

# Thousands Flee as Daesh Takes Philippine City



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte salutes the coffins of 15 soldiers killed in a gunbattle with Abu Sayyaf militants in Mindanao in August 2016.

MANILA (Dispatches) -- **Thousands of civilians fled fighting in the Philippines as troops sought to contain Daesh-linked militants who took over large parts of a city, set building ablaze and captured a Catholic priest and other Christians.**

President Rodrigo Duterte said he had no choice but to declare martial law on his native island of Mindanao on Wednesday following a failed raid by soldiers on Tuesday on a hideout of the Maute militant group, which triggered clashes and chaos across the largely Muslim city of Marawi.

Duterte said Daesh could not be allowed to gain a foothold in the Philippines and he would do whatever it took to rebuff Takfiri

extremists from the Maute group and the allied Abu Sayyaf, even if it meant many would die.

"Anyone now holding a gun, confronting government with violence, my orders are spare no one, let us solve the problems of Mindanao once and for all. Do not force my hands into it," said Duterte, who cut short his visit to Russia to return to Manila.

"If I think you should die, you will die. If you fight us you will die. If there's an open defiance you will die and if it means many people dying, so be it. That's how it is."

Soldiers and militants set up checkpoints and roadblocks on routes in and out of Marawi as a stream of men, women and chil-

dren fled. Long queues of pickup trucks and jeeps crammed full of people and loaded with belongings snaked on roads leading into nearby towns.

Battles abated on Wednesday as the military tried to isolate Maute fighters while awaiting reinforcements to the city of 200,000 people, which an official described as a ghost town. Maute snipers and booby traps were hampering operations, which could last three more days, the military said.

Thirteen militants and seven members of the security forces have so far been killed and 33 troops wounded in the fighting, according to the military.

Duterte said martial law would mean checkpoints, arrests and searches without warrant, and it would go on for as long as it took to restore order, but he would not tolerate abuses of power by police or soldiers.

He said he would consider some legal measures in the central Visayas region next to Mindanao to facilitate arrests, and might even declare martial law nationwide if he felt extremists had proliferated. He was also furious that the Maute group had hoisted the flag of Daesh.

The Maute and Abu Sayyaf have pledged allegiance to Daesh and have proved fierce opponents for the military.

## Trump's Son-in-Law Under FBI Probe

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- **Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law and one of his senior advisers, has come under FBI scrutiny in the Russia investigation.**

Investigators believe Kushner has significant information relevant to their inquiry, officials said. That does not mean they suspect him of a crime or intend to charge him.

The FBI's scrutiny of Kushner places the bureau's sprawling counterintelligence and criminal investigation not only on the doorstep of the White House, but the Trump family circle. The Washington Post first reported last week that a senior White House official close to

Trump was a "person of interest," but did not name the person. The term "person of interest" has no legal meaning.

The officials said Kushner is in a different category from former Trump aides Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn, who are formally considered subjects of the investigation. According to the Justice Department's U.S. Attorneys' Manual, "A 'subject' of an investigation is a person whose conduct is within the scope of the grand jury's investigation."

Former FBI Director Robert Mueller is now leading the probe as a special counsel.

Kushner met at least once in December with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, and he also met last year with a Russian banker, Sergey Gorkov.

Congressional aides have said they would like to question Kushner about that meeting, and Kushner has said he would voluntarily appear before the Senate intelligence committee as part of its Russia investigation.

Kushner, whose family's real estate empire is worth \$1.8 billion, according to Forbes, wields significant power in the White House. He is married to Trump's daughter, Ivanka.

## Greece's Ex-PM Injured in Bomb Blast



Forensic experts attend the scene of an explosion in Athens, on Thursday, May 25, 2017.

ATHENS (AFP) -- **Greek police scrambled Friday to determine how a letter bomb wounded former PM Lucas Papademos despite security checks being beefed up after a wave of similar attacks in March.**

"We want to determine whether security procedures were followed," a police source told AFP, hours after Papademos and two guards were injured by the bomb that exploded as they rode in an armored car in Athens.

"The fact that the attackers managed to get past security is worrying," the source said, adding that experts were trying to determine the nature of explosive used. Papademos sustained superfi-

cial injuries to the chest, abdomen and legs, Evangelismos Hospital in Athens said, after he apparently opened his mail whilst riding in the car.

