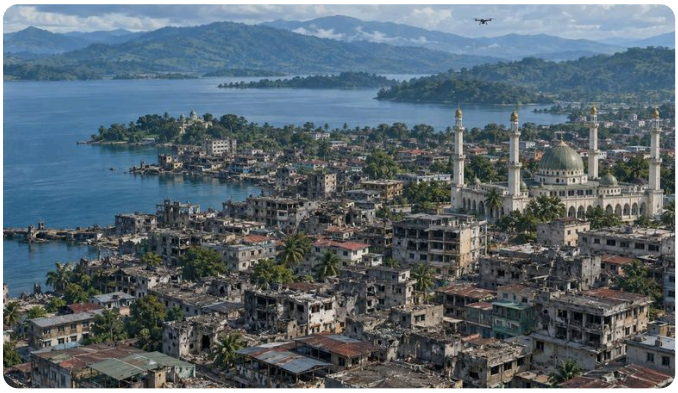
STUDENT HANDOUT

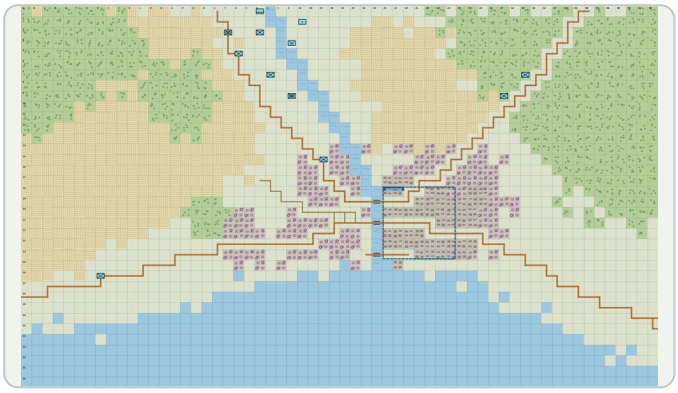
# The Siege of Marawi

Marawi, Lanao del Sur, Philippines · 23 May to 23 October 2017

Information as of September 2026



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

## Learning objectives

- Explain how the three bridge crossings and proximity to Lake Lanao shape the authored run, separating map geography from precise historical capture dates.
- Assess what observation can and cannot establish in the authored urban run, comparing its limited drone roster with the reconnaissance described by MWI and ASPI.
- Evaluate civilian and hostage protection using Amnesty’s findings and Stimson’s explicitly attributed displacement and building-damage estimates.

## Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 7 minutes 40 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

**Objective:** Take the main battle area east of the Agus River, from the bridges to the shore of Lake Lanao, by the end of the fourth wave. Start from Camp Ranao and the road from Iligan, clear the west bank, then cross at the Mapandi, Bayabao and Raya Madaya bridges as fresh units arrive. Use your few drones to find snipers, roadblocks and stores before your troops move. Civilians and hostages remain in the city, so choose artillery targets with care.

The Siege of Marawi: Take the main battle area east of the Agus River, from the bridges to the shore of Lake Lanao, by the end of the fourth wave. Start from Camp Ranao and the road from Iligan, clear the west bank, then cross at the Mapandi, Bayabao and Raya Madaya bridges as fresh units arrive. Use your few drones to find snipers, roadblocks and stores before your troops move. Civilians and hostages remain in the city, so choose artillery targets with care. Occupy the marked zone with at least one combat unit and no opposing combat unit for 8 continuous simulation seconds. The

authored limit is 460 simulation seconds across 4 stages. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

### Atrocity notice

Amnesty International documented serious violations of humanitarian law by all parties in Marawi, some amounting to war crimes, including IS-allied militants' killings and hostage-taking. Its report also addresses government-force abuses. The designated militant side remains computer controlled.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2017-11-17 · Amnesty International: The Battle of Marawi, death and destruction in the Philippines

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

## Historical source notes

Small and borrowed eyes in the sky mattered in a city fight. Philippine forces used a Raven tactical drone from the United States, US Cessna 208 aircraft and Australian AP-3C Orion surveillance flights with Filipino crews aboard (Wikipedia). Janes reported that the Philippines operated ScanEagle drones by June 2017. This support did not eliminate prolonged street fighting: the bridges fell one at a time over two months.

Bridges and the lake shaped the battle. The militants held the city centre east of the Agus behind three bridges, and the army took the Mapandi Bridge on 20 July, the Bayabao Bridge on 1 September and the Raya Madaya Bridge, the route to Lake Lanao, on 24 September (Wikipedia). Ten militants were reported killed trying to bring reinforcements across the lake. Cutting a defender's last route matters as much as attacking its strongest point.

