

3 terrorist leaders, 12 followers killed in Sulu air raid

Written by Katherine Evangelista
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At least 15 Islamic extremists, including three senior leaders, were killed in an air raid in Parang town in Sulu at dawn Thursday.

Abu Sayyaf commander Umbra Jumdail, also known as Abu Pula, and Jemaah Islamiyah leaders Zulkifli bin Hir or Marwan, and Abdullah Ali, who uses the guerrilla name Muawiyah Anjala, were the senior leaders killed in the air strikes, said military spokesman Colonel Arnulfo Burgos.

Zulkifli is a Malaysian leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, the militant organization blamed for some of Southeast Asia's deadliest terrorist attacks including the 2002 Bali bombings which killed more than 200 people.

Zulkifli, an explosive expert, was the over-all leader of the JI in the Philippines, said Burgos.

The US government has offered \$5 million and P7.4 million reward from the DND and DILG for Zulkifli's capture.

Muawiyah, who goes by many aliases, is a Singaporean member of JI who fled to the Philippines shortly after the Bali bombings, according to a Philippine military intelligence officer.

He was also a JI member affiliated with the Abu Sayyaf and had contact with Omar Patek, Burgos said. The US offered a US\$50,000 reward for his arrest.

Jumdail, a member of the Tausug ethnic group, is a founder and one of the most senior figures of the Abu Sayyaf group, which was established in Mindanao in the 1990s with seed money from Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda-network.

He had warrants of arrest for 21 counts of kidnapping and serious illegal detention and was involved in the 2000 kidnapping in Sipadan, Malaysia and the 2001 kidnapping in Dos Palmas resort in Palawan. A P7.4 million bounty from the Department of National Defense and Department of Interior and Local Government, and P\$140,000 reward from the US were offered for his capture.

In a press briefing, Burgos said that the composite unit composed of elite troops of the Philippine Army, Philippine Navy, Philippine Air Force first launched an air strike in Barangay Duyan Kabau, Parang town in Sulu to "soften the target" at around 3 a.m. Thursday.

The attack lasted only for a few seconds before troops stormed the terror group's temporary camp, Burgos said.

The air strikes were conducted following tips of civilians that there were Abu Sayyaf and JI members in the area, Burgos said. He said there were also reports that 30 terrorists, including six foreign JI members, arrived in Sulu last December.

"Sagot ito sa all-out justice campaign," Burgos said, referring to the security campaign launched

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by the Aquino government against lawless elements last 2011.

Burgos said that no civilians were hurt in the operations, adding that this was a “thorough and deliberate” attack done after “months of intelligence gathering”.

“We want to assure the people of Sulu that the operation conducted was aimed against known members of the terrorist groups—Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah— who intends to expand their presence in Mindanao,” Burgos added.

The Abu Sayyaf is blamed for the worst terrorist attacks in the Philippines, including the bombing of a ferry in Manila that killed more than 100 people, as well as a spate of kidnappings in the remote and Muslim-populated south.

A rotating force of 600 US Special Forces has been stationed in Mindanao for a decade to help train local troops in how to combat Islamic militants.

The US forces are only allowed to advise the Filipino soldiers, and are banned from having a combat role.

The Abu Sayyaf is well-known to have given refuge to Islamic militants from around the region such as JI leaders, who in turn have helped with training followers such as bomb-making skills. With a report from Julie S. Alipala, Inquirer Mindanao

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