The 69-year-old economist was in stable condition but is expected to remain in intensive care for at least two days, doctors said.

A later statement from Evangelismos Hospital said the former PM had undergone surgery to address a thigh injury. One of his guards has trouble hearing, the hospital said.

The police source said the attack was "largely symbolic" as Papademos was lightly hurt despite his proximity to the letter bomb. Calls have already gone out to

individuals who could be potential targets to boost security, and to the Greek postal service to step up searches for other similar devices.

As a former PM, Papademos has round-the-clock police protection and his mail is screened by special machinery at the Bank of Greece and parliament.

Leaders of all parties and former prime ministers condemned the attack, the first against an incumbent or former leader in decades.

The methodology is similar to that used by Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei, a domestic far-left group which in March mailed a letter bomb that injured a secretary at the International Monetary Fund in Paris.

The group had earlier claimed responsibility for an explosive device, also sent from Greece, discovered by the police at the offices of German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble.

The bombs contained gunpowder used in firecrackers, police said.

The police source acknowledged that Thursday's attack on Papademos was "similar" to those in March, but authorities do not want to rule out other possibilities.

Papademos' name was on a target list compiled by Paula Roupas, a senior member of far-left group Revolutionary Struggle jailed in January.

So far there has been no claim of responsibility.

## Russia: NATO Stoking Threat of Conflict

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- **Russia Friday accused NATO of increasing the threat of conflict, insisting attempts by the U.S.-led alliance to curb Moscow have left ties at their lowest ebb since the USSR collapsed.**

"At present NATO-Russian relations are at their worst since the end of the Cold War," the foreign ministry in Moscow said in a statement. The ministry said NATO was pursuing a policy of "containment" towards Russia that has seen it bolster its forces along the country's border in eastern Europe.

"The direct consequence is the increase in the potential for conflict in Euro-At-

lantic region," it said. The broadside from Moscow came a day after NATO leaders met in Brussels.

The Thursday meeting saw the Russia issue relegated as U.S. President Donald Trump blasted allies for not spending enough on defense and steered clear of saying Washington would stick to NATO's Article 5 collective defense guarantee. The Kremlin has long berated NATO for expanding into what it sees as its traditional sphere of influence along its Western flank.



Montenegro Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, center right, after appearing to be pushed by Donald Trump, center, during a NATO summit, May 25, 2017.

lantic region," it said. The broadside from Moscow came a day after NATO leaders met in Brussels.

The Thursday meeting saw the Russia issue relegated as U.S. President Donald Trump blasted allies for not spending enough on defense and steered clear of saying Washington would stick to NATO's Article 5 collective defense guarantee.

The Kremlin has long berated NATO for expanding into what it sees as its traditional sphere of influence along its Western flank.

NATO is deploying four battalions to Poland and the Baltic states. Billionaire leader Trump has previously called NATO "obsolete" and insisted it should do more to combat terrorism.

Trump aggressively challenged NATO

members to spend more on their own defense, putting the alliance under exceptional pressure to become tougher, sharper and newly relevant.

The 27 other leaders looked on in awkward silence as Trump suggested most NATO countries were freeloaders not paying their share for military protection. The other leaders are divided over his spending demands, as well as over how much intelligence to share with Trump's troubled administration. "Twenty-three of the 28 nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense," Trump said. "This is not fair to the people and the taxpayers of

the United States." The other big item on the NATO agenda was Trump's challenge to other countries to increase their military spending. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that NATO leaders would confirm a decision from 2014 increasing the amount member countries are expected to spend on defense to two percent of their gross domestic product by 2024.

To meet the 2-percent guideline, Germany would have to virtually double its military budget, spending more money on defense than Russia.

But in remarks that humiliated other leaders, Trump said that "NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations." He added, "Many of these nations owe massive amounts of money from past years."

## U.S. Warship Trespasses Into Chinese Waters



Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey transits the South China Sea May 6, 2017.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- **A U.S. Navy warship sailed within 12 nautical miles of an artificial island built up by China in the South China Sea, U.S. officials said, the first such challenge to Beijing in the strategic waterway since U.S. President Donald Trump took office.**

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the USS Dewey traveled close to the Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands, among a string of islets, reefs and shoals over which China has territorial disputes with its neighbors.