Amnesty International’s November 2017 report documents civilian displacement, destruction and abuses by all parties. One former hostage reported ten civilians killed in an air strike. Amnesty called for an independent investigation of the bombardment’s necessity and proportionality, explaining that access restrictions prevented a complete assessment. Official civilian totals were not a reliable complete account of the harm (Amnesty International).

## Civilian harm

Wikipedia records that 11 civilians were killed in the first hours, nine of them stopped by militants at a checkpoint and shot dead with their hands tied; army spokesman Lt. Col. Jo-Ar Herrera said on 24 May that 19 civilians had been killed.

Amnesty International, in a report released on 16 November 2017, documented at least 25 killings of civilians by militants, and hostages forced to forage, dig foxholes and make bombs, and blamed both the militants and government forces for widespread abuses, some of which amount to war crimes (as summarised by Wikipedia).

Witnesses told Amnesty International that 10 hostages were killed in air strikes by pro government forces, and Amnesty questioned the military necessity and proportionality of civilian deaths and large scale destruction (as summarised by Wikipedia).

Wikipedia records that at least 40 evacuees staying outside evacuation centres died of dehydration and 19 others died of diseases caught in congested evacuation camps; the Health Secretary disputed the first figure.

Government estimates put the number of residents displaced at 200,000, and the United Nations said 98 percent of Marawi's population was forcibly displaced by the fighting; about 70,000 people were still displaced in March 2019 (Wikipedia).

Stimson cites mapping of the main battle area: 3,125 structures destroyed or uninhabitable, 913 heavily damaged and 1,232 partially damaged. These categories concern that surveyed area and must not be collapsed into a citywide building count.

Presidential spokesman Ernesto Abella confirmed reports that the Maute group looted an estimated 500 million pesos from Marawi; Amnesty International reported looting by all parties, and the military charged an army officer and five soldiers with looting (Wikipedia).

### Evidence for learning objectives

MWI describes drone reconnaissance by both sides, government mortar spotting and contact with trapped civilians. Surveillance support coexisted with five months of fighting; this does not establish a no-surveillance counterfactual.

MWI places the Raya Madaya (Masiu) Bridge about 150 metres from Lake Lanao, with Bayabao and Mapandi farther downstream. The lesson can examine that geography without certifying every precise capture date.

Stimson reports an estimated 98 percent displacement rate and cites a crisis-mapping assessment of 3,125 destroyed or uninhabitable structures in the main battle area. Amnesty separately documents serious abuses by all parties and calls for further investigation.

## Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 10, spend 30 on the four authored stages with pauses and review for 20. For 90 minutes, compare another drone-observation allocation near the bridges and shore. For 180 minutes, compare standard and strict global rules of engagement and discuss the civilian-protection readings. These are classroom session budgets; the unpaused authored run is 460 seconds, and strict mode has no individual hostage-location mechanic.

| Session | Plan |
|---|---|
| 45 minutes | Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min |
| 60 minutes | Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min |
| 90 minutes | Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min |
| 180 minutes | Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min |

## Staff roles

**commander**
Set the pre-run posture and available standing orders, allocate drone observation near the banks and bridges, and report the automatic advance toward the take zone. Individual crossing, waiting and district-clearance commands are unavailable.

**intelligence**
Map revealed contacts and populated tiles, reporting bridge-area observation and visibility limits. The model does not identify individual hostage locations or certify that a district is historically clear.

**fires**
Observe automatic artillery engagements, recommend available artillery and rules-of-engagement standing orders, and flag civilian risk before a drone launch. The model has no hostage-specific fire exclusion or individual gun-target control.

**droneOps**
Allocate the small drones and the ScanEagle already available at the start between observation areas, and report launches, returns and losses. The ScanEagle is not a later-wave arrival.

## Decision points

- In the authored first stage, compare drone observation of the west bank and bridge approaches with contacts and automatic ground movement. The stage's objective does not verify the exact historical order of capture.
- At the second authored wave, compare bridge-area observations, stocks and the take-zone result. Ground routes and advance timing are automatic; the player cannot order an immediate crossing or wait for another bridge to be threatened.
- At the final authored stage, compare artillery standing orders, drone launches and global rules of engagement. Report automatic infantry movement, losses and civilian harm; the model has no individual hostage agents or selectable infantry-clearance command.

