and forcing authorities to leak little information in what was seemingly becoming a worsening climate.

How could this situation come about when only 12 months ago Duterte talked about a rebirth of the Philippines in economic and social terms?

Twelve months ago, this author wrote an article in which he explained in detail the strategic objectives of Duterte, the roots of his attempt to interact more with Moscow and Beijing, the failure of American policy in the Philippines, and strained communication between Obama and Duterte. The probable outcome and consequences of such an attitude could clearly be anticipated, being in contravention of Washington's dictates.

Duterte, unlike many politicians, has kept his word to voters and has brought about important changes, in contrast to his predecessors. Rather than breaking historic links with Washington, Duterte has preferred to broaden his country's horizons by starting a serious and fruitful dialogue with China and, to a lesser extent, Russia. Disputes regarding the Spratly Islands continue to divide Manila and Beijing, including with harsh tones, but both Duterte and Xi Jinping have reiterated that a diplomatic solution is the only possible option, and there is continued progress in this area. This is not exactly in line with the warmongering intentions of the military-industrial-espionage apparatus in Washington. The Spratly Islands are considered by American analysts and strategists as a possible point of confrontation between China and the US, as long as the American chosen ally, in this case the Philippines, agrees to be the tripwire. Duterte clearly understands US objectives in this context, particularly in the Asian region, which is to use of every ally as ammunition against China in a desperate attempt to contain Beijing's political, military and economic expansion in Asia. The Philippine president has clearly shown his intention not to sacrifice the interests of his country to benefit foreign nations like the US or Japan.

Duterte represents a real danger to the interests of the American establishment in Asia. In the last twelve months, he has applied to the letter what he promised, with an escalation in the war on terrorist organizations in the country, stepping up the fight against drug trafficking, and new diplomatic ties with Beijing and even Moscow, as evidenced by the recent meeting between Putin and Duterte.

The signs of a confrontation with Washington were already apparent during Obama's time. There are three clear phases in this path that led Manila toward a frontal confrontation with Washington. First was Duterte's harsh words against Obama and the embarrassed responses of the US State Department; then the operations against terrorist cells and drug traffickers and the protests of international organizations on human-rights groups as well as several governments including the EU and US. In a few months, using the established techniques of media manipulation and distortion, Duterte passed from being an arrogant and unconventional president to being defined by some American media as a bloody murderer.

The operation to demolish the Philippines is in full swing, with its third phase starting a few weeks ago with the infiltration of Daesh into the country from Indonesia and Malaysia and the alliance with local terrorist groups. It seems that Washington has lost all hope with Duterte and prefers to continue to create permanent chaos in the country as it has done to nations hostile for American interests in the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan.

Duterte finds himself in a hazardous situation with heavy internal pressures and even rumors of an unholy alliance between terrorists and political opposition parties. The contemporary internal chaos that the Philippines faces seems to be the sum of recent dynamics and multiple forces at play both external and internal.

It is still too early to understand what could be the final outcome of this double confrontation. Duterte must first resist internal pressure from his opponents and clear them away. By doing this he



will be able to focus on the terrorist danger and limit its spread.

Defeats and setbacks for Daesh and Al Qaeda in Syria have forced a number of operatives and terrorist assets to relocate to other areas of the globe, and Asia seems to have become the next target. It is essential that the Philippines security forces isolate terrorists and react quickly to future dangers. In Syria and Iraq the initial slowness to react to terrorist assaults allowed the takfiri to obtain initial gains from which to build defenses that made them difficult to dislodge.

Numerous rumors have been reported of rescue and evacuation operations of terrorists in Syria and Iraq. While it is hard to know where exactly the terrorists have been sent, by following the flow of money that feeds this network, one can trace everything back to Saudi Arabia. In a pattern already seen in Afghanistan through Pakistan, the terrorists funded by Riyadh would have arrived in the Philippines through Malaysia and Indonesia, two countries with pockets of Wahhabi and takfiri sympathizers.

It is to be noted, perhaps with little surprise, that during the beginning of operations against Daesh in the Philippines, John McCain was in Australia for a visit. It is curious that when Daesh launches a new operation, the senator always happens to be nearby, be it in Turkey with regard to events in Syria, or in Australia with regards to the Philippines.

Duterte, in the second phase, will need all possible allies in the region. Washington seems to have decided that if Duterte prevails over his internal opponents, then the Philippines will be condemned to suffer an escalation of tensions that will start to resemble the situation in the Middle East. From Washington's point of view, if they cannot control a country, they might as well destroy it and let it burn in the ensuing chaos.

It will be essential for Beijing to contribute toward securing the country and resolving the terrorist threat, if Duterte will be smart enough to seek help.

The American deep state sees the opportunity to spread the seeds of Middle-Eastern chaos to Asia. The objective is twofold: to prevent economic and political development linked to Beijing's role in the region, and to justify its military presence in the region in order to combat terrorism. Trump has underlined over the last few days how the US is «monitoring the situation in Manila.»

The agreement between the Saudis, Israelis and Americans, as reported in my last article, is producing its first results, with what would appear to be the first steps towards transferring some terrorist assets from the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iraq, to Southeast Asia and even in the republics of Central Asia. In this respect Trump and the deep state share a common view of how to achieve their strategic goals. For Trump it comes down to giving the image of a POTUS who has kept his word by defeating terrorists in the Middle East. For the deep state, it is basically about directing its efforts towards containing China by any means possible. Terrorism is one of the numerous tools available, and in this context an agreement to move terrorists from Syria and Iraq (where Iran-Russia-Syria and Iraq are devastating the takfiri) to relocate them to Asia would meet with everyone's agreement.

It seems that this perverse pact is at the root of many of the problems that the Philippines is facing today. As the situation evolves, observing the diplomatic movements between Beijing and Manila will be of crucial importance to understand what road Duterte will take to save his country from chaos.