The Maute Group (MG) is an ISIS inspired armed group primarily operating in Central Mindanao. It was founded by Omarkhayyam and Abdullah Maute and has pledged allegiance to the ISIS/ Daesh in April 2015.

Prior to its prominence as a terrorist organization, Maute is an influential family in Lanao del Sur, fielding and/or supporting political candidates for local government positions. Engr. Cayamora Maute and Farhana Maute are the parents, and Omarkhayyam, Abdullah, and Mohammad Khayam are their children. The Maute brothers also operate as a private armed group/ warlord involved in extortion and criminal activities.

Allegedly, the Mautes began its terroristic activities when it lost a bidding over a project. In 2016, they wanted to get even and targeted a local politician from Butig, Lanao del Sur but was immediately quashed by the military. That was the turning point. It was a ‘rido’ that metamorphosed into a feud with state forces. The Maute was not only crushed, the defeat was humiliating – and for a local warlord group whose social capital is power and force, a saving-face action must be quickly instituted, lest the enigma of the group's power would quickly dissipate.

The Maute's pledge of allegiance to ISIS is its attempt to project a more fierce image, an attempt to arrogate more power using public perception. The actions of the Maute henceforth were meant to project this vicious image: in April 2016, MG abducted six (6) chainsaw operators in Butig, Lanao del Sur, two of which were beheaded while the rest were released. In August of the same year, the Maute Group instigated a daring jailbreak to free their comrades and in November, the Davao City bombing allegedly also has the handprint of the MG.

Becoming part of ISIS, however, requires more than just a pledge and a string of violent activities. They must have a unifying leader, and there must be a wilayah or a controlled territory that could accommodate foreign jihadists.

“The intent of ISIS is to impose its twisted idea of a caliphate globally. It re-interpreted Islamic religious texts to suit and justify their brutal regime. Its alleged caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi established the caliphate from territories seized from Syria and Iraq.

“The ISIS caliphate is divided into different “wilayahs” or provinces led by a “wali.” Each wali has a complete bureaucracy in place to exercise control over areas they occupy. A wali is provided a specific amount of financial support from the ISIS core to enable the wilayah to operate.” (SRI FAQ, 2017)
It is in the Philippines that the ISIS Southeast Asia-wilayah is meant to be established.

Earlier in 2014, Isnilon Hapilon pledged allegiance to ISIS and was recognized as the “emir” or the leader who will bring together ISIS-inspired groups. Hapilon rose to prominence as ‘emir’ when BIFF’s Umbra Kato, favored by most ISIS-inspired groups to lead them, died in 2015. Hapilon is the leader of the Abu Sayaff Group (ASG) based in Basilan. Unlike the Sulu-based ASG, there were fewer reports that involved Hapilon’s group in kidnap-for-ransom activities, making one suspect that he may be receiving funds elsewhere.

To facilitate the creation of a wilayah, the Daulah Islamiya Wilayatul Mashriq (DIWM) was created in 2015, an alliance of the following groups: ASG-Hapilon group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Anshar Khalifa Philippines (AKP), Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao (KIM), and the Maute Group. The goal is to work together to establish a wilayah, a controlled territory (with the ISIS flag freely flown as its symbol of control).

The security environment in Mindanao, compounded with the increasing disenchantment of its populace towards the peace process allowed for the manipulation of dissent and the germination of radical ideas. This creates a fertile ground for would-be recruits, if not a pool of sympathetic individuals who would support extremist measures. Hence, groups like ASG, BIFF, AKP, KIM, and MG have relative freedom to move around without fear of detection, and worst, have freedom to train and be trained in using and/or manufacturing terroristic weapons.

Still, the ISIS-inspired local-based groups do not yet possess the more deadly capability of ISIS to produce and employ suicide attack vests and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDS).

Yet still, the viciousness of the attack in Marawi and the holding-on capacity of the group show the level of cohesiveness and ‘interoperability’ of the DIWM alliance, particularly the ASG-Hapilon and the Maute Group, the two groups who planned and carried out the attack. The capacity of the DIWM, now led by the joint forces of ASG-Hapilon and Maute Group, to establish the ISIS SEA-wilayah based in the Philippines must be considered in any security and policy planning. That Hapilon is still considered as ‘emir’ (and not ‘wali’) shows that the ISIS still does not recognize that Philippine-based wilayah.

But paradoxically, the declaration of martial law may be interpreted by the ISIS core that “Mindanao had been sundered from the Philippines by Hapilon. Instead of a show of force, martial law may be taken as a go-signal by foreign terrorist fighters to exploit the perceived lapse of government control in Mindanao. Prior to the Battle of Marawi, there were already more than a dozen foreign fighters being monitored by the Philippine military in-country. This was before the June 2016 exhortation of Malaysian Abu Aun al-Malysi for other Southeast Asians to join their “brothers” in Mindanao if one could not travel to Syria.” (Franco, 2016) With the Marawi-siege continuing, more jihadists are, allegedly, getting inspired by the actions of the local-based jihadist.
Sources:


