

Regional Overview: Southeast Asia 12-18 January 2020

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In Southeast Asia, key developments from last week include: continued fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state; increased separatist violence targeting civilians in Thailand; continued clashes between state forces and Papuan rebels in Indonesia; and fighting between state forces and both Islamist and communist rebels in the Philippines.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping visited **Myanmar** to shore-up economic agreements between the two countries, a protest was held in Yangon calling for an end to the Chinese-run Myitsone Dam project. During Xi's visit, on 17 January, the military reportedly attacked the Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party/Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNTJP/MNDAA) in Muse township in northern Shan state ([Kachin News Group, 17 January 2020](#)). Fighting between the military and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) continued in Rakhine state throughout last week prior to Xi's visit.

Two clashes were reported in Narathiwat in **Thailand** between state forces and suspected separatists. Further, separatists targeted civilians in Yala and Pattani, leading to four reported deaths. Meanwhile, earlier in the week, in Bangkok and other provinces around the country, several thousand people participated in a "Run Against Dictatorship" aimed at the current military-backed Palang Pracharat party government. A smaller "Walk to Cheer Uncle" was also held in support of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. The anti-military gathering follows a protest in December by the Future Forward Party which has gained popular support for its opposition to the military, despite attempts by the government to have the party banned ([Reuters, 21 January 2020](#)).

In **Indonesia**, the separatist West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) targeted a bus carrying employees of a mine in Papua. This led to a clash between state forces and the group the following day. Unrest in the region has intensified since the end of 2018.

While attempting to rescue an Indonesian hostage, the Philippine military and the Islamist group, Abu Sayyaf, clashed in the Mindanao region of the **Philippines**. As well, in addition to clashes between the communist New People's Army (NPA) and state forces, the NPA and the Revolutionary Proletarian Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPA-ABB) also clashed last week in Western Visayas. The RPA-ABB is a splinter group of the NPA and has aided the military in fighting the NPA after a peace agreement was reached in 2000 (Panay News, 16 January 2020). Last year, former members of the group were reportedly killed by the NPA.

Finally, in **Malaysia**, a protest was held regarding the Sabah Temporary Pass (PSS) legislation. The legislation would replace old immigration documents that allow migrants to live and work in Sabah. There are many Filipinos living in Sabah who in previous decades fled the conflict in Mindanao. The new legislation was politicized in the run-up to local by-elections in the region (The Rakyat Post, 17 January 2020).



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