China said its warships had warned the U.S. ship and it lodged "stern representations" with the United States. China said it remained resolutely opposed to so-called freedom of navigation operations.

The U.S. patrol, the first of its kind since October, marked the latest attempt to counter what Washington sees as Beijing's efforts to limit freedom of navigation in the strategic waters.

Territorial waters are generally defined by UN convention as extending at most 12 nautical miles from a state's coastline.

The United States has criticized China's construction of islands and build-up of military facilities in the sea.

Last month, top U.S. commander in the

Asia-Pacific region, Admiral Harry Harris, said the United States would likely carry out freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea soon. Chinese defense ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang told a monthly briefing two Chinese guided-missile warships had warned the U.S. vessel to leave the waters, and China had complained to the United States. "The U.S. side's errant ways have caused damage to the improving situation in the South China Sea, and are not conducive to peace and stability," Ren said. Ren was referring to a recent easing of tension between China and other claimants, in particular the Philippines. China's extensive claims to the South China Sea, which sees about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade pass every year, are challenged by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, as well as Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said such patrols were "very likely to cause unexpected sea and air accidents". Under the previous U.S. administration, the Navy conducted several such voyages through the South China Sea. The latest U.S. patrol is likely to exacerbate U.S.-China tensions that had eased since Trump hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping for a summit in Florida resort last month.

## News in Brief

**TAORMINA, Italy (AFP) -- European Union president Donald Tusk called Friday on G7 leaders to maintain sanctions on Russia over the conflict in Ukraine, but the White House said it did not yet "have a position" on the issue.**

**The EU and United States under then president Barack Obama imposed sanctions on Moscow over its 2014 annexation of Crimea and fighting in eastern Ukraine between government forces and pro-Russia rebels. But it is as yet unclear whether Obama's successor Donald Trump, who is under fire domestically over allegations that Russia meddled to aid his election campaign last year, will maintain these sanctions.**

\*\*\*\*

**JAKARTA (AFP) -- Indonesian authorities have arrested three suspects over a twin suicide bombing on a Jakarta bus terminal that killed three policemen and which has been claimed by Daesh, an official said Friday.**

**The elite anti-terror squad working with regular police Thursday detained two men in Bandung on Java island and a third in the nearby area of Cimahi, and their houses were now being searched, said local police spokesman Yusri Yunus. "We arrested three people in connection with the bombing, in three different locations yesterday afternoon," he told AFP.**

\*\*\*\*

**COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) -- Floods and mudslides triggered by heavy monsoon rains in western and southern Sri Lanka left at least 25 dead and 42 missing, the government said Friday.**

**The Disaster Management Center said that more than 7,800 persons are affected by the calamity. Home Affairs Minister Vajira Abeywardana told reporters that the adverse weather conditions could escalate. The government advised people living closer to rivers and areas prone to landslides to evacuate, he said.**

\*\*\*\*

**TRIPOLI (Dispatches) -- Fierce clashes erupted on Friday between rival armed groups in the Libyan capital Tripoli, seat of the country's UN-backed but largely ineffective unity government.**

**Tripoli has been gripped by a power struggle between dozens of militias since a NATO-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. AFP muammarists heard explosions and artillery fire as fighting broke out in the Abu Slim, al-Hadhba and Salaheddin districts in the south of the city. Witnesses said tanks had been deployed. Groups hostile to the Government of National Accord said they attacked loyalist forces.**

\*\*\*\*

**GUWAHATI, India (Reuters) -- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking three years in power, Friday inaugurated the country's longest bridge that spans the vast Brahmaputra River in the northeastern state of Assam.**

**The 9.15 km (5.7 mile) Dholasadiya bridge, strong enough to carry a 60-tonne battle tank, will reduce travel times from Assam to the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh whose territory is partly claimed by China. "The inauguration of the bridge marks the end of a long wait for the people of this area," Modi's office quoted him as saying in a speech, adding the bridge "opens the door for economic development on a big scale".**