## Before and after questions

1. **What limitation remained despite drone and surveillance support during the Marawi siege?**

   A. Observation products establish whether infantry can rapidly regain each block
   B. Additional surveillance coverage establishes the expected duration of ground fighting
   C. Aircraft availability establishes when the defended urban positions will fall
   D. Surveillance and spotting supported operations while the ground siege still continued from May to October

2. **MWI places the Raya Madaya (Masiu) Bridge near which major geographic feature?**

   A. It connected militants with nearby Lake Lanao
   B. It connected militants with Mindanao State University
   C. It connected militants directly with Camp Ranao
   D. It connected militants with the Iligan road

3. **MWI records a friendly air strike killing ten soldiers during the early Marawi fighting. What limit does this illustrate?**

   A. Target identification establishes that friendly troops remain outside the area
   B. Accurate observation establishes that nearby infantry require fewer coordination precautions
   C. Nearby friendly positions remain vulnerable to mistaken strikes
   D. Precision guidance establishes that friendly-position information is sufficient once recorded

4. **What did Amnesty International find about abuses during the siege?**

   A. Assess government conduct separately from militant treatment of detained hostages
   B. Abuses by both sides included possible war crimes
   C. Reported departures established limited remaining risk of abuse to residents
   D. Recorded looting established principal harm without examining other victim accounts

5. **An Amnesty witness reported ten civilians killed while held hostage. What further inquiry did the report call for?**

   A. Whether observed target identities established the legality of strikes
   B. Whether recorded departures established limited remaining exposure to strikes
   C. Necessity and proportionality of civilian harm and destruction
   D. Whether successful military outcomes established the adequacy of precautions

## Discussion

- Amnesty records one former hostage’s account of ten civilians killed in an air strike; MWI describes a friendly strike killing ten soldiers. How should evidence limits and civilian protection be discussed separately from equipment losses and points?
- ASPI's July 2019 report describes Australian surveillance flights and foreign training and equipment support during Marawi. Which forms of outside support are represented in the run, and which are not? What evidence would be needed to assess their contribution to the historical outcome?
- MWI locates the Raya Madaya Bridge close to Lake Lanao. In the authored run, how do bridge access and the lake affect movement? Distinguish this model exercise from unverified last-route and reinforcement-death claims.
- ASPI's July 2019 report documents destruction and continuing reconstruction challenges. Why does meeting the run's capture objective not establish that displaced people have returned or the city has recovered? What additional evidence is needed to assess civilian recovery?

## Debrief rubric

**Strong**
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

**Adequate**
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

**Weak**
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

## Published readings

1. Modern War Institute: Urban Warfare Case Study 8, Battle of Marawi (23 May 2024)
2. Stimson: Urban Warfare and the Protection of Civilians (2021)
3. Amnesty International: The Battle of Marawi, death and destruction (November 2017)

## Complete source list

Modern War Institute: Urban Warfare Case Study 8, Battle of Marawi (23 May 2024)
Stimson: Urban Warfare and the Protection of Civilians (2021)
Amnesty International: The Battle of Marawi, death and destruction (November 2017)
Wikipedia: Siege of Marawi
Wikipedia: Marawi
Wikipedia: Maute Group
Wikipedia: Isnilon Hapilon
Wikipedia: Omar Maute
Wikipedia: Abu Sayyaf
Wikipedia: Proclamation No. 216
Wikipedia: Lake Lanao
Wikipedia: Agus River
Wikipedia: Mindanao State University
Wikipedia: Amai Pakpak Medical Center
Wikipedia: Marawi Grand Mosque
Wikipedia: Dansalan College
Wikipedia: Philippine Marine Corps
Wikipedia: AeroVironment RQ-11 Raven
Wikipedia: Boeing Insitu MQ-27 ScanEagle
Wikipedia: 2017 in the Philippines
Janes Defence Weekly (archived): US solicitation reveals Philippines to be ScanEagle operator (7 June 2017)
US Embassy in the Philippines: U.S. Military Delivers Counterterrorism Equipment to the Philippine Army and Marine Corps (February 2017)
Combating Terrorism Center at West Point: Beyond the caliphate, Islamic State activity outside the group's defined wilayat, Southeast Asia (15 June 2017)

Rappler: FAST FACTS, What you should know about the Maute Group (24 May 2017)
Rappler: Duterte declares martial law in Mindanao (24 May 2017)
BBC News: Philippine President Duterte eyes nationwide martial law (24 May 2017)
Rappler: Congress extends martial law to December 31 (22 July 2017)
Associated Press: AP Exclusive, Video shows militants in Philippine siege plot (7 June 2017)
The Economist: Winning the war with IS in the Philippines, but losing the peace (20 July 2017)
Philstar: Isnilon Hapilon, Omar Maute confirmed killed in Marawi (16 October 2017)
France 24: Philippine troops kill two militant leaders allied to IS group (16 October 2017)
Arab News: FBI confirms death of Isnilon Hapilon in Marawi (21 October 2017)
US Department of State: Foreign Terrorist Organizations
GOV.UK: Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations (accessible version)
ASPI: The Marawi crisis—urban conflict and information operations (31 July 2019)